

Chief Officer: Children and Young People

Annual Report June 2023



Contents

- Purpose
- Introduction
- The Education System in Monmouthshire
- How did we do last year?
- Our Provision:
 - Early Years
 - Our Schools
 - Attendance
 - Supporting Disadvantaged Learners
- Community Focused Schools
- Developing an Inclusive Education System
 - Additional Learning Needs
 - Educational Psychology
 - Pupil Referral Service
- Developing an Inclusive Education System
 - Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)
 - Support Services
 - Healthy Schools
- Developing our School Estate and Planning for the Future
 - Development of Our Schools
 - School Place and Planning for the Future
 - Finance and Sustainability
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- Conclusions



Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an overview of the status and performance of the education system in Monmouthshire. It is not a report that seeks to capture every dimension of service delivery but rather one that seeks to provide the Chief Officer's perspective of the relevant strengths and weaknesses in the system, the risks that the service faces and the opportunities that exist to improve.

The last Chief Officer's report was presented to council in 2021. Therefore this report will in some instances cover a two year window of activity but its main focus will be on the last administrative year and the progress that was made against the key deliverables.



Introduction

Education in Wales is in one of its most challenging periods. The return to school following the pandemic has affected both learners and the teams that work in schools in a way that, whilst predictable, has been more intense and extensive than many envisaged. The Welsh Government has advanced an ambitious reform agenda which will deliver the new Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and a new approach to the provision of support for children with additional learning needs (ALN). Furthermore, the 'cost of living crisis' has seen the number of children in our schools facing financial challenges at home increase. Finally, and not least, our schools are facing workforce and financial challenges on a daily basis.

The thirty five schools and settings in Monmouthshire have not been immune to any of the tests above, our (relative) affluence has not protected us from the impact of the recent societal changes.

However, it would be entirely wrong to project this period as simply a negative one. Monmouthshire's schools have worked tirelessly to promote the wellbeing of their learners. In doing so they have sought to 'return' to effective teaching and learning with a focus on the progress that their children make in lessons.

In the period of time since I last presented to Council we have seen local changes in the in the administration and leadership of the Council. This change has seen a focus articulated through the recently approved Community and Corporate Plan.

Taking Monmouthshire Forward: working together for a fairer, greener, more successful county draws on all the resources we have to become a zero-carbon county, while also supporting well-being, health and dignity for all.

This focus aligns well to the ambitions of the Children and Young People's Directorate. There has been a sharpened focus on the mitigation of the impacts of economic disadvantage inline with the cost of living crisis. This builds on existing work to ensure that all learners achieve their full potential irrespective of their background or starting points in life.

The administration have placed equality and decarbonisation at the heart of their planning and aspirations. Officers from across the Children and Young People's Directorate work effectively with the Cabinet member, the Cabinet and the Council more broadly to ensure that the voice of elected members is heard in our planning and delivery.

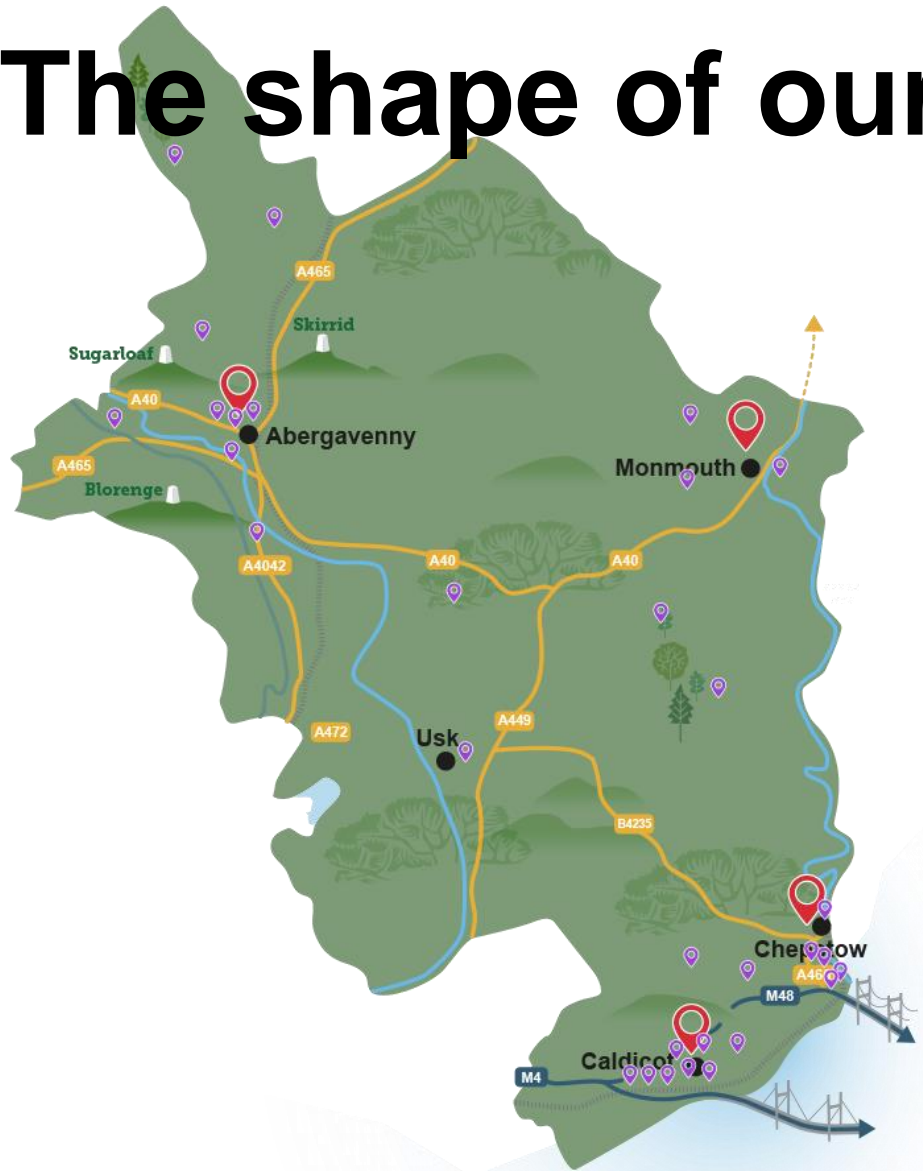


The Education System in Monmouthshire

The shape of our system and how we work



The shape of our place



Monmouthshire is a relatively large, rural county situated in the south east of Wales. It is located at the heart of the important strategic corridor between Cardiff and Bristol.

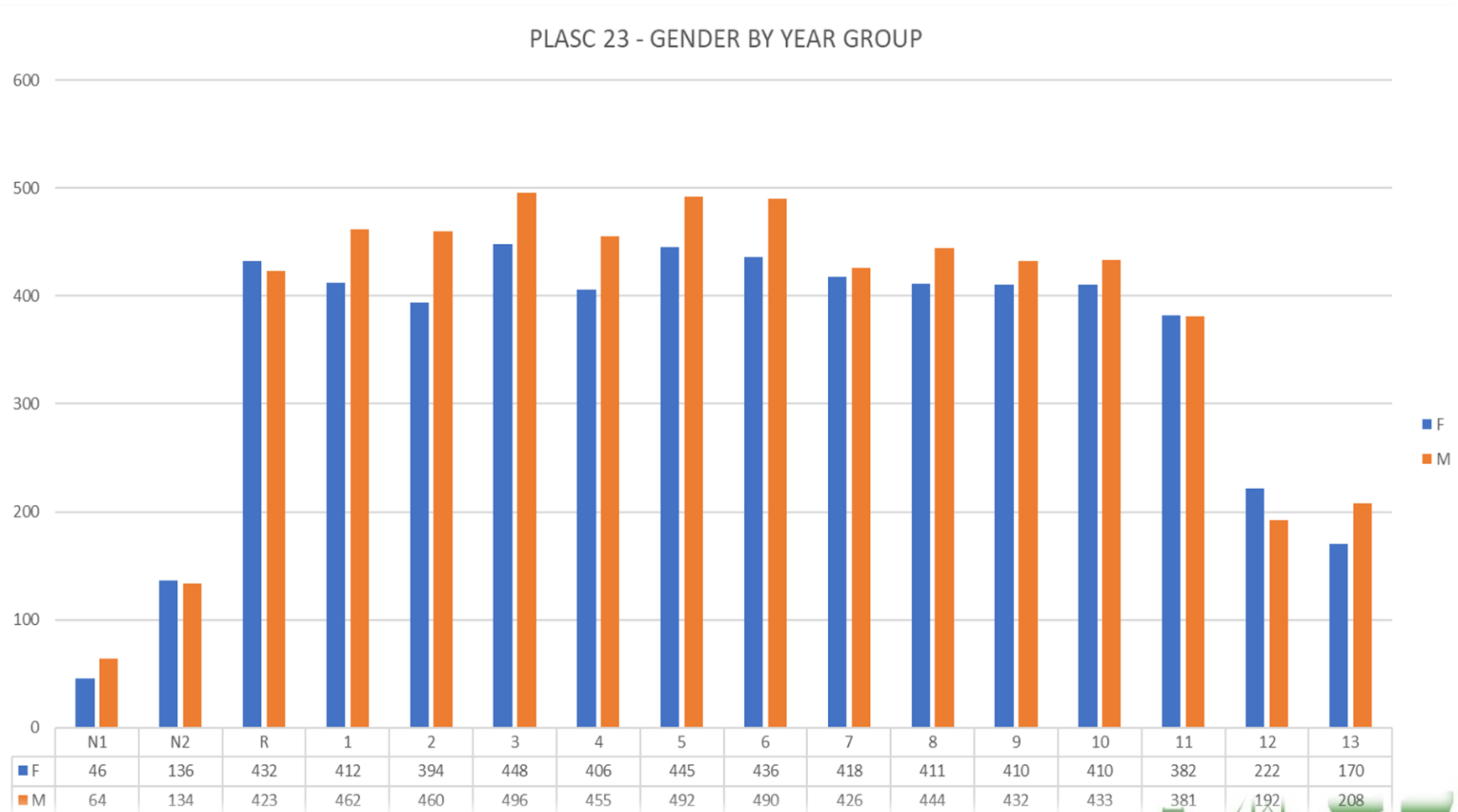
We have 28 English medium and 2 Welsh medium primary schools, the majority of which are single form entry (a single class). There are four secondary schools each located in one of the county's main towns. There is also a Pupil Referral Service (PRS) that supports learners at risk of exclusion from mainstream school or those unable to attend school.

The schools in Monmouthshire employ 1,148 members of staff (the central CYP directorate employs 78 members of staff).

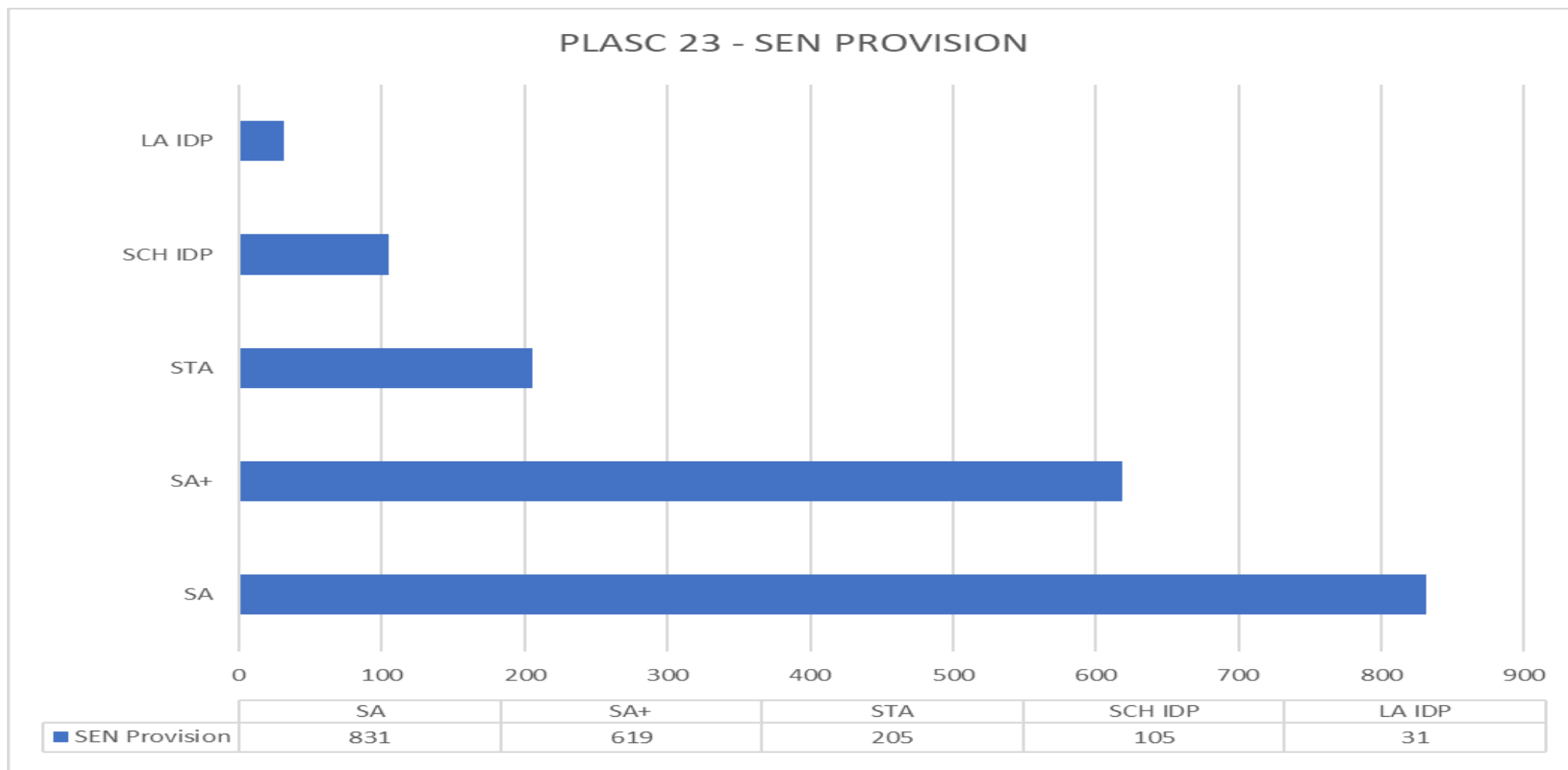
The schools educate 11,570 pupils across the county (52% of which are male); 15.5% of the population have an identified additional learning need and 17.3% of the population are eligible for free school meals (FSM).



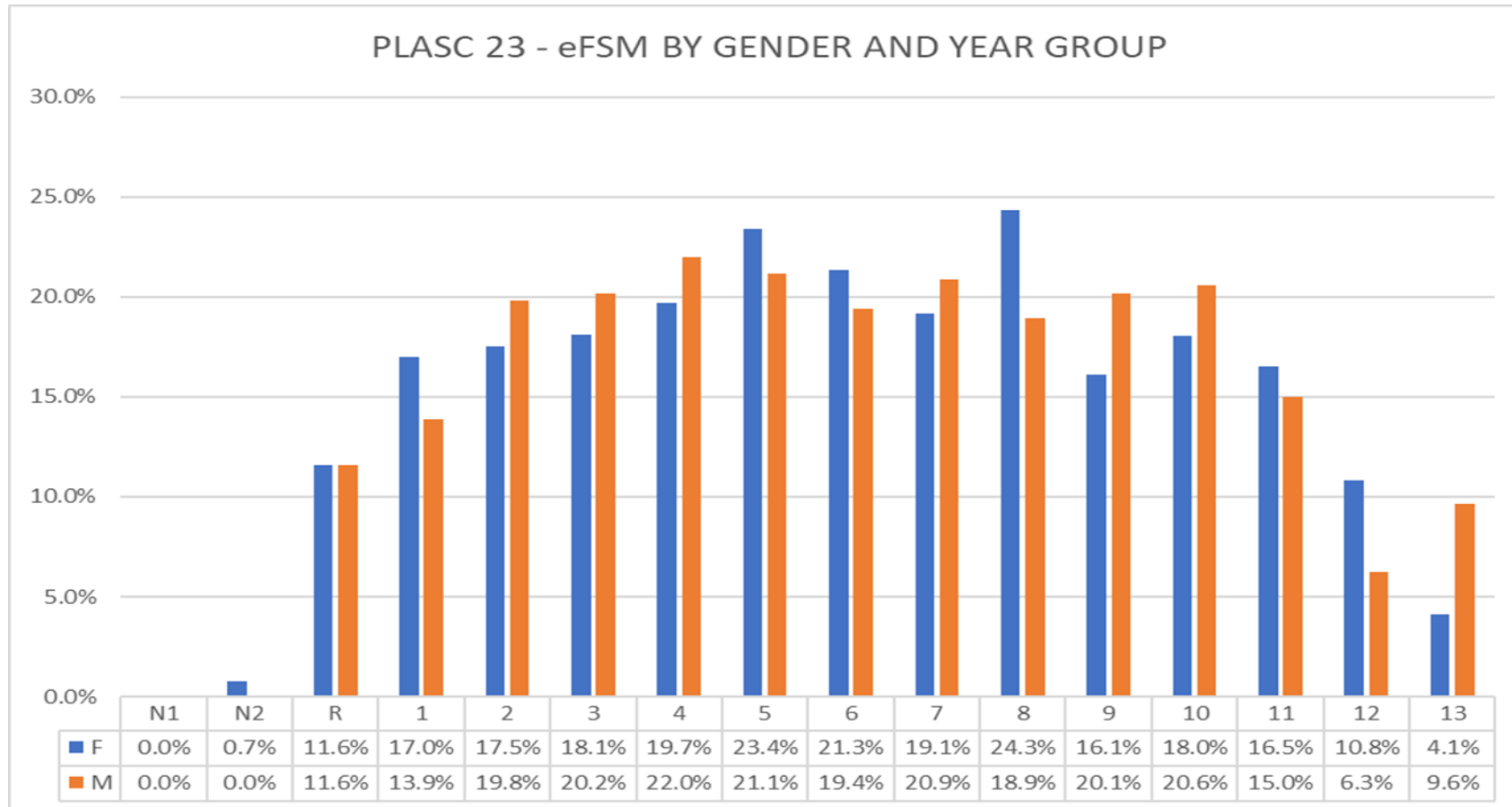
The shape of our place: Age and Gender



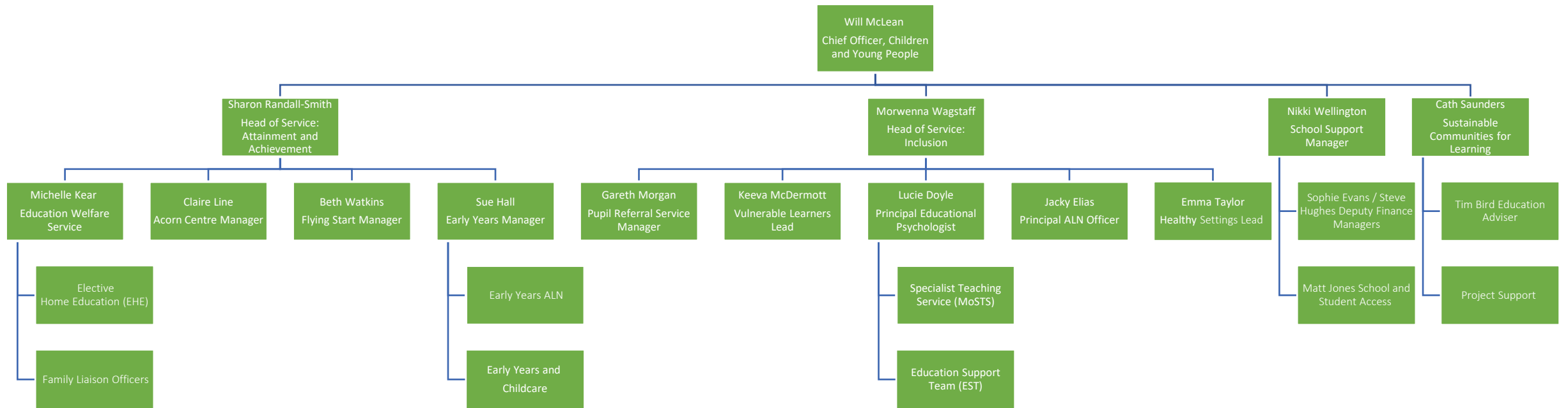
The shape of our place: ALN needs



The shape of our place: eFSM and Gender



The Shape of the Team



The Shape of the Team

The past year has seen the Children and Young People's Directorate form into four clear areas of work. They represent:

- School Improvement
- Inclusion Services
- Support Services
- Sustainable Communities for Learning

This development has allowed for greater clarity in roles and responsibility and secured greater capacity in the inclusion service. With the current focus on supporting learners return to school and addressing additional learning needs and behaviours that challenge, this has been a worthwhile investment.

It should be noted that the four elements of the team work closely together and recognise the interlocking nature of their areas of work. Simply put, the work of our school improvement professionals is negated without pupils attending school, in the same way we know that the best approach to addressing behaviours that challenge is to ensure that excellent teaching and learning is taking place in our classrooms that keeps learners engaged. Our support services work to ensure that we are able to manage the school finances that ensure the right staff are working in our schools. The Sustainable Communities for Learning ensure that our schools are suitable for our learners now and in the future.



The Shape of the Team



Partnerships

Much of the work of the Children and Young Peoples Directorate can only be achieved through working in Partnership.

The biggest team in the directorate is the Flying Start team who are a shared, grant funded team that works across MCC and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. This work to promote early health and development of our youngest children is vital to ensuring children arrive in school ready to begin their learning journey.

Equally, our early years education is a partnership between our 25 non-maintained settings and our 12 maintained settings. This provides a vital link to our schools and shows the way in which the two sectors work to best provide childcare and education that meets the needs of our families.

For our schools perhaps the most significant partnership that exists is the work that is undertaken with our commissioned (and jointly owned) school improvement partner, the Education Achievement Service (EAS).

This vital organisation provides us with the insight of what is happening in our schools through their School Improvement Partners (SIPs) but then provide bespoke support and broader professional learning across a number of areas such as Curriculum, Health, Wellbeing and Equity and Leadership.

Outside of these partnerships there a whole host of other partnerships with internal departments and external agencies that support the provision of services for children across Monmouthshire.



A moving & evolving system

Strategic
Direction
(our local
direction)

Post-
pandemic
response

The
reform
agenda

Stretched
resources



The local frame for our work

Unlike many aspects of service delivery in Monmouthshire the role of the Chief Officer, Children and Young People is, in some ways, peculiarly constrained. The direction of travel of the Welsh Education system is set by the Welsh Government. The clearest articulation of which is the latest National Mission document. This is then interpreted and delivered at a local level by our 33 school leaders.

This does not mean, however, that there is not the scope or capacity for Monmouthshire to have a vital role in the work of our education system. It is the role of the Authority to provide direction, support and challenge to our schools. For a number of years now we have clearly articulated our aspirations for the system and the young people who learn in that system.

These have been focused upon being a high performing system that delivers excellent education for all our learners. This report will set out our emergent areas of focus for 2023/24 and an update on the progress we made in 2022/23.

We now have a Community and Corporate Plan that provides a clear direction of travel for the service and a vital link in the 'golden thread' from the National Mission to local school delivery.

The key deliverables of *The Learning Place* are:

- Improved school attendance and reduced levels of exclusion which remove barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils
- The benefits of the new curriculum in Wales are maximised through excellent teaching and learning
- A truly inclusive educational system that recognises learners' starting points, strengths and educational needs
- Continue our programme of school modernisation

These will be the drivers for the activity in each of the Heads of Service's Delivery Plan for the coming year.



The broader context we are working in

If the national and local policy framework in which we are working has become clearer and more stable the societal context in which we are working remains more volatile and uncertain.

Across the system, at all levels, there is an absolute recognition that the pandemic continues to have a significant impact on our learners and the teams of staff that support them.

When the pandemic struck in 2020, Monmouthshire had just been inspected. This broadly positive inspection left the Authority with a clear sense of its direction and areas of work where it needed to focus its attention. The pandemic changed the platform from which we are trying to climb and, in many ways, changed the mountain we are seeking to scale.

If you think you're going to come in and operate your business as if it's February 2020, you're going to get crushed.

If you think you're leading the same workforce—people with the same mindset, the same mentality, the same desires, and the same priorities—you are nuts.

You have to change or get out of the way. There's no turning back. This is the big reset, and that's where the hope and opportunity live.”

-Scott Sonenshein

dare to lead | Unlocking Us
WITH BRENÉ BROWN



The broader context we are working in

The pandemic was a hugely significant interruption to traditional, structured teaching and learning for all of our school-based learners but it had profound effects on those below school age, impacting on their socialisation and early development. For those reasons alone we can expect the impact to last well into the medium term.

As the most significant societal controls lifted, we saw Wales's education inspectorate, Estyn, return to full activity. The inspection framework has evolved with the new Chief Inspector bringing important changes that have evolved the nature of the inspection. It remains a vital part of the assurance framework in which we operate.

The pandemic did bring some respite from a period of exceptionally challenging school budgetary management. However, the budget setting process for the current financial year was particularly challenging and for the first time since 2015-16 a reduction in the Individual School's Budget (ISB) was made. This in some ways contributes to the final part of volatile context in which we are working.

This year has seen industrial action by two trade unions in our schools. In early 2023 the NEU undertook strike action to campaign for a higher pay award (the Independent Pay Review Body Wales recommended 5% in November 2022 which was agreed by the Minister). This led to three days of teachers striking. It had a variable impact on schools in Monmouthshire with some closing completely and others able to remain open.

More recently the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) voted to partake in industrial action for the first time in their 125 year history. They have voted to engage in Action Short of Strike (ASOS) with the stated intention of frustrating the education system. It has three areas of concern - pay erosion over time, Headteacher's workload and the transparency of education funding. This has been a significant challenge to the way in which the local authority works with its schools and the extent to which I am able to provide you with assurance as to the performance of the system.



The reform agenda

In many ways it would be easier to describe the aspects of the education system that are not changing or evolving. The scale of change and development is hugely significant and has had a profound impact on the education our children receive. These reforms are captured in the National Mission: 2023 (see next page).

The Curriculum for Wales has been adopted in all primary schools and is being rolled out in all of our secondary schools. This process will continue until the teaching of the first of the new GCSEs in 2025 and their first award in 2027.

The Additional Learning Needs service and our associated provision is experiencing its most significant changes in more than 20 years. The language of 'statements' has been replaced by Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and there is a far greater role for schools to play in the maintenance and delivery of these statutory documents.

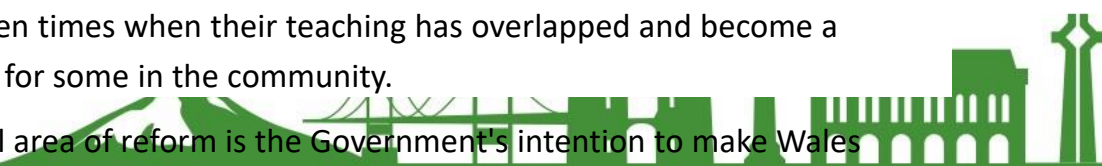
Alongside these two main areas of reform which require the greatest levels of resource, development and focus, there are a range of other areas that in many ways are of equal value. The ambitions to create a million Welsh speakers by 2050 has a significant impact on the authority and on the ambition expressed through its Welsh in education Strategic Plan (WESP).

The Council has been committed to closing the attainment gap between those learners who we understand to be disadvantaged and the rest of the cohort since the start of my tenure as Chief Officer. Traditionally the proxy measure for this has been those learners eligible for free school meals but the pandemic and the cost of living crisis has forced us to reconsider our understanding of disadvantage and the impact this has on learners.

The pandemic impacted on learners' academic progress, particularly in relation to disadvantaged learners and even more significant, was its impact upon learners' and staff's wellbeing. The Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing is a structured approach for schools to understand how, as organisations, they are best placed to promote wellbeing. This has a hugely significant impact on children's attendance and achievement in school.

Finally, there have been some specific and discreet curriculum changes as a part of the reform agenda. These have addressed areas such as religious and values education (RVE) and Relationships and Sexual education (RSE). Despite the delineations between these two areas, there have been times when their teaching has overlapped and become a concern for some in the community.

The final area of reform is the Government's intention to make Wales



Our National Mission

Objectives

Objective 1: Learning for life

so that everyone in Wales learns, and continues to learn, developing their knowledge and skills, and engaging in experiences that are relevant to their lives today and into the future.

What we will do: Ensure that all learning is guided by the four purposes of the curriculum, through collaboration across providers and with industries and employers.

Objective 2: Breaking down barriers

so that excellent education opportunities and outcomes can be achieved by all learners, at all ages, in classrooms, online, and in work.

What we will do: Through early identification, support and targeted actions, ensure that all learners gain the knowledge, skills and experiences to be an active citizen, including the cross-curricular skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competence.

Objective 3: A positive education experience for everyone

with learners and staff supported in their wellbeing and resilience, which is essential for improving education outcomes and life chances.

What we will do: Ensure that learners are supported to be healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society, within places of learning that are supportive, safe, inclusive and free from discrimination and bullying.

Objective 4: High-quality teaching and leadership

where everyone benefits from the best professional learning so that they can support the success of all learners, particularly those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

What we will do: Guaranteed career-long professional learning and support for all staff, from initial training through to leadership, focused on realising the four purposes of the curriculum, and capacity and capability to support the success of all learners.

Objective 5: Community-based learning

with strong institutions engaging, integrating and being empowered by their communities.

What we will do: Empower all learners, families and communities to build strong relationships and partnerships with education providers, so that we tackle disadvantage and deliver world-class education locally and nationally.

Objective 6: Cymraeg belongs to us all

giving every learner equal access to the language and the opportunity to reach their potential.

What we will do: Encourage the use of Welsh across the education system, as an integral part of Curriculum for Wales, our Cymraeg 2050 ambitions and expanding provision post-16 to study through Welsh and opportunities to learn the language as active and engaged citizens.



How we observe the system

When I first presented my Chief Officer's Report in 2018 it included 26 pages of detailed analysis of attainment data. Its focus was purely on the attainment of our learners at the end of the four statutory stages of education (the Foundation Phase, Keys Stage 2, 3 & 4) and this was analysed by levels of performance (expected level, expected level +1), gender and eligibility for free school meals.

Whilst this was a helpful crutch, in some ways it did not capture the richness of the work that takes place in our schools. Just before the pandemic the Welsh Government and WLGA decided that this approach was not the most effective to drive improvement in the system. *(This decision is set out on the next slide).*

Our ability to 'know' our schooling system is now much richer than it was when we relied solely on end of key stage data.

Every year we hold professional discussions with our schools to understand the aims and objectives of their School development Plans (SDPs) we use these to validate the evaluative activity that the findings have been based on. We ascertain whether the approaches are appropriate, and we facilitate bespoke support from our colleagues in the EAS.

Throughout the year we then work with the EAS to undertake supported self-evaluation activity. In the current academic year, the autumn term was focused on supporting disadvantaged learners. In the spring and summer term we have focused on the standards of teaching and learning in our schools. This was done through the EAS's Celebrate, Support, Share, Refine (CSSR) approach.

Where approaches do not reach our expectations, we use a range of different tools but in particular the Team Around The School (TAS).



Changes to accountability

Communication from the Welsh Government, the WLGA and Estyn to Chairs of Scrutiny, Cabinet Members, Directors of Education, Chief Executive Officers, Managing Directors of Regional Education Consortia, stated that:

It is counter-productive for schools to be placed under disproportionate pressure on the basis of individual measures. It is not in the interest of school improvement and risks undermining the ongoing change in culture that we are working together to achieve. We expect local authorities and regional consortia to support schools to make appropriate decisions about their curriculum to avoid narrowing choice for learners.

*Collectively, we have agreed that this is the right approach to take and strongly advise you to use a broad range of **un-aggregated data** and information to enable you to discharge your duties when reporting on school performance. Evaluating the performance of individual schools rather than generating aggregated data at local authority level will be more helpful to supporting and challenging individual schools with their improvement.*



How we observe the system

Our engagement with our schools is not limited to the school improvement activity of our professionals and the EAS. On any given day we will have a number of professional interactions with schools that allow us to form a view of where the system is and the risks that are present.

Our Educational Psychologists (EPs) are regular visitors to our schools and work closely with learners, teachers and support team members. The EPs deploy teams into schools to support our learners, the Specialist Teaching Service (MoST) focuses on supporting learners' literacy skills and the Education Support Team (EST) are a new part of the organisation and work with learners who are at risk of disengaging with their learning in a mainstream setting.

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) also works closely with schools to support vulnerable learners whose attendance has fallen below acceptable levels. This work is vital in the post-pandemic period where attendance at school has become an issue for all schools across Wales. In particular we see the emergence of emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) intrinsically linked to the heightened anxiety of both learners and families.

Beyond support for learners the authority works closely with schools to support their governance and financial management. This gives us another layer of insight into the ways schools are run. In the last year there has been a sharp focus on the financial resilience of schools.

The authority delegates the individual school budget every year and this is done in accordance with the Fair Funding Regulations. Schools and the Authority have a key role in promoting financial prudence but also a recognition that the funding afforded to schools is there to afford learners the best educational experience that they can access.

It would be remiss of me not to recognise that in the recent past access to schools has been more limited than previously. The adoption of action short of strike by members of the NAHT has fettered our ability to engage with schools. In particular this has affected our work with the EAS to progress school improvement activity, such as the CSSR programme. We have also had a lack of engagement in progressing some policy positions.



How did we do last year?

An evaluation against our Estyn recommendations and our ambitions for 2022/23



Our Estyn Recommendations

Our Estyn recommendation	Our progress
<p>Improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since before the Estyn inspection in 2020 there has been a relentless focus on the standard of provision for these learners who experience disadvantage. • Unfortunately, the pandemic constrained our ability to report the outcomes of learners compared to the past (this will change later this year with the Welsh Government’s decision to return to the publication of KS4 ‘Capped 9’ outcomes). • However, this remains a key focus in individual evaluative conversations with schools and features in our thematic work with the EAS during the autumn term 2022, the outcome of which is reported later in this report. • Many recent Estyn reports indicate that learners eligible for free school meals are making good progress in their learning.
<p>Further strengthen the focus on increasing the number of pupils achieving excellent standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monmouthshire remains committed to being an excellent education system; one that ensures all learners make good and excellent progress during their time in our schools. • We recognise that many of our learners arrive in school from an advantaged position and we must capitalise on this to increase the number of pupils who achieve excellent outcomes. • This is not to understate the challenges, both organisational and learner related, that remain in our schools across the county, but rather to recognise the starting position of our learners. • We continue to work closely with school leaders to determine what constitutes ‘excellent’ for their learners and derive means of capturing this information accurately.

The ‘Capped 9’ score consists of a student’s points score in English/Welsh, maths, science plus their next best 6 qualifications.



Our Estyn Recommendations

Our Estyn Recommendation	Our Progress
<p>Articulate a clear strategy for SEN provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The restructure and creation of a broader Inclusion Team has meant that the articulation of an ALN strategy will now form part of a broader umbrella suite of interconnected strategies and related toolkits/ resources/ policies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALN • Relationships • Children Looked After • Reducing Exclusions • These will sit within the current contextual framework of legislation/ guidance and will have overarching principles, informed shared values and key drivers such as person centred/ trauma informed practice/ children's rights/ equalities/ positive behavioural support/ participation etc. The Inclusion Team is developing this currently.



Our Estyn Recommendations

Our Estyn Recommendation	Our Progress
<p>Strengthen the use of information gathered through self-evaluation to better inform improvement planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation sits at the heart of understanding how well our service works and the impact that we are having on our learners' progress and the effectiveness of the services we run. • The pandemic and, more recently, the ASOS have restricted our ability to gain data and information in the way in which we have in the past. • However, improvements in our IT systems have promoted better reporting and analysis of attendance and exclusions data which is allowing us to focus our work in areas of need. • The recently adopted Community and Corporate Plan now provides a clear framework for action and evaluation of services to ensure that we are working most effectively in the areas of need.



Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:

Ensure our schools are effectively supported to emerge from the pandemic in an informed position to meet the needs of all learners so that they achieve their potential.

What have we done to realise this?

Ensuring our learners attend School

- During the pandemic, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) team maintained regular contact with vulnerable families and those feeling anxious about attending school as restrictions were lifted. Education Welfare Officers (EWO) provided support for schools, learners and their families to overcome barriers which ensure a successful return to school for many vulnerable learners.
- The Lead Officer in EWS for children missing education (CME) monitors learner movement from schools and other local authorities and records the support given to ensure they are safe. The CME officer works closely with other EW officers and the EHE officer to ensure provision within Monmouthshire is in place and monitored regularly.
- The EWS team have established good lines of communication with schools and other agencies which they use effectively to share relevant information such as Operation Encompass notifications and MARAC information. As a result, pupils receive the support they need in a timely manner.
- EWS has taken the lead in developing PowerBI to improve how we capture and analyse attendance across the county. Whilst this is at an early stage of development, we are already seeing benefits to workload and the range of analysis at our disposal.
- The number of families who have elected to home educate (EHE) has increased significantly since the pandemic. The EHE/EWS team continue to support these families by maintaining regular contact with them through home visits and face to face events. We have used the EHE grant to maintain a full time EHE support officer, provide a range of enrichment activities and support for EHE learners sitting Year 11 examinations. WG shared our model with other local authorities across Wales as an example of good practice in the use of the EHE grant.

Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:	What have we done to realise this?
<p>Ensure our schools are effectively supported to emerge from the pandemic in an informed position to meet the needs of all learners so that they achieve their potential.</p>	<p><u>Supporting Learners' Wellbeing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the pandemic, the Education Psychology Service (EPS) offered online training in partnership with Community Psychology that was focused on supporting schools to meet the needs of pupils returning to school. All training, including further specific training on the wellbeing of staff and pupils, and anxiety remains available to schools via the EPS Training Portal • Since the Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) project was launched, all four of Monmouthshire's secondary school have received bespoke EBSA training. This has had an impact on the confidence of school based staff to meet the needs of pupils who are struggling to attend school. • In the summer term 2022 we used grant funding to support a pilot initiative in a secondary school to support a group of highly anxious (EBSA) children who were struggling to attend school. A review of this pilot will be completed by the end of the academic year 2023. • We have also used ALN grant funding to introduce Cross-Phase ALN Support Officers. These are based in each secondary school, who work into the cluster Primary schools, to promote their inclusion and wellbeing, and to support the transition from Primary to Secondary school. This includes working preventatively with CYP at risk of EBSA and has meant that many vulnerable/ disadvantaged learners have received enhanced transition in Y5 & Y6. • The implementation of the Whole School Approach to Emotional Mental Wellbeing framework 2021 aims to ensure schools are aware of the wellbeing of staff and pupils and supports them to develop plans to promote positive wellbeing for all. The phased engagement of our schools has been positive, we currently have 15 schools working with the team on the WSA to EMWB self - evaluation tool. This equates to 43% of schools in MCC. • We have recently reviewed the core purpose and membership of the MCC Wellbeing Subgroup which has been renamed as the Wellbeing in Schools Subgroup to reflect its increased participation of schools. The group will continue to report to the CYP Strategic Partnership Group on the key priorities which include: (i) Responding to the School Health Research Network (SHRN) pupil surveys; (ii) Transitions (from EY settings to schools and from primary to secondary); (iii) Communication of mental health / wellbeing support and services.



Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:

Provide access to a range of professional learning and support to develop high-quality teaching and learning across all schools which leads to improved outcomes that are sustained over time.

What have we done to realise this?

- All schools within Monmouthshire have access to a wide range of Professional Learning in the areas of Leadership and Pedagogy, Wellbeing and Curriculum.
- The EAS PL offer includes an extensive range of leadership programmes for school leaders, at all levels including aspiring headteachers, middle leaders, NQTs and teaching assistants.
- Over the past eighteen months many of these programmes are well attended, with the Assessment and Progression Network, Aspiring HLTA programme and NQT Professional Learning, being the most popular.
- Professional Learning for Wellbeing includes training on whole school approaches to mental health, RADY and support for wellbeing leads. Wellbeing networks and training have not been well attended over the past eighteen months.
- Since Autumn 2021, an average of 50.6 teachers from Monmouthshire schools have attended EAS professional learning compared to an average of 53.5 teachers across all schools in the region.



Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:

What have we done to realise this?

Ensure our schools have access to high-quality professional learning, advice and guidance to develop a bespoke curriculum that engages and inspires all learners to develop the skills they need for employment and life-long learning.

The EAS provide a comprehensive package of professional learning to support the local authority, schools and educational settings to develop key aspects of their work.

This includes the provision of:

- bespoke support to promote cluster working through a high support, high challenge model to create an effective learning organisation across Monmouthshire.
- leadership briefings and curriculum networks to strengthen leadership and teaching across the whole workforce to support the effective learning environment across the county.
- professional learning as part of a Learning Network Schools model to support schools and settings to realise the Curriculum for Wales within their context.
- complimentary professional learning and support for health, wellbeing and equity with a sharp focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.
- facilitating events to share good practice across all areas of learning and leadership
- school improvement partner support for school self-evaluation activities

As a result, in most schools:

- The curriculum is developed purposefully with many activities designed to raise aspiration for all learners.
- Rich authentic learning experiences are developed successfully to engage and excite all learners.
- Effective provision is impacting positively on the wellbeing of disadvantaged learners.



Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:	What have we done to realise this?
<p>Provide bespoke advice and guidance to our schools to ensure a wide range of learners receive high-quality additional needs provision through the new ALN & Tribunal Act.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inclusion Team offer a wide range of advice and guidance directly to schools to ensure high-quality ALN provision. The development of the online Training Portal for schools has been positive in ensuring information and training is easily disseminated/ shared. • The Local Authority ALN Statutory Service provided comprehensive support advice and training to schools and governing bodies to ensure a smooth transition to the new ALN system. All schools and Early Years settings were prepared for their new responsibilities under the Act through targeted training and regular online Q&A sessions supported by the ALN Implementation Lead, the ALN Statutory Team and EY Advisory Teachers. • Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCOs) have been asked to complete questionnaires on bi-annual basis to report on their status within the school, time allocation to do the role & training needs. Regular ALNCO Cluster meetings are effective forums to discuss implementation issues and problem solve, ALN Statutory Officers & EPs often attend these meeting. Questionnaires are collated and information used to inform support for individual ALNCOs and training requirements. • The ALN Statutory Team are working with Capita as they develop a new IT system to support the processes and procedures related to the implementation of the ALN Act. The majority of schools have adopted the Edukey system and are using this to support the IDP process and inform provision mapping. • The ALN Statutory Officers, EPS, MoSTS, Vulnerable Learner Lead (VLL) and EST officers are all accessible and all have regular planned/ unplanned engagement with schools to discuss issues of concerns and to gain bespoke advice and guidance for learners. This allows for early intervention and prevention of escalation of issues which is especially important when supporting children/ young people at risk of exclusion or disengagement. • Since the new VLL Officer and Education Support Team have been in place, we can offer responsive, clear and detailed advice to schools on a range of issues with a particular focus on supporting pupils at risk of exclusion and those who are CLA. It is too early to measure the impact of the much of this work but feedback from schools/ settings has been positive. • Often this proactive advisory work is completed in partnership with other officers, such as H&S and safeguarding colleagues to support schools to use their awareness of disadvantaged learners with the input of parent/carers and other professionals to enable ALN, including emotional and mental health needs, to be met safely.

Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:

Provide bespoke advice and guidance to our schools to ensure a wide range of learners receive high-quality additional needs provision through the new ALN & Tribunal Act.

What have we done to realise this?

Training - There is a raft of advice and guidance available to schools via training opportunities bespoke to schools/ settings, or as part of authority wide roll out.

- One example is the partnership working with the Autism Education Trust (AET) and the National Autistic Society (NAS) since January 2022 as a response to the high number of autistic children and young people in our schools and settings. The commissioned MCC Autism in Schools and Settings project aims to develop a whole authority approach to building the capacity of the workforce to support children and young people with autism. The intended outcome is to improve access to, and the experience of, education for autistic children and young people in Monmouthshire - to ensure it is more positive and inclusive. We are currently in the process of rolling out the first round of training for SRB staff and key local authority officers who provide support/ outreach into our schools and settings. This is important to ensure a robust and consistent approach to autism across MCC and is necessary to future workforce development in schools and settings in the future. An Autism Champions group has been established to help develop materials for mainstream schools. The impact of this project will be closely monitored and evaluated.
- Training was provided to Children's Social Care in preparation for the new responsibilities under the Act with regard learners who are Children Looked After (CLA) with ALN with regards to a combined IDP/PEP. Recently the development of the Designated CLA Leads in School Network has been well attended by schools, and other MCC representatives across directorates to allow for a more coherent, consistent and coordinated approach to meeting the needs of learners who are CLA, former CLA or at risk of becoming CLA.



Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:	What have we done to realise this?
<p>Build the skills and expertise of schools to improve attendance recovery and levels of exclusion to reduce barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils.</p>	<p><u>Promoting attendance at School</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Welfare Service (EWS) Lead appointed to co-ordinate the work of the teams and to prepare the local authority and schools for the implementation of new statutory guidance for EHE and the 'Belonging, engaging and participating – Guidance on improving Learner Engagement and Attendance' which is currently at the consultation stage. • Education Welfare Officers (EWO) hold attendance consultations with secondary schools fortnightly and every half term with primary schools to ensure that the impact of support for complex cases is reviewed regularly and emerging concerns are identified. Consultations are offered more frequently as required. • EWO provide bespoke support for families in a range of ways. For example, they provide wellbeing visits, mediation between home and schools to overcome barriers to good attendance, attend school meetings with parent to support them in sharing their views, they make wellbeing homes visits. Where appropriate they also attend CASP, core group and CP conferences. • The Elective Home Education (EHE) officers maintain regular contact with EHE families throughout the year through home visits and engagement events. They provide examination advice and support and next steps advice as required. They support EHE learners back into the school environment , both state and independent, where appropriate. • EWS has established effective links with other services and agencies supporting learners and families, and particularly with inclusion services within CYP. Where appropriate EWO make referrals to Childrens' Services where there are safeguarding concerns.



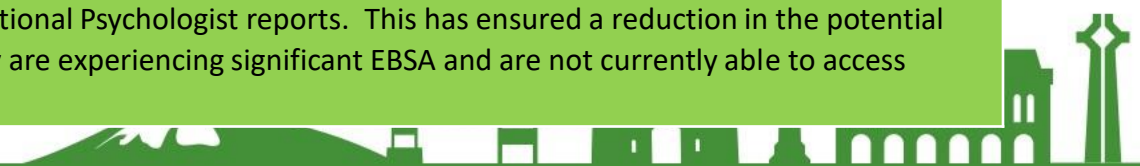
Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:	What have we done to realise this?
<p>Build the skills and expertise of schools to improve attendance recovery and levels of exclusion to reduce barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EWS provide advice and guidance to schools regarding attendance issues such as appropriate coding, flexi-schooling and persistent absence. • During the last year, the EWS team have attended training for Trauma Informed Schools (TIS), Suicide Awareness and Community Focused Schools. This ensures that the advice we give to schools in these areas is consistent with advice from Inclusion. <p><u>Reducing levels of exclusions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the appointment of a new Vulnerable Learner Lead, and the development of the role to sit within the Inclusion team, there has been a renewed and more focused universal offer of advice, guidance and monitoring with regards to managing exclusions, supporting learners at risk of exclusion and supporting their inclusion and admissions. • This work also aims to ensure awareness and compliance with Public Sector Equality Act obligations, and Disability Discrimination Act requirements as well as supporting Health and Safety and Safeguarding obligations and the Welsh Government commitment to reducing restrictive practices in schools. • As part of this offer, a robust suite of training is being offered to ensure that all LA officers and schools are confident of the expectations when a learner is at risk of exclusion, in terms of understanding of a range of graduated responses such as Pastoral Support Plans, reduced timetables, and reasonable adjustments. This includes ensuring that where learners are excluded, the process of pupil disciplinary hearings is fair and robustly considers if an exclusion was avoidable or not. • It is too early to see an impact of this early work from the VLL but feedback from schools suggests an increase in confidence when supporting our most vulnerable learners in schools/ settings.



Last Year's Ambitions

Our Ambition:	What have we done to realise this?
<p>Build the skills and expertise of schools to improve attendance recovery and levels of exclusion to reduce barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils.</p>	<p><u>Developing capacity in schools to meet a range of needs</u> through ongoing programmes/ work including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) - The EPS continue to offer initial ELSA training, supervision & CPD. 47 new ELSAs trained 2020-22. During the pandemic, a blended training model allowed this support to continue. Now all MCC schools (bar one) have at least one trained ELSA supporting pupils, in total we have around 70 active ELSAs making daily impact on the lives of numerous pupils. • Trauma Informed Schools (TIS) approaches continue to be embedded across MCC. Training has been well received by our schools and evaluations are positive. Over 220 staff across our schools as well as a range of service areas have completed the TIS Training, with 55 senior leaders accessing the 2 day training and a number have completed the TIS Diploma. TIS reflects the relational model of understanding children/ young people presenting with behaviours of concern and focuses on raising the awareness and capacity of adults supporting vulnerable pupils. This relational model underpins much of the work within the broader inclusion team and within our schools. 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident in supporting CYP, including those who have experienced trauma or mental health difficulties. • Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Project provides an embedded training and support programme for school staff, and other professionals supporting CYP who are struggling to attend school. The aim is to support early and effective intervention to assess and intervene in the most timely and helpful way, to prevent entrenched EBSA and promote positive outcomes. We continue to offer Introduction to EBSA training, online consultations, EBSA Guidance and Resources and bespoke EBSA training has been delivered into all four secondary schools. EBSA training has been attended by a range of school staff; Health Professionals; and professionals from a range of services across MCC. Feedback continues to be very positive. • Access to Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) - In response to the lengthy associated times to access CAMHS support, the requirement for accessing EOTAS provision broadened to include MCC Educational Psychologist reports. This has ensured a reduction in the potential period of time that a CYP has to wait for EOTAS provision if they are experiencing significant EBSA and are not currently able to access school-based provision.



Our Provision

The services we offer and the difference they make



Early Years Provision

I was once reminded (a little forcefully) by a colleague that children are not born when they start school!

The early years work that is undertaken by the local authority and its partners in ABUHB, our non-maintained settings and the EAS is significant to the future success of our children.

This is not just to ensure the best start for learners themselves, but also their families who need support with childcare and parenting.

The provision of the new King Henry VIII 3-19 school in Abergavenny has been built around the idea that the community will be able to access supportive services from pre-natal to the start of school.



Flying Start

Flying Start continues to deliver a high standard of parenting support both in and out of the target areas through our 0 to 7 Request for Support Panel.

The Flying Start team consists of:

- Commissioned Health Visiting service
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Early Years Play Therapist
- Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist
- Two Dads Advisors
- An Early Years Practitioner team delivering child development and parenting interventions

The child development support includes a registered Portage service which sits within MCC's Flying Start programme. Portage is a home-visiting educational service for pre-school children with developmental delay or disability, and their families.

The Early Years Dads' Advisors are providing support to Dads with children aged 0 to 7 across Monmouthshire. Their role is also to raise the awareness of the importance of the role of fathers across agencies working in Monmouthshire.

Phase 1 of the Flying Start expansion (full programme) has completed and now includes Rogiet and St Christopher's LSOAs.

Phase 2 of the Flying Start Childcare expansion commences in April 2023 and aims to provide fully funded childcare to an additional 77 two-year-olds in the Abergavenny, Llanfoist, Monmouth and Goytre areas. This is a phased expansion that continues to target areas identified by utilising WG and DWP data. In 2024/25, we will continue to expand the Flying Start Childcare using a phased approach to all two-year-olds in Monmouthshire. This universal service will be fully funded through the Flying Start revenue grant.



Estyn Early Years Outcomes

In Monmouthshire, early education is delivered through a combination of maintained and non-maintained settings. We currently have 12 maintained nurseries within primary schools and 25 non-maintained settings. This balance of provision is rare across Wales with a larger than normal non-maintained sector. Non-maintained settings are approved to provide early education and supported by Advisory Teachers appointed by the EAS and LA Officers within the Early Years Team.

Offering early education places in both maintained and non-maintained settings and allowing parents to choose where they take this up is a particular strength of our practice.

Since the introduction of the Childcare Offer, more children are accessing early education in non-maintained settings and this difference has increased in the last two years. During 2022-23, 57% of children received early education in a non-maintained setting, compared to 43% in a maintained nursery in a school.

Our non-maintained settings have adapted positively to the Curriculum for Wales and provide a high quality of care and education, as evidenced in recent inspection reports.

There have been seven joint Estyn and CIW inspections during 2022/23 and all inspections were positive with no areas of non-compliance. Two settings had excellent practice identified and were asked to produce a best practice case study.

We continue to work with settings to ensure training is rolled out to all members of staff and to utilise additional funding (such as RRRS and EYDG) effectively to continue to raise standards for all children.

We are concerned that non-maintained settings will be forced to close in the future due to the lack of qualified childcare staff. There is also a risk that the number of children attending maintained nurseries will continue to drop as parents return to work and need wraparound childcare and, if this is the case, it may result in financial difficulties for schools with nurseries.



Our Schools

As set out in the Introduction and earlier parts of this report, Monmouthshire's schools are working in a volatile period. They are still experiencing the 'tail' of the pandemic while grappling with staff turnover and budget pressures.

Alongside this, they have worked hard to ensure learners return to school and that exclusions are minimised as far as is possible. These can be intensive activities that absorb professionals' energy alongside the development of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN reforms.

Beyond these totemic reforms there are a litany of other initiatives and developments that schools have to respond to. As well as the ongoing focus on developing new pedagogical approaches to improve the standards of teaching and learning in our schools.

For many learners, key transitions have been missed or substantially altered and this impact is still evident in all schools, particularly the absence of early education and socialisation.

This broken landscape in which we work has led to inconsistency and variability across the schooling system which makes it difficult to provide a single, cogent view of the schools in Monmouthshire.

The pandemic changed the experiences and expectations of both our staff and pupils. The experiences of school leaders, teachers and support teams are now very different to those pre-2020. The system has had to take time to adjust and recognise this. However, at the same time the external requirements of inspection and formal external exams remain broadly the same. Whilst the adaptations to the Estyn inspection framework should be recognised and applauded it still represents a challenge for schools.

Across the 35 settings in Monmouthshire the experience of learners and staff will have been different and there will be a variable impact on different settings. We have sought to take a proportionate and informed approach to engaging with schools – seeking a supportive approach but one that recognises constructive and developmental challenge must be retained in the system.



Estyn quantifiers and what they mean

When we write about provision and standards in our schools you will notice a pattern of language that is used to describe and quantify the impact, or the number of learners affected. This is consistent with language used by Estyn in many inspection reports.

- nearly all = with very few exceptions
- most = 90%
- many = 70% or more
- a majority = over 60%
- half = 50%
- around half = close to 50%
- a minority = below 40%
- few = below 20%
- very few = less than 10%



Estyn Inspection Outcomes

Prior to the pandemic there were no Monmouthshire schools in any form of follow-up. Estyn suspended its standard inspections in spring 2020 but continued to maintain contact with schools through a series of Engagement calls visits until Estyn inspections resumed in the summer term 2022.

At the start of the pandemic, local authority suspended iwork n schools. SIP work continued with on-line and telephone contact. Most SIPs re-established school visits where possible during the spring tern 2022, but this was variable, and influenced by contextual factors such as COVID-19 infection rates. COVID was a continued factor for both the school receiving and providing support.

By the time inspections recommenced in summer 2022, the local authority had limited knowledge and evidence of the situation in many of its schools.

During the pandemic, Estyn reviewed their approach to inspection to reflect changes to reporting requirements and give schools confidence to develop and implement a contextual curriculum in line with the Curriculum for Wales. As part of this review, Estyn removed overall judgements. This means that schools now receive a narrative report only.

Since inspections resumed, nine primary schools and two secondary schools in Monmouthshire have been inspected with the following outcomes as detailed in the table to the right.

School	Date	Follow-up	Case studies
Dewstow	May 22	Special measures	No
St Mary's R.C.	June 22	No follow-up	Yes 1
The Dell	June 22	No follow-up	No
Gilwern	October 22	Estyn Review	No
King Henry VIII	November 23	Significant Improvement	No
Castle Park	December 22	No follow-up	No
Llanfoist	January 23	No follow-up	No
Llanvihangel	January 23	No follow-up	No
Monmouth	February 23	No follow-up	Yes 2
Cantref*	April 23		
Undy *	May 23		



Estyn Inspection Outcomes

What are the strengths of our practice and how do we know?

Since inspections resumed, nine primary schools and two secondary schools in Monmouthshire have been inspected: Whilst this is almost a third of Monmouthshire schools, it may not be representative of all schools in Monmouthshire.

Although the inspection process is rigorous, it can only capture a snapshot of a school at the time of the inspection. However, in many cases, Estyn's evaluation of schools' match with our evaluation, wholly or in part. Where they do not, this is a consequence of having limited access to schools during the pandemic and particularly in relation to monitoring standards, review books and speaking to learners. As we have been able to increase our engagement and visits to schools, the alignment of our PIR and Estyn findings has improved.

The following themes have been identified in the nine primary schools and two secondary schools inspected in Monmouthshire (It is also influenced by the three schools in Estyn follow-up or in an Estyn category):

- The majority of leaders know their school well; they provide strong leadership; they are clear about the strengths and areas for improvement, and they work effectively with partners to fulfil the vision for the school.
- Provision for wellbeing and its impact on pupils and staff is a strong feature in nearly all schools.
- Most schools have a clear vision for the curriculum. They are making good progress towards developing a curriculum that reflects the aspiration of the new Curriculum for Wales.



Estyn Inspection Outcomes

- Many schools ensure pupils have worthwhile opportunities to develop a range of skills. As a result, the majority of pupils make good progress during their time in school with a minority making strong progress.
- Behaviour in many schools is good and supports learning well.
- There are positive relationships between staff and pupils in nearly all schools. The positive ethos in many schools enables pupils to develop confidence and self-assurance well.
- Many schools have effective arrangements to provide support to vulnerable pupils and many make good progress.
- Pupils of all ages have beneficial opportunities to develop leaderships skills in most schools.
- Overall, schools provide a welcoming environment where pupils feel safe and secure.
- Generally, pupil's attitudes to learning are good, pupil voice is strong, and wellbeing is good. As a result, many children enjoy going to school.
- In a few primary schools, the development of Welsh language and culture is a strength.
- Schools make effective use of grants to support progress and wellbeing.
- Many governors have a good understanding of their role and discharge their duties effectively.
- No safeguarding concerns have been raised, and in many schools, there is a strong culture of safeguarding.



Estyn Inspection Outcomes

Our next steps

- Alongside our routine work, we commissioned a review of all schools using the Celebrate, Support, Share and Refine (CSSR) model. The review commenced in the spring term and to date, 16 schools out of 35 have participated in this review.
- However, following the implementation of ASOS many of the remaining schools have postponed visits until the industrial action is over. This is having a significant impact on our ability to understand the current strengths and areas for improvement in all of our schools and ensure that the support we are providing is suitable and effective.
- We compare the CSSR outcomes and trends with those identified by Estyn and use them to identify key priorities for our school system and we will continue to review Estyn inspection outcomes and provide support accordingly.
- We provide intensive support to schools in Estyn follow-up to ensure they have the support and capacity they need to address their recommendations in a timely manner

Remaining Risks

- A prolonged period of industrial action would mean that we could return to a position similar to the one we faced during the pandemic, where we did not have sufficient engagement with our schools to know them well. This means that in the future, schools in need of specific support will not have received it and our pre-inspection reports may not align well with Estyn inspection outcomes. If this is the case, the impact on progress and standards and professional learning could be significant.

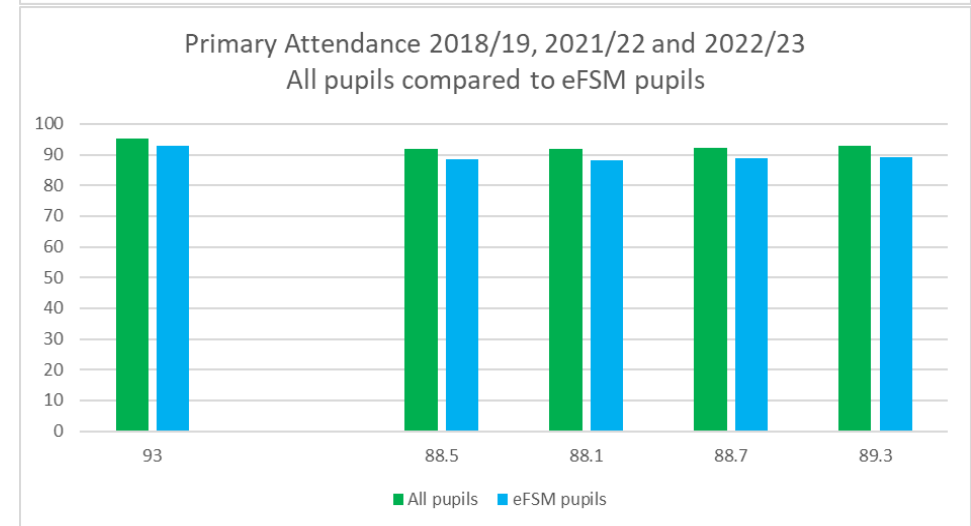
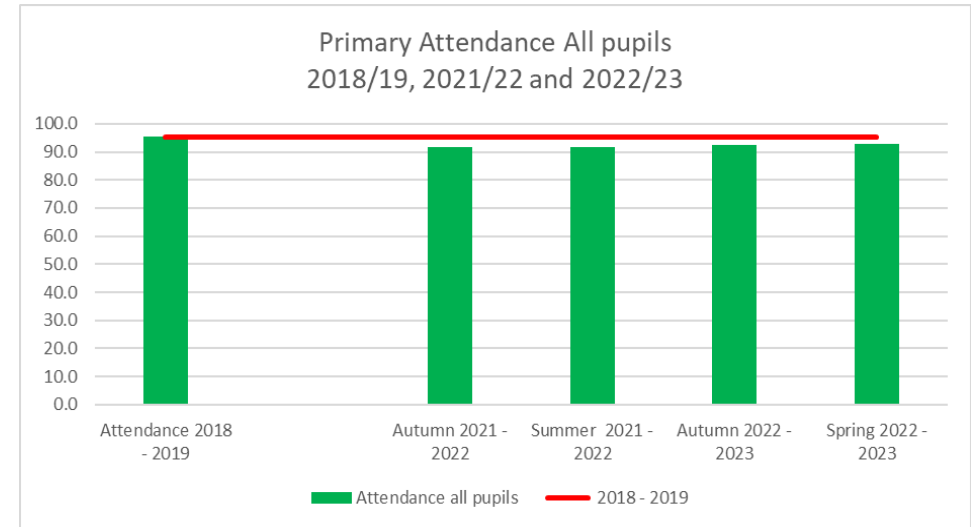


Attendance

Historically, the level of attendance in Monmouthshire schools is good and amongst the highest in Wales. Attendance in primary schools between 2013 and 2019 has been consistently over 95.4% compared to a Wales average of 94.6%, and over 94.4% in secondary schools compared to 94.4% across Wales. However, since the pandemic, levels of attendance have fallen in our schools and across Wales.

Attendance in Primary Schools

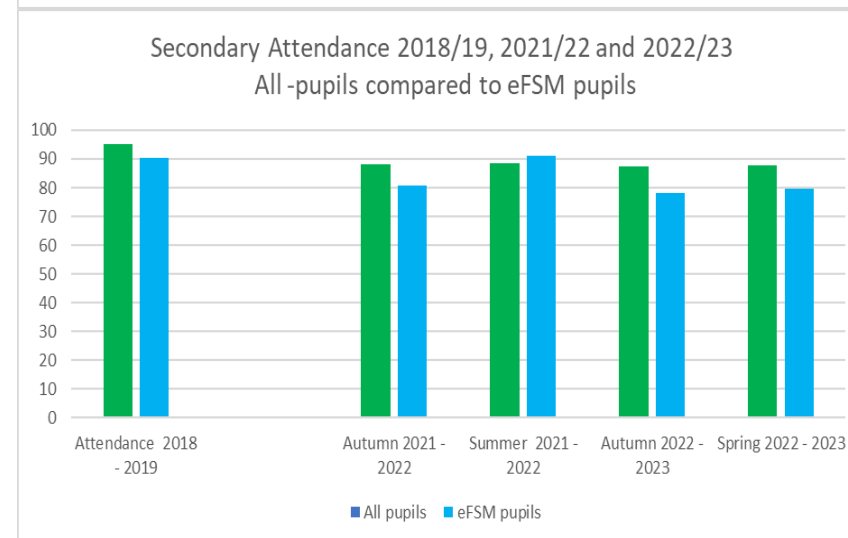
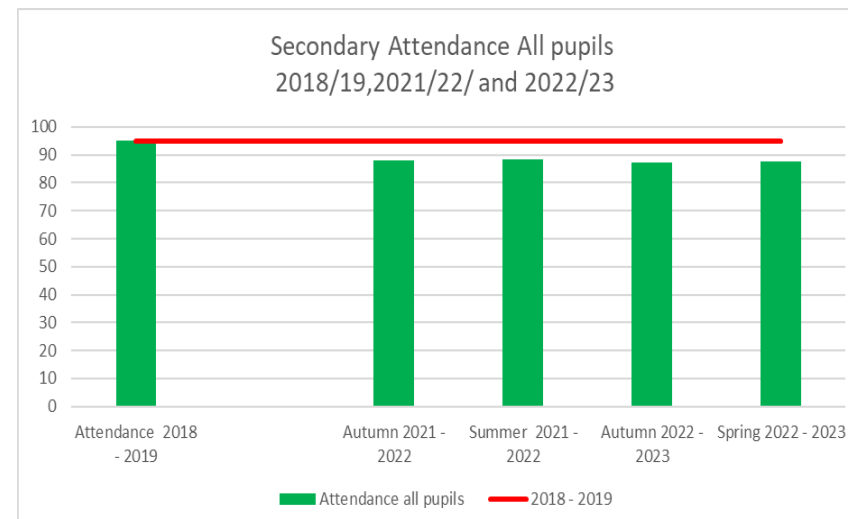
- At the end of the academic year 2018/19, attendance across Monmouthshire primary schools was 95.4%. This was the last full year for attendance figures until 2021/22 when pupils returned to schools in September 2021 following extended periods of school closure during the pandemic.
- The pandemic had a significant impact on attendance in all our schools and at the start of 2021/22, attendance in primary schools showed a decline of 3.6pp overall and this continued throughout the academic year. However, attendance of eFSM pupils fell by 4.5pp during the same period.
- Currently we are beginning to see an increase in attendance levels in primary schools and returning towards pre-pandemic levels for all pupils. Whilst this is also true for eFSM pupils, the rate of recovery is slower.
- There is a wide range of reasons for non-attendance which has increased because of the pandemic. The EWS team provide support and advice for schools on a range of educational strategies that can contribute to improving attendance.
- Welsh Ministers are currently consulting on a new attendance framework and the EWS will be supporting schools to develop their approach to securing good attendance in the light of changes.
- Estyn reports that attendance strategies are effective in all seven primary schools inspected since the summer term 2022.



Attendance

Attendance in Secondary Schools

- At the end of the academic year 2018/19, attendance across Monmouthshire secondary schools was 95.0%. This was the last full year for attendance figures until 2021/22 when pupils returned to schools in September 2021 following extended periods of school closure during the pandemic.
- The pandemic had a significant impact on attendance in all our schools and at the start of 2021/22, attendance in secondary schools showed a decline of 6.9 pp and whilst there was a small improvement to 6.6pp by the end of the year, the overall decline was significant. Unlike the primary sector, secondary school data is showing that an improvement in attendance is much slower and consequently it will take much longer to return to pre-pandemic levels of attendance.
- Anxiety is a main factor for non-attendance in secondary schools which is exacerbated by long waiting lists for assessments and interventions from supportive services. However, there are a range of reasons for non-attendance in secondary schools and not all related to the impact of the pandemic such as EOTAS provision and the complexity of cases is far greater than in primary schools.
- EWS provides on-going advice and guidance on implementing early intervention, developing an attendance strategy plan and being pro-active in their approach to support.
- Whilst the decline in attendance overall is significant; the 9.8pp decline in eFSM attendance is even more substantial. Data is showing that it is much slower to recover, showing an improvement of just 0.8pp over the last two years. The reasons for eFSM non-attendance are broadly the same as those for all pupils but this group is more likely to be impacted by additional factors such as ALN or being a young carer.
- Estyn identified short-comings in attendance in both secondary schools inspected during the year. EWS are supporting both to develop strategies to address these areas.
- EWS will be supporting schools to develop their approach to securing good attendance in the light of changes in the new attendance framework.



Supporting Disadvantaged Learners

This has been a key focus for our schools, the Directorate and our partners. The next section provides greater detail regarding our efforts in this area.



Supporting Disadvantaged learners

The Why:

Monmouthshire is often perceived as an affluent county and in many regards, it is however there are currently 27% of children living in poverty (Wales 34%). Our schools have seen a consistent increase in the number of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM). Our average eFSM is 18% but the range is from 5% to 48%.

The drive to mitigate the impact of poverty on education is clear in our national, regional and local policy drivers: the National Mission and its key theme around 'Breaking down barriers'; the EAS's business plan cites the support for vulnerable learners and the Community and Corporate Plan in Monmouthshire seeks to create 'A learning Place' where there is '*A truly inclusive educational system that recognises learners' starting points, strengths and educational needs*'.

There has also been recent research that identifies that not only are over 25% of our students impacted by poverty but also that Monmouthshire has some more unique characteristics regarding inequality in small, localised communities. An analysis of the difference between the highest and lowest levels of income in Monmouthshire's Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) shows that Monmouthshire has amongst the most extreme ranges in Wales.

The What:

We are seeking to create:

'A bespoke localised approach to promoting equity and achievement for all'

We believe that this localised and contextual approach is the most appropriate means of closing the achievement gap. Local schools, their leaders and their staff are best placed to understand their communities and deliver approaches and interventions to support their learners.



Disadvantaged learners

The How:

Every Monmouthshire School will:

- Identify a senior leader responsible for tackling poverty and raising the achievement of vulnerable learners
- Identify a Governor responsible for tackling poverty and raising the achievement of vulnerable learners
- Tackling Poverty will be in every school's School development Plan
- Every School will develop a strategy / plan
- Cluster working to enhance and equalise learner's experiences at transition will be a key component

We will ensure that there is a process for continual improvement and awareness raising by building on the Tackling Aspects of Poverty Programme provided by the Education Achievement Service (this was directed by the LA and over 80% of schools have engaged). This structured reflective practice and information sharing approach will allow all settings to learn from each other and become more sophisticated in their approaches.

We will also advocate that all schools engage in the *Tackling the Impact of Poverty on Education* Programme to provide a further baseline of understanding.



Disadvantaged learners

The Home to School Continuum

All leaders recognise that schools have a key role to play in tackling poverty but that this is a wider consideration across all of the services that the Authority offers. For our schools we want them to understand the impacts of poverty and the differential lived experiences of their learners. Our professional learning offer, facilitated by the EAS and colleagues in Monmouthshire has four different tiers:

The Community – Community Focused Schools / Family and Community Engagement

The Learner's Experiences – Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences and developing our Trauma Informed Practice

School Wide Activity – Thinking Differently (the RADY Toolkit), Sutton Trust Toolkit

Classroom Practice – 'Supporting vulnerable learners through effective teaching and learning' and a wide range of bespoke teaching and learning support commissioned through the EAS.

We want our learners to be 'As ready to learn as they can be', we know that teachers and school support staff go beyond to support learners, we want to make sure that all our learners have the best possible chance to succeed.



Community Focused Schools

Children and young people learn more effectively when they are happy, healthy and safe. Schools across Monmouthshire do an incredible job in supporting learners to be their best. However, schools cannot work alone in helping children and young people reach their full potential, as educational outcomes do not depend only on schools.

Outcomes are also influenced by factors including poverty, family circumstances, housing and health. Research shows that this range of factors can negatively affect children and young people's wellbeing and their ability to learn and achieve in school. The WLGA and WG 'Narrowing the Gap' project showed that schools that are at the heart of the local community have improved outcomes for all their children; as well as enhanced wellbeing for their local community – supporting communities in becoming more resilient.

The role of Community Focused Schools (CFS) Lead is crucial in working with schools and all our partners to develop these activities and relationships for the benefit of the whole school community. The CFS role is very different to that of Family Liaison Officer, who also plays a vital role, but tends to work with individual families on issues like attendance.



Community Focused Schools

The underlying philosophy is in capturing the wonderful social capital that exists within the wider Monmouthshire community and harnessing it for the benefit of the whole school.

For example:

- Building relationships with children, families, carers and the local community like churches, local businesses, third sector groups and care homes
- Supporting schools by signposting families to local community support – and in accessing support they're entitled to such as benefits
- Working with Future First in order to develop alumni networks in our schools, who can then share their journeys to a career and inspire younger pupils from similar backgrounds/areas/experiences
- Securing grants to support experiences – such as purchasing cooking equipment to facilitate skill learning experiences for families to help with the cost of living crisis and uniform swaps (linked to helping the environment, not specifically to help the 'poor' – this helps to overcome stigma and shame of receiving help)



Community Focused Schools and disadvantaged learners

We are working alongside the Education Achievement Service (EAS) on Tackling All Aspects of Poverty (TAP) and developing a whole authority strategy on supporting disadvantaged learners, including:

- Poverty Proofing our schools with a focus on reducing the cost of the school day, recognising that every penny and pound matter to many families
- Cost of living crisis support sessions around the county at accessible venues and pop-up events in schools
- Breakfast club funding made available for secondary schools to support pupils in starting the day off positively – helps with checking-in too with vulnerable young people to see how they're doing
- Providing a hardship fund to offer relief for families suffering from lack of resources like food, clothing or other essential material goods
- Addressing the learning gap that sometimes grows over the summer – signposting to holiday hunger schemes such as MonLife's Food and Fun Clubs



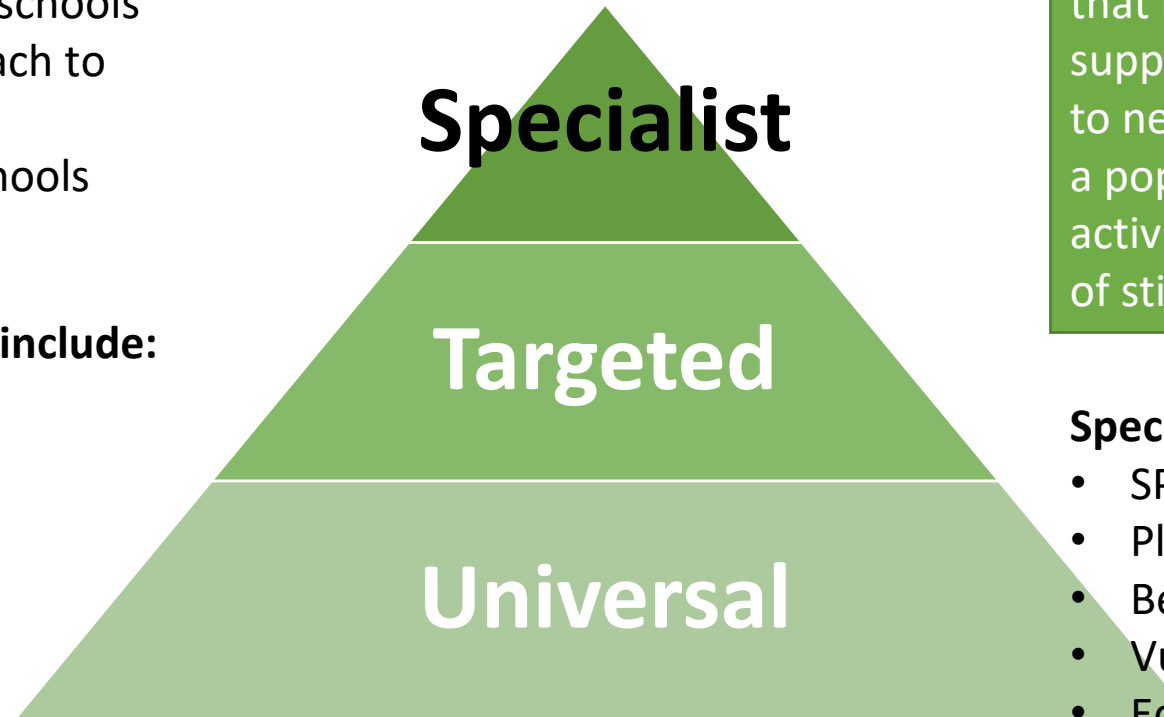
Community Focused Schools and disadvantaged learners

Universal provision can include:

- Cost of the school day support
- Community focused schools
- Whole school approach to wellbeing
- Trauma informed schools
- Love

Targeted approach can include:

- ELSA
- Roots of empathy
- Circle of security
- Nurture provision
- Breakfast clubs
- Family learning
- Incredible Years
- MIND Monmouthshire's Active Monitoring for Young People



Marmot talks about proportionate universalism, which is an approach that balances targeted and universal support through action proportionate to needs and levels of disadvantage in a population. Through more universal activities, we can also overcome issues of stigma and shame in seeking help.

Specialist approaches can include:

- SPACE referrals
- Play therapy
- Bespoke Maths and English sessions
- Vulnerable learner leads
- Education Support Team
- School farm



Disadvantaged learners – *EAS focused supported self-evaluation*

Countywide strengths in supporting disadvantaged learners

Many school leaders share a clear strategic vision for improving teaching and learning for all learners throughout the school, including vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

In many schools, leaders know their pupils well and ensure that they are well supported to meet their individual needs. For example, at Undy Primary School, weekly learner reviews provide opportunities for learners to discuss their learning and progress with their teachers, this is helpful in identifying areas of difficulty or concerns moving forward.

In a minority of schools, leaders have identified that following the pandemic, eFSM pupils are demonstrating greater resilience than their non-FSM counterparts.

PDG/EYPDG and LA PDG grant funding is appropriately allocated and supports pupils' progress and wellbeing. In many schools, funding is used for staff training on intervention, support and well-being programmes, additional staff to support the delivery of these programmes, and an investment in resources

In most schools, disadvantaged learners demonstrate good progress from their starting points. With appropriate support and/or tailored provision, the standards achieved by disadvantaged learners are in line with those who are not disadvantaged.

In Llandogo Primary School, strong progress has been reported in relation to attitudes to learning and behaviour, particularly for vulnerable pupils, who are better able to self-regulate.

Many schools a range of additional support for disadvantaged learners, where appropriate. This support is tailored to meet the needs of pupils and is either individual or small group depending on the extent of need. Where this is most effective, leaders use a range of data to inform provision for disadvantaged learners, for example PASS survey, literacy and numeracy assessments.

Effective provision is impacting positively on the wellbeing of disadvantaged learners in many schools for example, a play therapist and wellbeing dog are employed to meet the needs of pupils who identify with wellbeing concerns on a diagnostic assessment in Goytre Primary School.

Disadvantaged learners - *EAS focused supported self-evaluation*

Pupil progress is monitored half-termly through regular pupil progress reviews in many schools. The impact of these professional discussions has been to improve the accuracy of the monitoring of pupil progress. Learners who are not making expected progress are allocated to catch up programmes or to additional support, where appropriate. These programmes include support for literacy, numeracy and wellbeing and have clear entry and exit points. Effective tracking systems monitor individual pupil progress over a specified time-period.

Most schools are developing their curriculum with the needs of disadvantaged learners in mind. As a result, there are many activities designed to raise the aspirations of learners for example, at Osbaston Primary Schools, a Careers Week, featured visits to school from members of the local community, representing a wide range of careers providing rich authentic learning opportunities such as, a veterinary surgeon, motoring journalist and paramedic.

Castle Park Primary and Kymin View Primary schools have engaged fully with the Raising the Achievement of Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY) programme. Kymin View (now in year 2 of RADY) have completed Recorded RADY and are undertaking bespoke support to begin the process of embedding RADY principles and strategies across their curriculum, planning and policies.

Castle Park Primary (now in year 3 of RADY) have embedded the RADY approach as a golden thread across all aspects of school development and have undertaken bespoke support to sustain their embedded practise. Castle Park offers support to other RADY schools and shares their good practice through RADY regional network meetings.

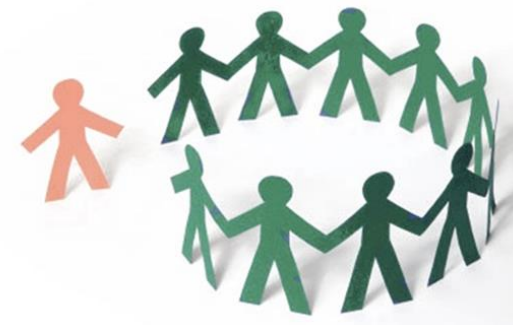
The largest amount of grant expenditure across the LA (76%), in both primary and secondary schools, is used to aligned fund additional staffing posts to support disadvantaged and vulnerable learners. Some of those named posts include:

- Family Liaison Officers
- Learning coaches/mentors
- Attendance Officers
- Intervention programmes delivered by support staff



Developing an Inclusive Educational Service





Inclusion

The creation of the new Head of Service for Inclusion role has afforded the opportunity to pull together a new CYP 'Inclusion Team' made up of the key professionals supporting our most vulnerable children/young people. The Inclusion Team consists of:

- Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
- Educational Psychology Service (EPS)
- Pupil Referral Service (PRS)
- the newly appointed Vulnerable Learners Lead, and
- The Healthy Settings Service

The Head of Service: Inclusion role has given a clear focus to the notion of MCC as an inclusive authority, with the aspiration that all CYP have the opportunity to remain in their local communities and schools.

We are working across the team to increase the capacity of our schools/ settings to meet the varied and often intertwined complex needs of CYP.

We are keen to develop greater understanding of our expectations around certain elements of inclusive practice e.g. enhancing the understanding of, and provision required to meet the needs of vulnerable CYP such as those with autism, or emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), or children looked after/ care experienced pupils who have experienced developmental/ relational trauma.

The Inclusion Team is collaborating to develop/ improve existing systems, identify gaps and overlaps to ensure that we are consistent, coherent and effective in meeting the needs of our most vulnerable CYP. The Inclusion team is committed to the following principles.

- Early identification, intervention and prevention where needs are identified and provision put in place at the earliest opportunity and where possible interventions are put in place to prevent the development or escalation of ALN.
- Collaboration and integration where services work together to ensure ALN are identified early and appropriate co-ordinated support is put in place to enable children and young people to achieve positive expectations, experiences and outcomes.
- Inclusive education where the majority of children and young people with ALN are supported to participate fully in mainstream education and a whole setting approach is taken to meeting the needs of learners with ALN. (Chapter 3 ALN Code).



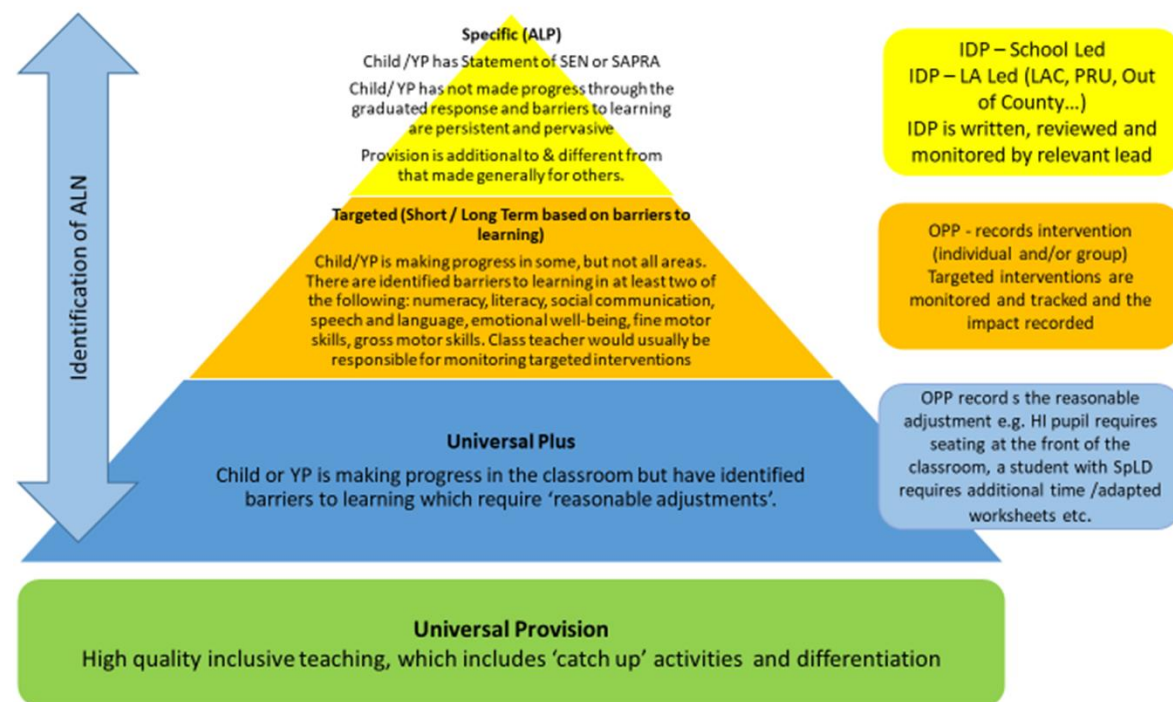
Inclusion: ALN Implementation



- The ALN Service has worked collaboratively with regional partners, schools, settings and families to effectively implement the new procedures identified in the ALNET Act.
- To support school's ability to effectively manage their responsibilities under the ALN Act, ALN funding was delegated to schools under an agreed funding formula from April 2022.
- A Contingency Panel has been established to support schools with unexpected ALN pressures. A review of the funding formula is currently underway.
- An MCC 'Provision Pyramid' was developed to support schools plan a graduated response to their responsibilities under the ALN Act. The Provision Pyramid has been used extensively in training with schools / ALNCOs & has been adopted by schools to demonstrate the continuum of provision as part of their ALN offer.
- A school Quality Assurance 'task and finish group' has been established and a QA process drafted.

Risks include:

- Possible increased challenge from schools in relation to their perceived ability to provide Additional Learning Provision (ALP) through the development of a school based Individual Development Plan (IDP). This could lead to more LA IDPs, there is currently no budget to fund provision identified in LA IDP.
- Post -16 provision – the demand for independent college placements and reduction in the grant from WG. To mitigate this we are working in collaboration with schools and other relevant partners to develop a coherent 14-19 strategy for ALN learners.



Inclusion – ALN Specialist Provision

Our model of specialist provision, places specialist resource bases (SRBs) at the heart of identified mainstream schools. This model;

- Ensures that children and young people remain close to their communities.
- Provides opportunities for integration and inclusion with mainstream peers in structured and unstructured times. Mainstream pupils have the opportunity to become mentors for learners in SRBs and develop a greater sense of tolerance, empathy and understanding.
- Supports the development of social relationships which can create long-lasting friendships that can give SRB pupils the skills to navigate social relationships later in life.
- Promotes an inclusive culture where the families of learners with ALN benefit by being integrated more easily into the broader school community. Having a SRB within a mainstream school can reduce stigma about ALN and positively contribute to a society that is more accepting of differences and people with disabilities.

The focus on inclusion is clear in the continued development of a closer network/ consistent model of specialist provision across the SRBs in MCC alongside the expectations of the ALN reforms.

The work in this area consists of continual workforce development (such as the Autism in Schools and Settings Project), improvements in SRB learning environments and an improved curriculum offer.

We continue to strengthen our outreach model to mainstream schools through the continued use of SRB staff and the new Education Support Team.

A Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) approach is being developed in collaboration with Health. This will be used initially to support pupils in SRB settings but will be rolled out to mainstream schools.

- In 2020-21, all SRB settings benefited from significant investment in their infrastructure and resources.
- In 2021-22 further grant funding was allocated to support the development of outdoor equipment, sensory rooms, IT and resources.
- In response to increased demand for primary SRB places in September 2021, an SRB class was opened in Deri View.
- In the summer term 2022 agreement was reached to expand provision in Pembroke SRB by 4 places
- We are prioritising the development of a framework for the management of LA SRB provisions, which ensures a consistent, equitable approach across all settings in terms of the learning environment, staffing structure, curriculum offer, Inclusion opportunities and funding formula.

Risks include:

- The increased demand for specialist provision places. Robust data analysis (particularly around Early Years pupils) is being developed to support the forecasting of complex ALN needs to help inform provision required to meet need.
- High costs associated with ALN transport particularly to out of county provisions
- Ensuring the quality of ALN provision in SRBs that is consistent across the LA. Failure to ensure that specialist provision is of high quality and that the offer is equitable across all SRBs, could lead to a high level of challenge from parent and potentially lead to children being transported to settings outside their community.



Inclusion – Educational Psychology (EP) Service

The ongoing close collaboration between the EPS and ALN, has allowed the EPS to work preventatively and creatively, and as such MCC has lower statutory work demands.

The EPS provide a good level of direct support to our schools, with all schools having a named School Link EP.

Additional capacity is provided into our larger secondary schools or schools in need of additional support, to allow for a greater focus on systemic work.

The EPS continues to develop skills and tools with regards to complex case work, which is an increasing area of our work – examples of innovative practice in this area would include the use of Therapeutic Assessment, Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) and Positive Behaviour Support (PBS).

The EPS has developed a more flexible and responsive model of service delivery, to complement and be responsive to changes in ALN reform and subsequent role of EP in Wales.

The reputation of the MCC EPS has allowed it to maintain staffing levels in spite of the national shortage of EPs.

Early Years EP Support

An embedded Early Years ALN system provides a more consistent multi-agency approach for preschool children with ALN, focusing on good transitions through the School Entry Planning process to enable children to have the best start on entering full time school.

Feedback from parents and professionals about consultations and the School Entry Planning process is very positive. For example;

- from a member of staff : “very helpful indeed, exactly what I was looking for”.
- from parents : “I felt like my thoughts and ideas on how to help my child in school were taken on board”/”extremely helpful”/”extremely reassuring”.
- From ALNCOs: “Great transition into Reception”/ “All steps were achievable and appropriate”.

Almost all of the children involved with the EY EP/ ALN service have significant and complex needs. Between 2020 and 2022:

- 68 have successfully entered mainstream Reception with support
- 17 have begun attending SRBs
- 3 children have been provided with a school place outside of Monmouthshire



Inclusion – Pupil Referral Service (PRS)

The Pupil Referral Service:

- teaches MCC pupils who have been permanently excluded,
- provides intervention support for pupils at risk of exclusion within their own school (Dalen Newydd/ In-Reach), and
- teaches pupils at home if they are too ill to attend school Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

Three times more pupils require PRS support in 2022-23 (c. 150) than in 2020-21 (c. 50).

Pupils experiencing poor emotional and mental health/ anxiety are the group growing fastest.

Almost all pupils supported by the PRS receive interventions from more than one Early Help agency.

Around half of the pupils have been or are placed on the Child Protection Register.

Around half of the pupils have identified ALN and many have autism.

	2020-21	2021-22
Pupils who returned to School having completed interventions with PRS	11	10
EOTAS Medical pupils returned to their own schools	3	3
EOTAS Medical pupils returned to schools in other LAs	4	2
Pupils moved from PRS to suitable Specialist Provision	2	
Pupils completed in-reach interventions & returned to mainstream fulltime	2	5
Y11 leavers gained 5 recognised qualifications at level 1 and 2	Most	Most
Y11 leavers secured transition to education, employment or training	All but 1	All but 3



Inclusion – EOTAS

The PRS has been supported to expand provision and is currently preparing to move into two new, high-quality learning places that match the changing demands of Curriculum for Wales and provide more capacity.

Innovation that arose during the pandemic has made a lasting improvement to our teaching across the service.

EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) Medical pupils for example:

- Access teaching in small groups experienced subject specialists through live digital lessons. Most return to making progress in the literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Outcomes continue to improve each year.
- Person centred practice (PCP) is enhanced by the Health and Wellbeing work carried out by Pupil Engagement Officers, that safeguards and leads to the return to school or successful transition to Post-16.
- To combat social exclusion/isolation the small group Health and Wellbeing pilot 2022-23 was developed to encourage social successes with peers in a safe and supported/ supportive environment.

The EOTAS Bespoke pilot developed from improved collaboration between the PRS and ALN to meet the need of those with the most complex needs. These CYP typically have ALN, have been unsuccessful in specialist provisions, have experienced the multiple ACEs (i.e. significant issues around attendance, engagement, exclusions, behaviours of concern/ challenge) and are often also Children Looked After (CLA).

- The pupils require sensitive and person-centred packages of educational opportunities that are tailored and responsive to their individual needs. We will be looking closely at the impact and outcomes of this work towards the end of this academic year.

RISKS

- A growth in pupils referred to PRS is costly and will require a funding model to meet the needs in terms of increased staffing/budget for PRS.
- The current learning environments of the two PRUs are not conducive to the new Curriculum for Wales and do not allow for continued growth.
- Attendance in line with PRUs.
- The overuse of reduced timetable policy by Schools for the Dalen Newydd cohort.



Inclusion- Support

MoSTS (Monmouthshire Specialist Teaching Service) aims to improve outcomes for children and young people with literacy difficulties.

Leadership for this team was moved to the EPS in Autumn 2021 and subsequently an equitable model for MoSTS delivery to schools was developed and implemented, which complements the changes within the ALN reform.

Literacy Practice Guidance for Schools and online Q&A/Consultation sessions formed a key part of the offer to all schools.

Literacy Junction is a targeted literacy intervention, trialled by primary settings across the region. In March 2022, funding was made available to roll out Literacy Junction across MCC.

The MoSTS Team deliver Literacy Junction Intervention to pupils and are beginning to roll out the Literacy Junction Training and support to all primary schools.

The MoSTS is having a positive impact working with schools and in particular in building the skills of TAs to meet the needs of CYP with literacy difficulties, as well as ensuring strong universal provision.

Direct Intervention from MoSTS tutors is well received and felt by school staff to be having a positive impact.

The Education Support Team (EST) is a newly created team, who work in partnership with schools and colleagues to enhance and promote the inclusion of children and young people in Monmouthshire schools.

The focus is to support schools to meet the needs of primary aged children presenting with behaviours that challenge, including those with ALN, neurodevelopmental conditions, and those at risk of exclusion, and to support schools to meet the needs of CLA.

Early feedback from schools has been positive.

Since the new Vulnerable Learner Lead and the EST have been in place, more responsive, clear and detailed advice is available to schools on a range of issues including:

- Managing and reducing exclusions
- Risk assessments
- Pastoral Support Plans (PSPs)
- Use of reduced timetables and restrictive practices
- Supporting Children Looked After (CLA) and being 'CLA Friendly and CLA Ready'

Risks include:

- The increase in exclusions including those of young children.
- Costs associated with the number of learners with complex and intertwined needs, who require a high level of support or 'bespoke' packages due to either exclusion from specialist provision or presentation that prevents them from accessing mainstream provision.



Inclusion – Healthy Schools Service

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

RSE is statutory requirement and a cross cutting theme in the Curriculum for Wales. From September 2022 it is mandatory for all learners from ages 3 to 16. All schools are offered support as they develop their RSE curriculum.

All secondary schools have engaged in sharing networks and accessed bespoke professional learning identified through listening to the CPD needs of teachers.

All primary schools have been offered bespoke training for school staff, governors and support with family information workshops. To date 20 schools have accessed some level of support from the team and a further 6 have booked professional learning / workshops to take place. To date 135 school-based colleagues have provided feedback on the training. All responses are positive.

This work also links with the period dignity agenda as part of curriculum development and availability of sanitary products. All secondary schools have accessed professional learning and workshops for young people are taking place during the summer term.

In conjunction with supporting schools to develop their RSE curriculum, schools have been offered professional learning on Managing Sexual Behaviours. 28 schools accessed this training and feedback was positive and as a result further training will be made available this year.

Implementation of the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

Our MCC Healthy Settings Lead is also the regional WSA Implementation Lead, a post which is grant funded. This has developed capacity locally to support schools with the implementation.

We currently have 15 schools (11 primary, 3 secondary & PRS) working with the team on the WSA to EMWB self - evaluation tool. This equates to 43% of schools in MCC.

Levels of engagement varies but is generally good. Those schools that are more engaged and are working closely with the team; complete the self-evaluation tool quicker and identify their areas of development to inform SDP.

Activity from September 2023:

Sharing Sessions: have included: staff wellbeing, listening to learners and using your SHRN data.

Briefing sessions for new schools interested in using the self-evaluation tool. These focus on the sharing and learning from other schools in MCC.

Network meetings: to share progress, good practice and problem solving.

Further develop partnership working with the EAS, Cynefin and Mental Health In-Reach to Schools

Risks include:

- Healthy Settings team is 100% grant funded. This is year on year funding.
- The self-evaluation tool is a non-statutory document to support the implementation of the statutory framework as a result it may be difficult to engage all schools in this work programme by March 2025.



Developing our School Estate and planning for the future

Developing our Sustainable Communities for Learning



Development of our schools

There is a significant amount of work underway at the moment developing our education estate. This faces significant challenges in the escalating costs due to inflationary pressures.

King Henry VIII School – Sustainable Communities for Learning

- Replacement of King Henry VIII and Deri View Schools with a through school

Ysgol Y Fenni

- Repurpose Deri View Primary School for Ysgol Y Fenni to enhance and increase Welsh medium education in the Abergavenny area

Monmouth WM seedling school

- Create a seedling school within Overmonnow Primary School in September 2024 (subject to Statutory Consultation) and provide Welsh medium education within the Monmouth area.

Nurseries

- Establishment of two additional non-maintained nurseries at Trellech Primary School and Archbishop Rowan Williams Primary School

Castle Park

- Refurbish and remodel existing accommodation and install two lifts ensuring the school is completely DDA compliant.

Chepstow

- Cluster review underway to establish the most appropriate way to develop education in the Chepstow area. The review will look at all education aspects as well as the education estate in the area.

Capital Maintenance

- Work is underway to redevelop and relocate the PRS in both the north and south of the County.
- Replace toilets at Shirenewton Primary School
- Replace floors in demountable classrooms at The Dell Primary School

Collation of school condition surveys

- Condition Surveys were undertaken of the School estate in 2019. The Council primary stock comprises of 19 Schools in category C, 7 in category B and 4 Category A. The secondary stock is 1 in category D, 1 in category C and 2 in category A.



School Places and Planning for the future – The Challenge

Since 2017, we have had a focus on the way in which pupils in Monmouthshire transition from primary to secondary school. We recognised a risk that more Monmouthshire pupils leave MCC schools at the end of KS2 than any other authority in Wales. In part this is due to two towns having neighbouring schools which have been popular in the past.

In the last transition period:

- 19.75% (178 pupils) move to an out of county school.
- 11.3% (92 pupils) come from an out of county school.

Addressing this is important for the Authority as we want to secure effective curriculum transition for our learners, and we want to ensure that our communities value and choose our schools. The developments in practice and the quality of the asset base will help promote this.

Surplus Places are another key consideration for the school planning team. We work closely with colleagues in the planning team to ensure that we are prepared for the potential changes associated with any new Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) and these are reflected in our planning.

- Abergavenny 12.77% (3 over 15%)
- Chepstow 26.7% (1 over 15% and 2 over 25%)
- Caldicot 11.45% (2 over 25%)
- Monmouth 9.2% (3 over 15% and 2 over 25%)

It is important that we recognise that these levels of surplus places require further consideration and potentially action. The School Organisation Code says:

Where there are more than 10% surplus places in an area overall, local authorities should review their provision and should consider whether to make proposals for their removal if this will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of provision. A significant level of surplus provision is defined as 25% or more of a school's capacity (as defined in Circular 21/2011) and at least 30 unfilled places



School Places and Planning for the future – What are we doing?

The Authority undertook a large-scale secondary catchment review in 2021 which introduced Monmouthshire feeder schools. A full Primary Catchment review will be undertaken in autumn term 2023.

Whilst there is no Welsh Medium secondary education in Monmouthshire this can inhibit parents' choices for taking Welsh medium education at primary phase. We are working with our neighbouring authorities to develop plans for another Welsh Medium Secondary school in the area to compliment Gwent Is Coed and Ysgol Gwynllyw.

It is anticipated that the development of the new King Henry VIII All Age School in Abergavenny will reduce the number of pupils attending an out of county secondary school.

All secondary schools have strong transition plans for primary pupils and are working collectively to embed cluster curriculum plans.

94.7% primary / 95.8% secondary admissions get 1st choice places.

There remains pressure in Caldicot town for school places and we are using appropriate s106 funding to increase capacity. It should be noted that the consultation that was taken forward for Caldicot in 2020 was set aside to test alternative proposals. Since that decision the expected growth in pupil numbers has not materialised to the expected extent and the current considerations are using this more accurate data.

We are currently moving to the second stage of consulting on establishing a new seedling Welsh Medium primary school in Monmouth (the publication of statutory notices). This will further increase surplus places in Monmouth.

Ysgol Y Fenni move to Deri View Site will increase capacity by 90 places. This is beyond their existing surplus places of 63.

We are currently reviewing Chepstow and its environs, our smallest cluster, to reduce surplus places, proposals will be shared and discussed with members in the Autumn term.



Finances and sustainability – The Challenge

At the end of the financial year 2021-22 Monmouthshire's schools had a collective surplus balance of £6.9m, there was one school in a deficit. At the end of 2022-23 the surplus balance had reduced to £4.2m with five schools in deficit. Of these five, schools four have relatively small deficits and one has a large deficit. The balances at the end of the last year are higher than expected but balances are reducing.

It is important that we recognise that there are pressures on schools and the corporate settlement is putting pressure on school balances. For the current financial year, the Individual School Budget reduced by 2.8% (£1,450k) to help balance the broader budget.

Teacher's pay award is adding to school budget pressures. In 2022/23 we met the cost of 3% of the 5% original teachers' pay award (for the period September 2022 to March 2023). We do not know the teachers' pay award when we set our budget in March (the award was agreed eight months later in November 2022) instead we model and expected pay award and the 3% was the predicted level.

Given the hugely challenging financial year that has just passed there was not the headroom corporately to meet the additional 2% (7/12), so schools met this from their reserve position.

In the negotiations associated with the NEU and NAHT's pay claims and industrial action the Welsh Government agreed to fund a further 3% for the last financial year (1.5% was to be consolidated and 1.5% unconsolidated). The full grant from WG to afford the extra 3% teachers received was passed on in full.

This year's budget includes the 5/12 of 5% pay award (fully funded).

Beyond the pay awards there are further pressures in the system. Pupils being identified with ALN at an earlier age can add pressure to school budgets. The authority delegates all of its additional funding for ALN directly to schools. We believe that they have the expertise to best utilise this resource close to the needs of learners. Where schools identify needs in excess of the allocated sums this can bring pressure to budgets.

With a further challenging settlement expected in the coming year there is the recurrent risk that the ISB will need to reduce further.

The other significant cost driver for CYP at the moment is related to transport costs associated with those children with additional learning needs. These costs have escalated significantly, driven by increased fuel costs and more specialised staff and escorts being required.

We are working closely with colleagues in the Passenger Transport Unit to manage a re-tendering exercise carefully and sympathetically for this population recognising that we need to reduce cost as far as we possibly can but balance the need for some of our learners to have consistency and reliability in their daily routines.



Finances and sustainability – What are we doing?

In order to manage the financial situation, we provide support and challenge to schools through our budget monitoring process. Insofar as we are able, we provide schools with a 3-year budget projection to allow them to plan into the medium term. ALN funding was delegated in April 2022 allowing schools to plan spend over a longer period of time.

Where schools do fall into a deficit there are recovery plans and these are agreed by the Cabinet Members for education and resources. In some circumstances schools are able to apply for a Local Authority loan to help manage the deficit in a longer term framework. This removes the pressure of radical and short term cost reduction, these are often associated with staffing reductions.

We are currently working with school leaders to review the ALN formula to identify any potential issues. The emergent findings suggest that we should adjust the treatment of managing the funds that we receive from other local authorities, often known as recoupment.

During the pandemic schools received significant grant funding from Welsh Government. This has supported learners in the aftermath of changed learning but we need to recognise that it will not be there into the future and schools should not plan for its continuation.

We have developed a comprehensive five-year ALN forecasting model to identify pressures for future placements and this allows us to predict future costs and budget pressures more effectively.

Alongside our work to support revenue funding in school we have also used available capital grants to enhance and develop facilities. We have supported schools across the county to prepare for the roll out of the Universal free School meal offer. We have also invested in schools where there were specific needs. Our most significant investment has been in Chepstow School where we have invested in excess of £1m to improve the building and the learning environments. Staff and pupils have valued this investment.

We have also been able to use the Community Focused Schools grant to improve community access to schools across the county and to promote initiatives such as community fridges and uniform swap shops.

The finance team work closely with schools and colleagues in the EAS to advise schools on grant expenditure and management.



Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

We are coming to the end of the first year of our ten- year WESP. During the last year we submitted a five-year plan to Welsh Ministers outlining our detailed targets for the year. Despite the short timescale, progress has been made in many areas. However, progress in other areas is limited and in a few, work is to commence later in the year.



Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

Key achievements:

Outcome 1: More nursery children/three-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh

- The WEF Promotion Working Group is established. The group has convened to promote the benefits of a bilingual education to support the admission process for the two existing Welsh medium schools and applications to the seedling school in September 2024..
- New materials have been developed to promote the benefits of a bilingual education and promote Welsh language groups and classes and opportunities for a career in Welsh-medium childcare. The MCC website has been up-dated to include videos that promote WM education, all existing promotional material has been updated and the group are working on creating new.

Outcome 2: More reception class children/five-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh

- The refurbishment of Ysgol Gymraeg Y Ffin to increase the capacity of the school to 210 places from Reception to year 6 is complete.
- We secured additional WG funding for three years to continue the Immersion class in Y Ffin and extend this provision in other areas of the county.

Outcome 3: More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another; and Outcome 4 More learners' study for assessed qualifications in Welsh (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh

- Initial contact has been made with the e-sgol platform following the role out of the platform by Welsh Government across Wales. Schools are including the benefits of being bilingual within their career's curriculum and pathways publications
- Preliminary discussions have taken place with MCC Early Years and Finance Managers on Welsh Government funded qualification routes within the Child Care Sector. Both aspects form part of the MCC Post 16 Review to be formally launched with all stakeholders in March.

Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

Outcome 5: More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in school

- The Outcome 5 group has convened and work on mapping current provision will be underway before the end of the academic year.
- School-based activities focusing on the use of Welsh in a range of contexts are being shared on social media platforms.

Outcome 6: An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) in accordance with the duties imposed by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018

- ALN documentation for use in schools and settings, including online information, is available in Welsh
- Translation services where parents or pupils request advice, support, or intervention through the medium of Welsh.
- Parents are informed of their right to access Welsh-medium childcare for the child with ALN.
- All ALN documentation for parents/carers, including online information, is available in Welsh.

Outcome 7: Increase the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh (as a subject) and teach through the medium of Welsh

- We continue to work alongside the EAS to encourage school-based and setting staff to engage training to develop Welsh language skills. This includes participation in Cwrs Sabothol which is having a positive impact on Welsh language skills in our English medium schools.
- The EAS continue to provide high quality training and support to many of our schools, as well as continuing to provide professional learning on the pedagogical and methodological approaches to teaching Welsh to support language acquisition and immersion techniques.
- The local authority has launched a staff survey to determine the Welsh language skills of the workforce and is in the process of analysing the information.



Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

Key priorities for next year

Outcome 1 More nursey children/three-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh

- Strengthen the work of the promotion group to support the opening of the new seedling school in Monmouth
- Begin work to open a fourth Cylch Meithrin in Chepstow and to support Cylch Meithrin Trefynwy is not planned to commence until September 2023/24.

Outcome 2 More reception class children/five-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh

- Open a seedling school and Cylch Meithrin in Monmouth town in September 2024
- Relocate Y Fenni to its new site in the autumn term 2024/25

Outcome 3 More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another and Outcome 4 More learners study for assessed qualifications in Welsh (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh

- Promotion group to support schools to promote the benefits of a bilingual education in future careers during the time when learners are making choices about options, A levels and further educations pathways.
- Strengthen links with partner local authorities provide secondary education through the medium of Welsh for Monmouthshire 11-19 learners.
- Begin work to establish baseline information to monitor linguistic progression and external examinations data for Monmouthshire pupils.

Outcome 5 More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in school

- Complete provision map for all partners supporting the development of opportunities for using the Welsh language.
- Agree an action plan and key targets for all partners to close any gaps that result from the mapping exercise.



Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

Key priorities for next year

Outcome 6 An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) in accordance with the duties imposed by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018

- Finalise transition arrangements between primary and secondary phases in other local authorities to ensure that Welsh-medium ALN provision is appropriately maintained for Welsh-medium learners.

Outcome 7 Increase the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh (as a subject) and teach through the medium of Welsh

- Analysis of data sources including staffing lists and pupil projections to understand the trends in demand for Welsh-medium teachers and project future needs as demand increases, particularly when our third Welsh-medium school opens in Monmouth.
- Develop opportunities through joint working between Initial Teacher Training and Education (ITET) providers, the regional consortia and other work-based learning providers to recruit suitably experienced and qualified staff.
- Work with key partners to develop the skills of our school workforce in line with the Welsh Language Competence Framework.
- Consider staff incentives to learn or improve Welsh language skills at all levels to improve the Welsh Language across the organisation.

Key Risks

- The funding to support the development of a seedling school in Overmonnow will not be received or reduced.
- Work to establish the seedling school and Cylch Meithrin in Monmouth is not completed in time to open fully from September 2024.
- There will not be enough qualified teachers and teaching assistants to staff the new school and the increased numbers in Y Fenni and Y Ffin.



Conclusions



Conclusions

When I started to draft this report, I envisaged a succinct report that highlighted the progress we have made in the last period, I am very conscious that whatever this report maybe it is not succinct!

However, as I discussed with my colleagues the opportunity to share their areas of responsibility and the breadth of their work with Council was too great to be missed. I would hasten to add, that the areas that are covered in the report represent a small element of the work that is undertaken by schools and the CYP Directorate.

I hope that the report provides members with an overview of the services provided, their aims and objectives. This will be significantly enhanced by the agreed objectives of the Community and Corporate Plan which will allow us to strengthen the 'golden thread'.

It is stated throughout the report that education in Monmouthshire is proceeding through a challenging period, and this is clearly having an impact on the services that we offer and the way in which our schools operate.

The Children and Young People's Directorate is a small team of only seventy-eight people (the biggest element of which are 23 members of staff in Flying Start which is a shared grant funded service). Inevitably this team's ability to support and provide professional challenge to the thirty-five schools and 25 non-maintained setting is a perpetual challenge, but this paper illustrates the breadth of services and the impact that this team has.

I have not been able to offer the same level of commentary (or assurance) as to the progress of our schools simply because our ability (and that of the EAS) to see first-hand evidence has been restricted by the pandemic and more recently by the action short of strike. This has meant that we have been reliant upon Estyn inspections to provide evidence of the standards in our schools. However, the feedback from the eleven inspections across Monmouthshire since their return in 2022 shows a developing picture of strengths in our provision.

In the extremely challenging environment that everyone is working in, our school leaders are faced with a range of challenges that are both different and intensified since the pandemic. We have sought to strengthen our team to provide support to our learners and our schools.

As we look back, I believe that we have made good progress against our ambitions of the last year. It is harder to form a view against our Estyn recommendations due to their areas of focus: progression of FSM learners and excellent standards requiring more extensive access to schools to understand and evidence their progress.

Some development courses refer to: Volatility; Uncertainty; Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA). This seems apt for the education system currently. The challenges of reforms, funding, staff turnover and increased expectations all contribute to this.



Conclusions

I should also set out the risks to our ability to deliver for the Council. These are apparent in a number of different areas, but I think they can be consolidated into four main areas.

Firstly, there is a risk that our schooling system struggles to adjust to the new patterns of need amongst our children and young people in the post pandemic period. The behaviour changes we have seen in schools, the changes in pupils' and staffs' expectations are all traced back to the pandemic. We have also seen an increase in levels of acute anxiety in our student population at all ages. If our children and young people do not feel able to attend school, we cannot provide the support and care that our schools and support services do with such compassion and expertise.

Secondly, the reform agenda is placing a significant burden on our schools. The rationale for change has been well made at a national level and, locally, the system, I believe, agrees with its direction, but the scale and the breadth of reform and change places a weight of expectation on a system coming to terms with a different (if not 'new') reality. Our ability to support schools with our partners is challenging. We are a small team and our capacity and that of our partners is stretched.

Thirdly, the current industrial action being undertaken by the NAHT presents a risk to our ability to deliver the aspirations of the Council. The union's action short of strike is designed to 'frustrate' the system. As a result, my ability to engage fully on a range of initiatives with my colleagues in the primary sector has been constrained since 1st February 2023.

Fourthly, and finally, I have to recognise the resource pressures that exist in the system. For some schools, their reserve positions look healthy and the year end 2023 was better than predicted. But there is perilously short coverage within this reserve position given the pressures in the system and I anticipate this being eroded significantly in the next year. We have also seen the impact of resource constraint on collaborative endeavours such as the EAS and Sencom, the regional sensory support service.

The resource pressure is not limited to financial resources, we are seeing staff leave their professions in patterns we have not seen previously. Be it Head Teachers choosing early retirement, teachers not moving through the profession as we may have expected or teaching support assistants seeking better paid employment in other settings such as retail.

The directorate, working with its partners, seeks to provide consistency and support for our schools. At times this may be challenging for both the central services and the schools. I do not underestimate the potential tension between the funder and the recipient, my need for assurance and schools' desire for space for creativity, or our advocacy for individual pupils and schools' need to support whole classes and cohorts. These are the natural strains that exist in a highly decentralised system.

However, we have seen in the past that Monmouthshire has been adept at responding to its challenges and I believe that we will do so again.

The changes that we have made to strengthen our services place us in a stronger position than we were previously, and we are able to provide broader and more informed support to our schools. As we move into the next academic year, I believe that with focused work, structured to achieve the aspirations of the Corporate & Community Plan, while maintaining our focus on the Estyn recommendations, will see us establish Monmouthshire as one of the foremost education systems in Wales.

This is the report of your Chief Officer, I have provided it to give you a sense of the service and system I work with and within. I hope that it gives you, as the elected members, an assurance that the system is working hard to support Monmouthshire's learners achieve their potential, and that we are committed to becoming the very best that we can be to support our children and young people.

