

Monmouthshire County Council

Children and Young People's Chief Officer's Report 2023/24

*Reflections on the year and the
challenges faced and
addressed*

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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 nor every aspect of and life in each of our schools and settings. Rather it seeks to provide the Chief Officer's perspective of the relevant strengths and areas for development in the system, the risks that the service faces and the opportunities that exist to improve.

This report begins with the context within which our pupils learn before considering the wider challenges that face the Welsh education system. There is a particular focus on the Middle Tier Review of school improvement services.

This year there is an extended section on the report focusing on the conclusion of the latest cycle of Estyn inspections. This considers the whole authority position, what we have learnt our schools' strengths are – and, of course, the areas that they need to develop.

Because of the changes regarding the publication of Key Stage 4 (the end of statutory education) outcomes there is a section of the report that focuses on this. If members wish to see more detail regarding the GCSE outcomes, I refer them to the paper considered by the Performance and Overview Select Committee in February of this year.

The timeframe for this report is 2023/24 however when there have been significant developments in the period between this report and the 31st March 2024, I have reflected these.

Introduction

As we have moved forward in 2023/24, I felt it was more appropriate to present our progress against the core elements of the Community and Corporate Plan that talk directly to the experiences of our children and young people. However, I also want to reflect some examples of the work of our teams across Monmouthshire, these are presented as case studies and are included in blue boxes within the document.

The last year has continued to present a range of challenges for the education system in Wales. There are challenges that all public services are experiencing; financial constraint, increased pressure in terms of both demand and complexity, and of course a set of societal changes that have emerged in the period post-pandemic. As I reflect on the language that were being used in 2021 such as the 'new normal' it strikes me that these were woefully mis-guided and '*normality*' in education remains an elusive commodity.

In the past year we saw a continuation of the industrial action undertaken by the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) which only concluded in December 2023. This action short of strike (ASOS) caused a period of instability and inertia in the primary schooling system. I entirely recognise Headteachers' concerns about school financing and the weight of the reform agenda however, it would be impossible to not recognise the impact on the Directorate and our ability to work closely with schools.

As ever I hold close the fact that every day over 11,000 children attend a Monmouthshire school where they are met by teachers who care deeply about the education they receive and more than that their whole life experience. We have had a continued focus on tackling aspects of poverty in our schools this year and we have seen schools adapt their provision to enable all our learners to thrive.

We have been able to maintain an effective and purposeful relationship with the political administration ensuring that there is a continual focus on the work to reduce inequality in our schools. This support is valued by all of the directorate. I am grateful for the work of everyone in our system who supports learners, from classroom teachers to our support staff, providing meals and making sure our buildings are ready for their learners every day, to the school leaders who have led our schools so capably.

Chief Officer's Reflections

The aim of this report is always to present a balanced picture of where our education system is. In many ways this has been an exceptionally challenging period. Demands on a small service in Monmouthshire have been relentless and our capacity to absorb some of the pressures coming from schools has been exceptionally challenging at times. We are not unique in this regard both within the authority and beyond.

I have reflected on the levels of reform in education in my previous reports and this year is no different in many ways. The election of a new First Minister and a change in ministerial responsibilities has led to a period of instability when stability would have been valued to allow the curriculum and Additional Learning Need reforms to embed.

As a directorate we have focused on supporting our most vulnerable learners. From a school improvement perspective this has meant a focus on how schools can support learners who experience poverty, and our inclusion team has been focusing on the provision in our Special Resource Bases (SRBs) and in the mainstream to ensure that our teaching is effective for all.

Set against increasing demands is a decrease in the funding available to schools. This year has seen schools move into a collective deficit for the first time since before the pandemic. The budget setting process for 2024/25 saw the impact of inflation and pay awards on the resources that schools have available to them. Rectifying this position and helping schools recover to a balanced budget is a key focus going forward.

Despite these financial challenges and the increasing demands in schools, we end the inspection cycle with no schools in a statutory category. This is a sign of real strength for the schools in Monmouthshire. The new cycle starts again in September 2024 and our schools will be well placed to continue to perform well. One of our Estyn recommendations in 2020 was to seek more excellence in our learning outcomes. We now step into this area with a clear focus on what we want to achieve and how we will do so.

Across Wales attendance at school has been a key challenge. Monmouthshire has seen strong attendance in its primary phase but in the secondary phase it is more challenging, and our rates of improvement are not where they should be. There is a particular challenge for those learners who are eligible for free school meals.

We have also seen a very significant rise in the number of children who have been excluded from school. This is a key risk for the authority moving forward. Improvement in this area is dependent upon strengthening provision at school level but also increasing the capacity of the Pupil Referral Service to provide early interventions.

This year has seen periods of industrial action, one sectoral and one focused on a single school. These have brought their own challenges, but it is important that we maintain effective relationships with all representative bodies and work to resolve any issues that emerge.

My role is always interesting, but I am increasingly struck by the limits of my 'powers'. It is a role that seeks to draw partners together, schools and other services to achieve the best outcomes for our children. My sense is that we will have to work more effectively with our schools in clusters and at a whole authority level to maximise the resources we have; to learn from each other and continue to develop. A deepening of meaningful partnerships is vital, these maybe informal and supportive but as Chief Officer I will have to consider more formal collaborative arrangements both at a local authority level and at cluster level.

Our Context

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 27 English medium and 2 Welsh medium primary schools, the majority of which are single form entry (a single class). There are three secondary schools, one located in each of the county's main towns and a 3-19 through-school located in Abergavenny. There is also a Pupil Referral Service (PRS) that supports learners who have been excluded, or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream school, or those unable to attend school.

Across the whole county there are 97 settings; schools, non-maintained nurseries, independent schools, and independent special schools who we are responsible for supporting within various elements of legislation such as *Keeping learners Safe* which sets out our safeguarding responsibilities.

Monmouthshire's Schools:

- educate 11,024 [11,570] pupils across the county, of those learners (last year's numbers are in the []):
 - 49% are female [48%]
 - 12.1% [17.3%] of the population are eligible for free school meals (eFSM)
 - 12% [15.5%] of the population have an identified additional learning need (ALN) or Special Educational Need (full implementation to the new ALN system will be completed by August 2025), see table 3.
- employ 1,148 members of staff [1,148]
- the central CYP directorate employs 88 [78] members of staff.

We also provide early education for 600 of our three and four -year-old learners in 25 non-maintained settings. The recent past has seen an increase in learners who chose to be home educated, we know this population as electively home educated (EHE), there are currently 153 children who are educated in this way. This is an increase of 50% compared to September 2023. We have one full-time EHE Officer who meets regularly with these families through home visits and engagement activities such as, creative sessions and outdoor experiences in Gilwern. As a result, we have established strong relationships with these families to the extent that our EHE Officer received a gold award from Education Otherwise, voted by parents, for her work during the year.

Table 1.

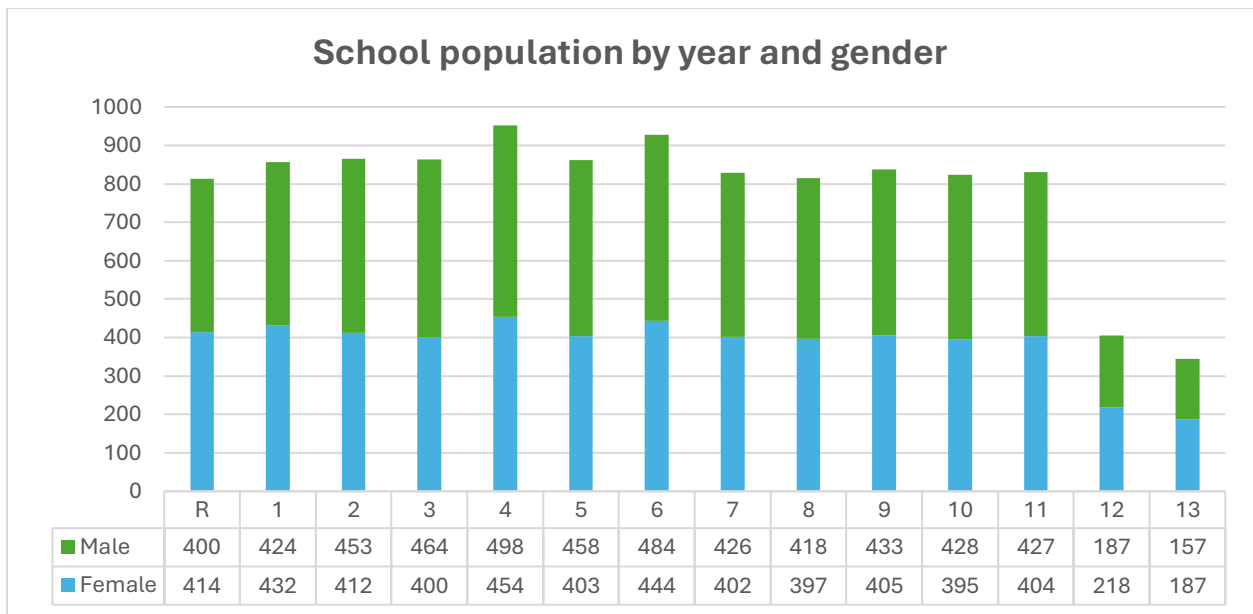
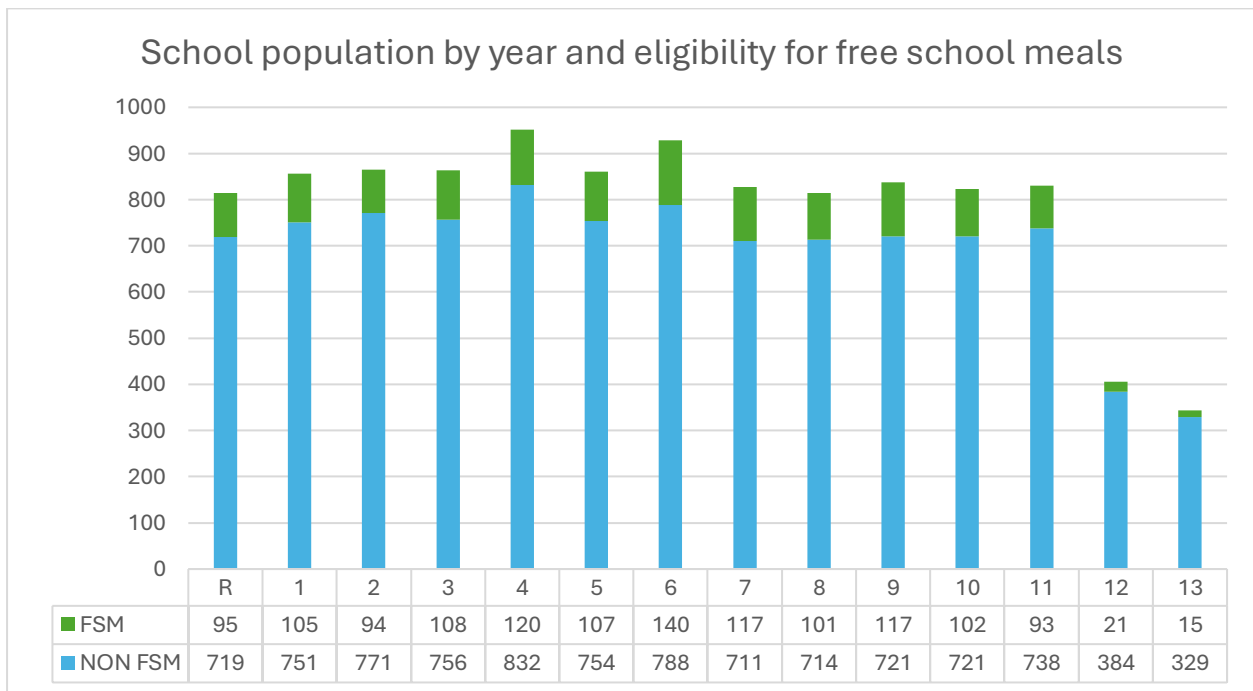
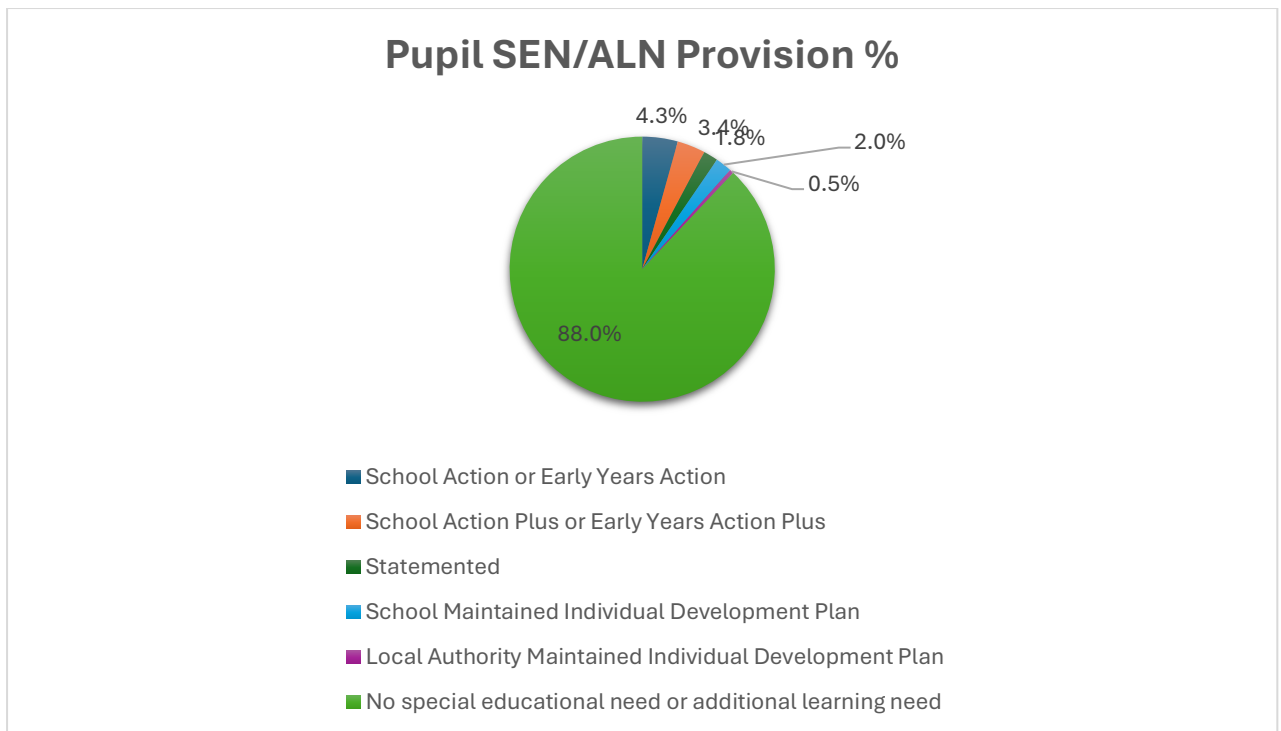


Table 2.



The decrease in the numbers of pupils eligible for Free School Meals has fallen since my report last year. We work very closely with partners in the Shared Benefits Service to ensure that all families who could be eligible claim this benefit. Although all primary aged children now receive a free school meal at lunch time it is vital that learners who are eligible are still registered as they are eligible for the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) and support for school uniform and other necessities.

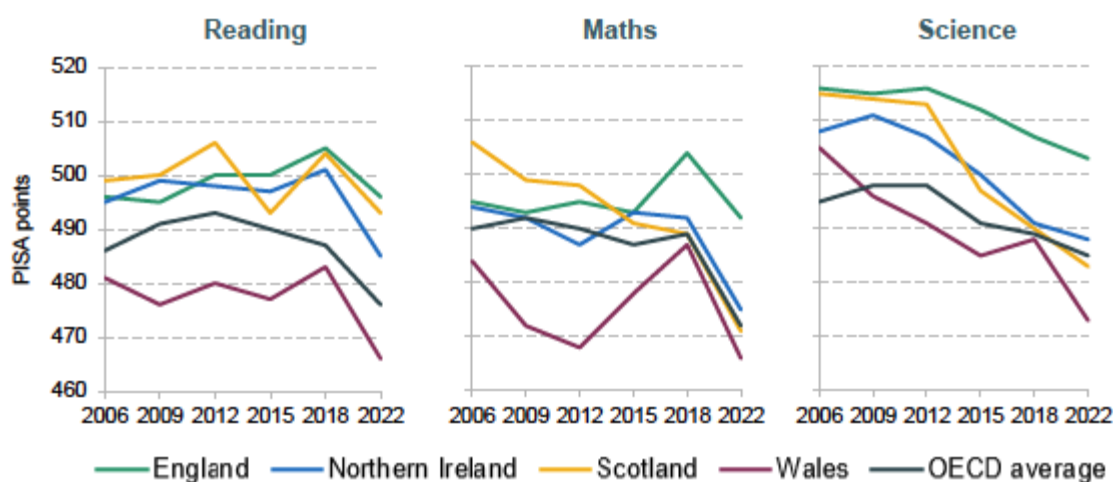
Table 3.



Challenges in the Welsh Education system

In each of my Chief Officer reports I try and provide Council with an oversight of the challenges that are facing Wales in general before looking at the areas that are impacting Monmouthshire in more detail. Across the country all administrations and Directors of education are grappling with often similar themes.

In the recent past we have seen the publication of data sets that identify concerns regarding the levels of performance. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) outcomes showed that assessments of pupils in Wales who sat the assessment declined significantly in 2022, erasing all progress seen since 2012. Wales's scores were below the average across OECD countries and significantly lower than those in the rest of the UK.



Furthermore, analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies¹ found that disadvantaged children in England outperform disadvantaged children in Wales by about 30 points. This meant that the average performance in Wales was similar to that of disadvantaged learners in England. The IFS report highlights several challenges for the education system in Wales.

More recently the Welsh Government's own assessment of attainment in its personalised assessments shows a declining pattern of attainment in numeracy and reading assessments.²

At the heart of these attainment issues is a high range of variation both between and within schools. This remains a key focus for all authorities and their school improvement partners.

The Curriculum for Wales is a significant reform for all schools and our learners up to year 8 are now following the new curriculum. However, progress in implementing it is variable. Across Wales, and in Monmouthshire, some schools are making better progress than others. There is currently a tension amongst educationalists about the extent to which the curriculum should be 'purpose led' focusing on skills that students will use in their futures or a more 'knowledge rich' approach that is focused on specific subjects.

In bringing these areas together, it is vital that schools find the appropriate balance between the necessary curriculum planning and a relentless focus on improving teaching and learning.

¹ <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/major-challenges-education-wales>

² [Patterns of attainment in reading and numeracy: September 2018 to August 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

If Wales is to realise its ambitions for its pupils, the teaching workforce is a, if not the, vital component. Currently Wales has a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in subjects such as maths, science, Welsh, and languages. Locally in Monmouthshire we have seen the numbers of quality applications for leadership positions decline.

The teacher workforce is also ageing, with more than a third of teachers over 50 years old and a low proportion of teachers under 30. There has been a worrying trend emerge where teachers are leaving the profession within their first five years, citing workload, stress, and lack of career progression as reasons. Monmouthshire has participated in research with academics looking at why entry into Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses is so low, particularly for secondary phase teachers.

In the next section of this report, I will offer my reflections on the 'Middle Tier Review' which considered the roles and responsibilities for school improvement in Wales and was led by Professor Dylan E Jones on behalf of the former Education Minister, Jeremy Miles, MS.

Councillors will be aware that for the past period I have not been able to offer any detail or information about the attainment of our learners in Monmouthshire's schools. This was partly because of the pandemic but also of a policy direction that saw the system move away from published attainment data and the end of key stage teacher assessment. The use of data in a crude way could clearly give rise to unintended consequences and perverse incentives for schools to act in certain ways to hit specific targets or thresholds. The development of a new accountability framework across Welsh schools is a necessary focus.

This year I can report on the outcomes achieved by Monmouthshire's pupils in the 2023 set of public examinations.

Review of roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and delivery of school improvement arrangements

The Middle Tier Review³ of education in Wales is a comprehensive analysis of the roles and responsibilities of education partners across Wales, focusing on the delivery of school improvement arrangements. The review was conducted to ensure that the school improvement system in Wales provides the best and most cost-effective support infrastructure to enable education leaders to lead, teachers to teach, and learners to learn.

The review was undertaken following extensive engagement with colleagues across the education sector in Wales, this included Headteachers (between 25-45% of school leaders in Wales) alongside representatives from the regional consortia and local authorities.

The review highlighted the need for clarity regarding the roles and impact of all elements within the Middle Tier (local authorities, the regional consortium, Estyn, National Academy for Educational Leadership, Education Workforce Council), as many requests from this tier were seen as unnecessary, counter-productive, and adding bureaucracy for Headteachers.

Monmouthshire has a long and successful relationship with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) which began at its inception in 2012. This relationship is the basis of our work to know, challenge and monitor all our schools. We have worked hard to ensure that our School Improvement system is able to support our schools at an early stage and where significant needs are identified we are able to broker bespoke support.

The Review has led to a reappraisal of the role of local authorities and the regional consortia. As a small authority, I believe it is incumbent upon us to continue to collaborate to ensure that we do not become insular in our practice and lose the ability to learn from others across the Gwent footprint and beyond. We will continue to work with our partners across the region to ensure that any solution remains effective, efficient and promotes the very highest standards of school improvement.

³ [Review of roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and delivery of school improvement arrangements: letter to the minister \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Our Partnership with the Autism Education Trust

Monmouthshire has a strong history of partnership working and this goes beyond the core relationships with our schools, school improvement partner and other partners in the middle tier. In the last few years we have expanded that partnership working to the Autism Education Trust to develop a programme of work to support our schools in this area of growing demand.

In recognition of the increasing numbers of autistic learners, both in mainstream and our Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs), we commissioned the Autism Education Trust (AET) to design and deliver a programme to improve education for autistic children and young people in the county.

This project is key to help us move towards our aim to develop a truly inclusive educational system. Central to this is the belief that Monmouthshire children and young people should be enabled to remain in Monmouthshire settings, schools and communities that *'all learners are given the opportunity to succeed and have access to an education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit from, and enjoy learning'* (ALN Code).

Our Vision: All autistic children and young people in Monmouthshire will experience a positive and inclusive education that supports their wellbeing and provides equality of opportunity. The parents and carers of autistic young people have a positive and collaborative experience of education settings which supports and improves their wellbeing.

The Project's Aim: To develop a skilled and supported education workforce that has the knowledge, skills and confidence to work effectively with all children and young people, including autistic young people, by:

Upskilling Specialist Resource Bases as centres of excellence for autism:

- All SRBs have received a one-day training course based on feedback from a training needs analysis, and further twilight training sessions on: communication needs, autistic girls, sensory needs, and anxiety and distress.

Creating an Autism Champion model to add capacity and drive the change across settings:

- A model for Autism Champions was created.
- All schools and clusters of Early Years settings have identified an Autism Champion.
- 56 Autism Champions have been inducted into their roles.

Building capability in mainstream settings:

- Through this work in Monmouthshire the AET have created a Standards and Competency Frameworks for Wales, in both Welsh and English, developed through consultation with practitioners, and reviewed by an Expert Reference Group (ERG) made up of professionals, autistic people, and parents and carers, from across Monmouthshire and wider Wales.
- Panels of autistic young people in each of our secondary schools have been created to ensure lived experience and expertise is at the heart of the programme. Many of these young people have been filmed sharing their lived experiences for the training materials.
- The training materials and resources embed the voices of Monmouthshire's autistic children and young people, and their families, to promote and ensure good autism practice across Early Years and school settings.

- The Monmouthshire Autism in Schools and Setting training team is made up of staff from the Specialist Provision and Outreach Team including those from the Educational Psychology Service, Education Support Team, Early Years team and SRBs.
- The training team has begun delivering the initial awareness raising module 'Making Sense of Autism' into our schools and settings.

The impact of this trail blazing work in Monmouthshire means that in every school or setting, there will be a greater understanding of how to implement the AET principles of good autism practice to support autistic children, young people and their families. These principles have been developed for professionals as a guide to creating structured, consistent environments that respect differences and promote inclusivity.

Estyn Inspection Outcomes⁴

Non-maintained Settings

Non-main settings are inspected jointly by Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) against the following six areas:

- Wellbeing
- Learning (three and four-year-olds)
- Care and development
- Teaching and assessment (three and four-year-olds that do not receive education in a maintained (school) setting)
- Environment
- Leadership and management

There have been fourteen non-maintained settings inspected by Estyn since May 2022. The following table shows that there has been no Estyn follow-up in any of these settings and four have been asked to submit a case study to Estyn for publication. In three of the settings*, all areas were judged to be excellent. This is particularly strong area of our work, giving many of our children the best start in school life.

Non-maintained Setting	Date	Follow-up	Case studies
Meadowbank Day Nursery*	September 2022	No	Yes
Mathern Day Nursery at Caerwent	September 2022	No	No
Tiny Tots	October 2022	No	No
Crossway Nursery*	October 2022	No	Yes
Ladybirds at OLSM	November 2022	No	No
Sticky Fingers Under Fives	December 2022	No	No
Little Tigers Day Care	February 2023	No	No
Nevill Hall Creche	May 2023	No	No
Sunshines Pre-school	June 2023	No	No
Llandogo Early Years	June 2023	No	No
Ladybirds at Llanvihangel	October 2023	No	No
Little Explorers	November 2023	No	Yes
Little Trees St Arvan's	March 2024	No	No
Busy Bodies Playgroup*	June 2024	No	Yes

Schools

Estyn inspections using the current framework started in September 2016 and will finish in August 2024. Over the last year, Estyn developed and piloted a new framework in several schools during the spring and summer term although none of these were in Monmouthshire.

⁴ Estyn write within a precise evaluative framework. They use a set of descriptors to describe proportions: nearly all = with very few exceptions / most = 90% or more / 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%

This framework will be introduced in September 2024 for all schools and PRUs. Estyn have inspected all of Monmouthshire’s schools in the current cycle.

Over the past seven years 11 Monmouthshire schools have been placed into one of the three Estyn follow-up categories which are:

- Estyn review
- Significant improvement
- Special measures

Most schools were placed in Estyn Review, the lowest level of follow up, however, one secondary school needed significant improvement and two primary schools required special measures.

Secondary Sector

Chepstow, Caldicot and Pupil Referral Service (PRS) were placed in Estyn review during this period and King Henry VIII in significant improvement. Although the recommendations in each school varied, self-evaluation, leadership, behaviour, and the development of pupil skills were common themes across most of these schools.

Primary Sector

Raglan, Llantillio Pertholey, Deri View, Goytre and Gilwern primary schools were placed in Estyn review and Magor and Dewstow in special measures.

The table below shows the time schools remained in a follow up category. On average, schools in Estyn review (yellow) were in this category for between 18 to 20 months. However, schools in need of significant improvement and special measures remained in this category for up to 24 months as they had more areas to improve. This is in line with the expectations of Estyn and the Authority to ensure that schools address the concerns, embed practice and can continue to continue their journey of improvement without significant external support.

Schools marked with * remained in a category for longer than expected because Estyn and LAs were unable to determine the level of progress until after the first wave of the pandemic at the end of 2020.

School	Date in follow up	Date out of follow up	Time taken
PRS	April 2018	December 2019	20 months
Llantillio Pertholey	September 2016	April 2018	19 months
Raglan	November 2016	June 2018	19 months
Magor	May 2017	December 2018	18 months
Chepstow	September 2017	December 2020	39 months*
Deri View	October 2018	February 2020	16 months
Caldicot	October 2018	December 2020	26 months*
Goytre	May 2019	December 2020	19 months*
Dewstow	May 2022	April 2024	24 months
Gilwern	October 2022	December 2023	14 months
King Henry VIII	November 2022	School closed	NA

Inspection Outcomes May 2022 to present.

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. However, follow-up categories remained the same.

Since inspections resumed, fourteen primary schools and two secondary schools in Monmouthshire have been inspected. The table below shows the level of follow-up required for these schools and the schools who were invited to submit a case study of effective practice for inclusion on Estyn's website.

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	No follow-up	No
Undy	May 23	No follow-up	Yes 1
Trellech	October 23	No follow-up	No
Kymin View	March 24	No follow-up	No
Llandogo	March 24	No follow-up	No
Cross Ash	May 24	No follow-up	No
OSLM	July 24		

Currently, at the end of this Estyn inspection cycle, Monmouthshire have no schools in any follow-up category.

Strengths identified in Monmouthshire schools inspected since May 2022.

The following themes have been identified in feedback, and Estyn inspection notes for the 14 schools inspected since summer 2022.

- 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.
- Many schools ensure pupils have worthwhile opportunities to develop a range of skills. As a result, most pupils make good progress during their time in school with a minority make 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 school provide support 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.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in Monmouthshire schools.

This represents 46% of Monmouthshire schools and is a representative sample of strengths observed across the remainder. The sample is influenced to some degree by the recommendations arising from schools in Estyn follow-up or in an Estyn statutory category however, this still reflects our own intelligence of all schools in the main.

Areas for Improvement

Whilst there are many strengths across our schools, there are also areas in need of improvement. Estyn capture the most significant of these in the form of recommendations for the school to address.

Although the number of Monmouthshire schools is relatively small and not statistically significant, it is useful to compare overall trends across Wales with those in Monmouthshire. The table below compares the recommendations from the Chief Inspectors Annual Report 2023, with those in Monmouthshire primary schools inspected between May 2022 until July 2024. It focuses on those areas where there is a differential between Monmouthshire's outcomes and those across Wales.

Recommendations across Wales		Recommendations in Monmouthshire	
Two-hundred and nineteen schools were inspected during the academic years 2022-2023		Fourteen primary schools in Monmouthshire were inspected between March 2022 to August 2023	
27%	Sixty of the primary schools had a recommendation to improve their curriculum to ensure the progressive and systematic development of pupils' skills.	33%	Five of the primary schools had a recommendation to improve their curriculum to ensure the progressive and systematic development of pupils' skills.
21%	In forty-six of the primary schools, inspectors identified a need to improve the level of challenge provided during lessons and activities.	7%	In one of the primary schools, inspectors identified a need to improve the level of challenge provided during lessons and activities.
30%	Inspectors identified fifty-one of the 169 English-medium primary schools inspected as needing to improve the development of pupils' Welsh language skills, in particular spoken Welsh.	50%	Inspectors identified seven English-medium primary schools inspected as needing to improve the development of pupils' Welsh language skills, in particular spoken Welsh.

Overall, the percentage of Monmouthshire schools with a recommendation to improve the curriculum to support the progressive development of skills and improving Welsh language skills in English medium schools is higher than across Wales. However, improvements in numeracy skills and the level of challenge is lower in Monmouthshire compared to the national picture. Overall, recommendations to improve self-evaluation and school improvement, the quality of feedback to pupils and literacy skills broadly reflects the position across Wales.

The table below compares the recommendations from the Chief Inspectors Annual Report 2023, with those in Monmouthshire secondary schools inspected between May 2022 until July 2024.

Recommendations across Wales		Recommendations in Monmouthshire	
Twenty-eight secondary schools were inspected during the academic years 2022-2023		Two secondary schools in Monmouthshire were inspected between March 2022 to August 2023	
86%	Twenty-four of the schools inspected received a recommendation related to self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, particularly regarding how precisely they focus on the impact of provision on pupil progress.	100%	Both schools inspected received a recommendation related to self-evaluation processes so that they focus robustly on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and provide leaders with a precise view of the school's areas for development

54%	In 15 of the schools, inspectors recommended that they should strengthen arrangements to improve pupil attendance.	100%	In both schools, inspectors recommended that they should strengthen arrangements to improve pupil attendance.
50%	Fourteen of the schools inspected received a recommendation to improve the planning and co-ordination of provision for pupils' skills.	0%	Neither school inspected received a recommendation to improve planning and co-ordinate provision for the development of pupils' skills.
25%	Seven of the schools inspected had a recommendation to improve pupils' Welsh language skills, two of which were Welsh-medium schools.	100%	Both schools inspected had a recommendation to improve pupils' Welsh language skills

As in the primary sector, the number of secondary schools inspected in Monmouthshire compared to Wales is not representative of all our secondary schools, and the number of schools is very small. However, we can see that both of our secondary schools have received a recommendation relating to improving self-evaluation processes, an aspect of attendance and improving Welsh language skills.

Emerging Themes

Based on the recommendations from Estyn Inspections since summer 2022, the following themes have emerged in relation to the schools inspected during this period. This broadly reflects our own intelligence on our schools from the first hand evidence base that is available.

- Self-evaluation process, particularly in relation to the impact on learning.
- The systematic development of skills and their application across the curriculum.
- Pupils' Welsh language skills, particularly oracy.
- Assessment and feedback to support effective learning.
- Developing pupil independence for all learners.

Overall Reflections

Joint inspection outcomes in our non-maintained settings are a strong feature of our work.

Overall, Estyn school outcomes have improved across our system during this cycle of inspections. Generally, we know many of our schools well, with the exception relating to the schools that were inspected at the summer term 2022 when we had been unable to visit or engage with schools for a sustained period.

The gap between schools being placed in follow-up and then being withdrawn, was extended for some schools because of the pandemic and this meant that the time taken in follow up was significantly longer than the norm. However, taking that into account, our schools were able to address their recommendations in a timely manner.

The ability to compare schools inspected at the start of the current cycle, with those inspected at the end of the cycle is a real challenge. This partly because Estyn inspections were suspended for a period of two years and staff, pupils and schools were very different when they returned. In addition, changes to the framework and Welsh Government policy, such as

removing the judgements and the removal of performance data for pupils at the end of key stages 1,2 and 3 made it difficult to determine improvement and progress in the school system.

However, many of the changes have been beneficial for schools for example, removing end of key stage outcomes has enabled school to focus on learning and progress and schools increasingly report positive experiences about the way inspections are conducted, particularly in relation to their participation in the process and the way outcomes are reported.

Progress against Monmouthshire's Estyn Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Good progress.

Whilst our ability to provide evidence of the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals in published attainment data has been compromised by changes to the accountability frameworks this remains a vital focus of our work.

On page 24 we can show that the performance of MCC's eFSM learners was higher than that of the comparable population across Wales. Whilst this is pleasing the Capped 9 score for this population is not as high as we want it to be and we acknowledge that there is still progress to be made.

This year our focus, alongside the EAS, on providing training and networking opportunities for schools on how they can address the impacts of poverty in school has seen a positive impact on learners. This work is captured in more detail on page 37.

Recommendation 2: Further strengthen the focus on increasing the number of pupils achieving excellent standards.

Good Progress

We have worked closely with our partners in the EAS to strengthen the structures that support our engagement with schools. This has added robustness and clarity. We now have our strongest group of School Improvement Partners (SIPs) and meet them every term to discuss the key foci for their work in Monmouthshire schools, and again before every Professional Discussion. This allows us to reinforce the continued focus on achieving excellence.

Through our embedded quality assurance processes with the EAS, we work collectively to review a wide range of first-hand evidence that now exists such as, looking at books and listening to learners which complements our knowledge of schools' practice. Through the Professional Discussions, Supported Self Evaluations and Celebrate, Share, Support and Refine (CSSR) there is a structured means by which we can engage constructively with schools. These processes also allow us to identify and share best practice and provide timely interventions where required. For example, case studies leading to progress teaching and learning and bespoke support for schools.

The EAS has recently produced revised Teaching and Learning Guidance to further support leaders to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning within the context of Curriculum for Wales. It provides a starting point for leaders and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their school or setting. This work will complement our thematic work with the EAS which prioritises key areas for development and provide us with a common approach to enable us to continue our focus on increasing the number of pupils achieving excellent standards.

Recommendation 3: Articulate a clear strategy for SEN provision.

Good progress.

There has been a relentless focus on the development of provision for our learners with ALN and this work has focused on the professional development of our teams who work in school to provide additional learning provision (ALP). The review of Monmouthshire's ALP that was considered by the Performance and Overview Committee in May 2024⁵ saw that there was strong practice in our SRBs, however, there was a lack of consistency, and this endangered the equitable offer across the authority.

The authority has been able to invest in additional officer resource to support the development of our ALN provision through the Welsh Government's ALN Improvement Grant. This is proving to have a significant impact but there are risks around the continuation of this funding.

Our strategy of developing centres of excellences in our SRBs linked to mainstream schools is proving to be effective in ensuring that our learners can remain close to home and be educated with their peers. The capacity continues to be developed and the new King Henry VIII building will have a SRB for children with complex needs, particularly those who are neuro-divergent with a capacity of 76 places across the age range.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen the use of information gathered through self-evaluation to better inform improvement planning.

Good progress.

Given the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent period of industrial action our ability to illicit strong first-hand information about schools, their progress and emergent risks has been limited. However, as we have been able to work more closely with schools again, we have undertaken a significant number of meetings with schools to ascertain what is happening in the classroom.

We meet all schools at least once per year for a formal discussion reviewing the school's development plan and the progress, they make towards meeting their objectives. These meetings are informed by the school's Improvement Partner who will have visited the school to undertake supported self-evaluations. Where there are concerns, around any aspect of school like, we can have more frequent meetings to discuss progress and support needs. All of these meetings are led by our school improvement lead and the EAS.

Within the Directorate we have taken the decision to have three professional learning days alongside monthly wider team meetings that consider teams evaluations and areas of emergent risk. At our Professional Learning Day in the spring term, we used a new evaluative enquiry approach called the 'clarify canvas' to review the last year's activity. This had the benefit of targeting our evaluation on the impact that had been made as opposed to the activity. This work then constituted the basis for the business planning for the current year. Holding onto the 'golden thread' from the Community and Corporate Plan, our Estyn Recommendations through to service improvement plans and personal development plans is a vital feature of this work.

⁵ [Agenda for Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 14th May, 2024, 10.00 am - Modern Council \(monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](#)

We are currently developing a comprehensive framework that will capture a full range of information about schools and allow us to share that internally and provide a basis for discussions and shared support arrangements with schools.

There have been some delays in taking reports to the relevant select committees and this will be an area of focus in the coming year.

KS4 Outcomes

The key aspects of the published data are contained in this section of the report. However, if members would like more detail, then they should review the paper and discussion that occurred at the February meeting of the Performance and Overview Select Committee.⁶

This year, for the first time since 2019, the Welsh Government are producing Key Stage 4 All Wales Core Data Sets (AWCDS) at individual school level. Each of the last 4 years used essentially different methods for determining grades, so none are directly comparable. In 2023 national outcomes are lower than 2022, 2021 and 2020, but not as low as 2019.

The Welsh Government published the following measures for 2023 outcomes.

- The Capped 9 measure
- Literacy measure (best of Language / Literature)
- Numeracy measure (best of mathematics / numeracy)
- Science measure (best of science)
- Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate measure

In addition to the above 'points based' measures the percentage of learners achieving 5 or more A*-A and percentage of learners achieving No Qualifications were published.

As well as comparisons of All Pupils, comparisons are also made Male / Female and FSM / non-FSM for each of the indicators, but only Capped 9 comparisons are included in this report at LA level.

In terms of analysis the two main comparisons are the Welsh Government line of modelled outcomes, and a comparison with a 'family' of similar schools.

Families

Schools face different challenges based on their context. The AWCDS contains comparative outcomes against similar schools – known as 'Families'. Families (of 9-10 schools) have been created by grouping on size and linguistic delivery and then ordering schools according to the values of an index of 'challenge', calculated as follows:

- 50% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)
- 30% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who live in an area classed as in the 20% most deprived parts of Wales using the 2019 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)
- 10% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age subject to an Individual Development Plan (IDP) or with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)

⁶ [Agenda for Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 20th February 2024, 10.00 am - Modern Council \(monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](#)

- 10% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who are either new to the English language (or Welsh where relevant), at an early acquisition stage or developing competence.

A three-year average of data from PLASC 2021-2023 is used.

For 2023 there are 6 Welsh medium families, numbered from 1 (the most disadvantaged) to 6 (the least disadvantaged). There are 15 English medium families numbered from 7 (the most disadvantaged) to 21 (the least disadvantaged). For 2023 Monmouthshire secondary schools are in the 2nd (Monmouth and Chepstow), 3rd (Caldicot) and 5th (King Henry 3-19) least disadvantaged families.

Capped 9 – all pupils – compared with the family average

The table below shows the Capped 9 performance of all learners in each school compared with their individual family. Two schools are above their family, one significantly so, and two below, but both by small margins. ⁷

School Name	FSM	Capped 9	Capped 9 - Family	Capped 9 School-Family Difference
Caldicot School	17.20%	376.6	377.7	-1.1
Chepstow Comprehensive School	12.70%	412.3	383.4	28.9
King Henry VIII Comprehensive	18.50%	367.5	362.4	5.1
Monmouth Comprehensive School	11.80%	379.4	383.4	-4

For all GCSE subjects the points difference between every grade is 6 points⁸. So, for example a B is worth 6 more points than a C.

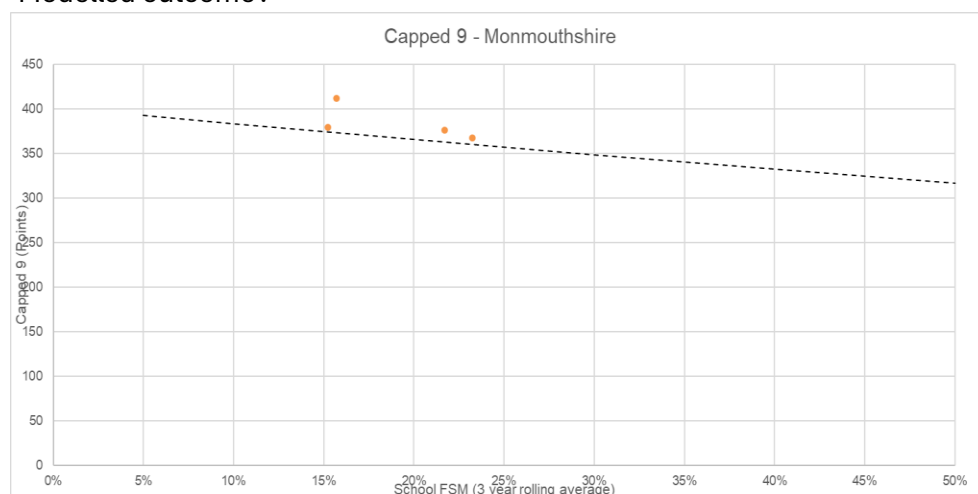
This means that for the Capped 9, a difference of 54 points indicates that on average, every learner in a school is performing above or below the family by a whole GCSE grade in every subject. (6 points x 9 subjects=54 points).

Chepstow school learners on average perform approximately half a grade better in every subject compared with their peers in the family.

⁷ The population outcomes of both Caldicot and Monmouth Comprehensive School are affected to a certain extent by the fact that they have provision for learners with additional learning needs and in reach PRS services (the in-reach provision also exists in King Henry 3-19). These differentials are discussed with the schools during our engagement during the autumn term.

⁸In the calculation of the capped 9 an A* is worth 58 points, each grade is worth 6 points, so a C grade is 40. The most valuable step is a learner achieving a grade as a G grade is worth 16 points.

The chart below does not compare with the family, but rather the Welsh Government's 'Modelled outcome'.



Literacy Measure – compared with the Family average

To put all these charts in perspective a difference of +/- 6 points is the equivalent of a GCSE grade difference for every learner. +/- 3 points would therefore be a half a grade difference.

School Name	FSM	Literacy Measure	Literacy Measure - Family	Literacy Measure School-Family Difference
Caldicot School	17.20%	41.3	42.1	-0.8
Chepstow Comprehensive School	12.70%	44.8	42.6	2.2
King Henry VIII Comprehensive	18.50%	40.7	40.1	0.6
Monmouth Comprehensive School	11.80%	43.2	42.6	0.6

Three schools are above the family average for the literacy measure, but one school is slightly below by approximately 1/6th of a GCSE grade per learner.

Numeracy Measure – compared with the Family average

School Name	FSM	Numeracy Measure	Numeracy Measure - Family	Numeracy Measure School-Family Difference
Caldicot School	17.20%	39.2	41.1	-1.9
Chepstow Comprehensive School	12.70%	43.7	40.9	2.8
King Henry VIII Comprehensive	18.50%	40.9	38.6	2.3
Monmouth Comprehensive School	11.80%	43.3	40.9	2.4

For the numeracy measure three schools are above the family average, (by approximately half a grade per learner) and one is below the family average (again by approximately half a grade per learner).

Science Measure – compared with the Family average

School Name	FSM	Science Measure	Science Measure - Family	Science Measure School-Family Difference
Caldicot School	17.20%	37.1	41.2	-4.1
Chepstow Comprehensive School	12.70%	42	41.2	0.8
King Henry VIII Comprehensive	18.50%	38.8	38.3	0.5
Monmouth Comprehensive School	11.80%	41.5	41.2	0.3

For the science measure three schools are above their respective families, with one below, by over half a GCSE grade per learner.

Welsh Baccalaureate Measure – compared with the Family average

Three schools are significantly above their family averages, but one is slightly below. All families' averages are relatively high.

School Name	FSM	Welsh Bacc. Measure	Welsh Bacc. Measure - Family	Welsh Bacc. Measure School-Family Difference
Caldicot School	17.20%	42.1	38.6	3.5
Chepstow Comprehensive School	12.70%	46.4	40.8	5.6
King Henry VIII Comprehensive	18.50%	41	37.8	3.2
Monmouth Comprehensive School	11.80%	40.4	40.8	-0.4

No Qualifications – compared with the Family average.

Please note the reversed colour coding on the bars to indicate that a negative difference from the family is positive.

School Name	FSM	No Qualifications (%)	No Qualifications (%) - Family	No Qualifications (%) School-Family Difference
Caldicot School	17.20%	0.00	0.30	0.30
Chepstow Comprehensive School	12.70%	0.00	0.40	0.40
King Henry VIII Comprehensive	18.50%	0.00	0.60	0.60
Monmouth Comprehensive School	11.80%	1.20	0.40	-0.80

Three schools have no learners leaving without a qualification. One school however has 1.2% of learners not achieving a qualification which is three times their family average.

5+ A*-A – compared with the Family average

School Name	FSM	5+ A*-A (%)	5+ A*-A (%) - Family	5+ A*-A (%) School-Family Difference
Caldicot School	17.20%	22.30	26.10	-3.80
Chepstow Comprehensive School	12.70%	33.00	25.90	7.10
King Henry VIII Comprehensive	18.50%	22.90	21.20	1.70
Monmouth Comprehensive School	11.80%	29.60	25.90	3.70

Three schools 5+ A*-A percentage are above the family average, one significantly so. One school's rate is less than the family average but remains relatively high compared with Wales at 20.3%.

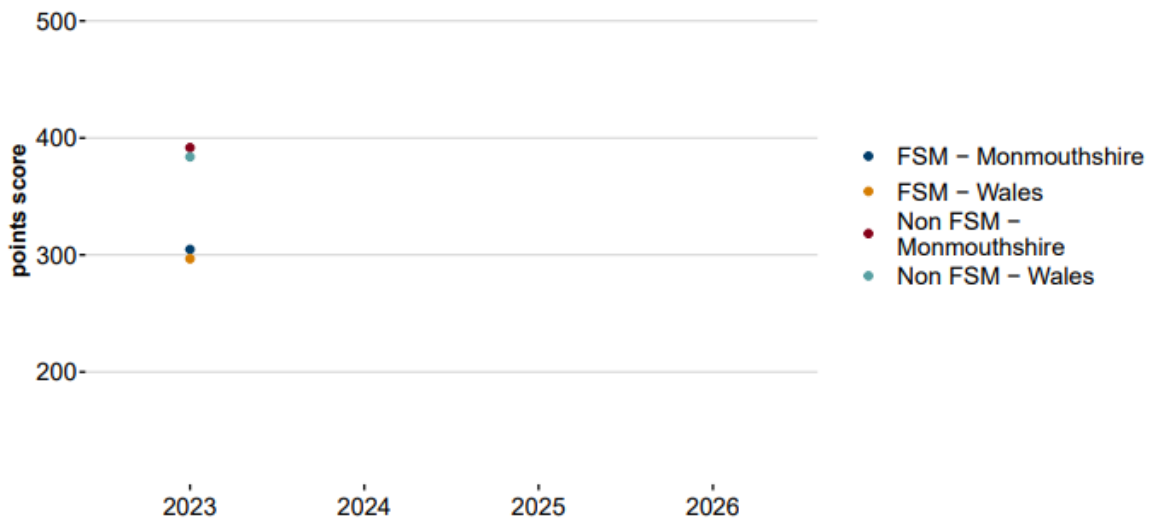
Key measures – Compared with Wales

Please note that these measures are not contextualised but compare with the Wales average.

Table 1.1c - Qualifications outcomes

Title	2023 - Monmouthshire	2023 - Wales
Capped 9 points score (interim)	374.7	358.1
WBacc Skills Challenge Certificate indicator – points score	41.1	31.6
Literacy indicator – points score	41.9	39.7
Numeracy indicator – points score	41.2	37.1
Science indicator – points score	38.9	36.9
No qualifications - % of pupils	0.8	1.4
5+ A*-A or equivalent	26.0	20.3

Capped 9 FSM – non-FSM



Note: The y axis does not start at zero in this plot.

Table 6.2 - KS4 Capped 9 points score (interim) (average)

Title	2023
FSM - Monmouthshire	304.7
FSM - Wales	296.7
Non FSM - Monmouthshire	391.7
Non FSM - Wales	383.8

Both FSM and non-FSM learners in Monmouthshire have higher Capped 9 scores than their peers in Wales.

Safeguarding

Collectively in our schools there is a fundamental requirement for all professionals and adults who work with our children to safeguard them from harm. Our roles and responsibilities in the education system are enshrined in the Welsh Government Guidance, Keeping Learners Safe⁹.

'The role of education in safeguarding children effectively is vital as education settings have frequent contact with children and families and could be the only professionals in their lives. Education settings often bring a child into contact with a trusted adult and staff will get to know the child and family as well as their wider community. This brings responsibilities and opportunities, and safeguarding should be embedded in to the culture of an education setting so early intervention and prevention can be instigated, risks minimised and the impact of trauma reduced...At its heart, the framework is about reinforcing the little things that build the positive relationships which, above all, make the difference and which foster the sense of belonging and community – not just relationships between learners and staff, but also relationships that span community, statutory and third sector boundaries, so that the whole system, working around the school or education setting as the hub of the community, can create an ethos that values and supports emotional and mental well-being. This approach needs support from the whole education system and each role and responsibility (in this section) will contribute to its success.'

In Monmouthshire we work closely with education and childcare settings to ensure that safeguarding is embedded in all aspects of our work with children. Advice and support is available to all settings and services as required, and as noted in the regulatory inspections that have taken place, safeguarding arrangements have been seen to be well placed.

We continue to identify and support those children who may be at risk of harm, whether this harm relates to their home life or wider circumstances. The challenge can sometimes be to ensure that emerging themes are understood and addressed and that everyone is aware of appropriate responses and safeguards.

One example has been the increase in the use of vapes by children. The risks include not only the use of tobacco based vapes, but those laced with other substances such as cannabis. We have been working closely with schools and colleagues in Trading standards, ABUHB's Public Health Team and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to understand the risks and to put protective measures in place. Schools have been provided with links to Ash Wales Free Education Programme who can provide sessions for staff and for children.

However, despite a range of preventative and proactive training opportunities are awareness raising approaches children and young people find themselves at risk of a wide range of safeguarding concerns. We work closely with our partners particularly Gwent Police, ABUHB and Children's Services to support children at risk of exploitation, victims of sexual harassment or abuse, domestic abuse to name a few areas of harm.

Due to the volume of safeguarding concerns that education settings are dealing with, it has been a real challenge to maintain high standards of practice. There is pressure due to the volume of meetings that need to be attended, and at times this pressure has been unrelenting.

⁹ [Keeping Learners Safe \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

All of Monmouthshire's education settings make every effort to ensure that safeguarding matters are a priority, and our own officers effectively collectively together to ensure that between us we can support settings. Our settings account for a significant proportion of all Duty To Report referrals (safeguarding reports) submitted to Children's Services, and this is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. Positively, these reports are in general submitted in a timely way, the content is of a good standard, and pupil voice is reflected well.

A key strength in relation to safeguarding lies in our collaborative working arrangements and our aim towards continuous improvement. Safeguarding is dynamic, it changes, new themes emerge, and it is important that we all prioritise safeguarding. Our aim is to promote best practice, reflect on what we do well and what we can improve upon, and strive to make Monmouthshire an environment where children, young people and their families are supported to live safe from harm.

Future Risks

Risk is a key factor in all service delivery, and it is no different in education and the services that support our learners.

Financial

The public finances continue to be exceptionally challenging. The most recent forecasts from the Wales Fiscal Centre suggest that the next four years will be as challenging as the past period has been. Our ability to fund schools at the necessary level will continue to be difficult when set alongside all the other pressures that exist within the authority's remit.

The number of schools in a deficit has increased over the year, at start of the financial year for 2023-24 our schools held a collective surplus balance of £4,255,676 with only 5 schools in a deficit budget. The balance held at the 31st March 2024 is a collective deficit of £905,095 with 13 schools in a deficit budget. All these schools will be required to produce recovery plans to be agreed by the Governing Body and the Local Authority. However, it should be noted that with a falling school roll, a teaching workforce that is typically employed in the most expensive bands of the pay spine and remaining inflationary pressures for some schools this will represent a very significant challenge. The authority will work closely with schools to construct recovery plans that are fair and allow the necessary time to recover.

This year the budgets for central cost centres were overspent by £279,505. Most significantly there has been pressure on transport costs for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) resulting in an overspend of £732,079. The costs associated with transporting our learners with ALN experience a greater level of exposure to the market than our mainstream population. There is often a need for children to be accompanied and supported to access their learning provision. However, the placement costs for our ALN pupils have reduced due to the increasing number of pupils that we are able to support in-county leading to an underspend of £147,358. These pressures will continue.

One further risk within the financial envelope of the directorate is an increasing use of grant to fund critical roles. There are currently 88 FTE staff in the CYP directorate of these 49 (55%) posts are grant funded. This is a significant risk for the directorate if the grants were to be withdrawn.

This risk can be well illustrated in the Education Welfare Service where over half of the staff are grant funded, including the Elective Home Education (EHE) Officer. If we were unable to maintain the additional staff, it would have a significant impact on our ability to deliver the service in its current form. Due to the increasingly complex nature of the referrals to the service, we would be unable to carry out preventative work above 50% attendance. The lack of an EHE Officer would mean we would not be able to meet with EHE families once a year to check in or provide enrichment events or identify any potential safeguarding concerns.

Middle Tier Review and Reform

I set out the remit of the Middle Tier Review in an earlier section of this report and I believe that any potential changes to the existing arrangements present a risk in slowing the pace of improvement and development in our schools. The ambitions of the report to create a genuinely local, self-improving system are entirely appropriate but there are genuine questions about the capacity of the system to progress this now. The roles and responsibility, the legal

accountability remains with the local authority therefore this is not something that can easily be delegated to schools themselves. A new approach that is financially affordable and sustainable without a reliance of current Welsh Government grant should be our focus. We will continue to work with colleagues across the region to ensure that our collaboration and improvement activities are robust and effective.

Exclusions

Monmouthshire is currently experiencing exceptionally high levels of both Fixed Term Exclusions (FTE) and Permanent Exclusions (PEX) and this presents a risk to the positive engagement and outcomes for children / young people and increasing pressure on local authority services and provisions.

This year, we have seen a doubling in levels of FTEs with 299 reported in Autumn term 2022 and 651 in Autumn 2023. It should be noted that a significant number of the current FTE are linked to one school, however overall, there is still an upward trend in the numbers of FTEs issued by schools. Of concern is that the data shows clear rises in the issue of FTE for reasons linked to violent or aggressive behaviour, this can be verbal or physical against another student or an adult.

Increased levels of exclusions increase the pressure on the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) which currently does not have the capacity to accept any new learners unless they have been PEX. This means that even where a graduated response has been applied within a school, and where behaviours and risk assessments indicate the learner may merit a PRS intervention, there is limited capacity to access this.

Demand Growth & Complexity

Current projections indicate a requirement for an increased number of places within our Specialist Resource Bases. There are currently 79 SRB places for both primary and secondary in the south of the county and 150 in the north (increased through investment in the SRB in King Henry VIII 3-19). The demand for increased spaces is evident in the primary phase in the south, with 31 pupils currently placed in the primary SRB and one space available for September 2025 entry. From information held on projections, there is an awareness of increased complexity of additional learning needs (ALN) and a more therapeutic provision being required to meet the identified ALN of a small cohort of pupils.

Complaints

The post-pandemic period has seen a change in the way that parents and carers engage with schools about complaints. There is now a much more common expectation that complaints can be escalated to agencies and partners outside of the formal schools' complaints processes. It is not uncommon for complainants to contact their local MS, MP, Estyn and the Local Authority. There are increasing levels of complexity in the complaints that schools receive and often complainants begin their process with a position that they are not content to engage with the school. This is a risk and a challenge for the directorate because we are unable to become involved in the complaints process until its conclusion (the resolution of a stage C complaint) and then only if the procedure has been mis-managed. We have to be careful that we do not become involved in the process and raise expectations or cause confusion. This can frustrate complainants and schools.

Throughout the year we have developed a new policy for schools to help manage complaints processes alongside the statutory guidance.

Our progress against the ambitions of the Community and Corporate Plan

The Community and Corporate Plan is the guiding strategic document for Monmouthshire County Council. In this section of the report, we reflect on the progress made against the 5 key areas of activity that are set out in *'A learning Place: Monmouthshire will be a place where everybody experiences the best possible start in life and has the opportunity to learn; developing the skills and knowledge they will need throughout life to reach their potential'*.

There is one further action allied to schools and the work undertaken to support learners. In the Connected Place theme there is a focus on work to create *'A healthy and active Monmouthshire where loneliness and isolation are reduced, well-being is promoted, and people are safeguarded'* – the focus on the Whole School Approaches to Mental Health and Wellbeing is evaluated in this report.

Each element is set out in the same way:

- i) What we were seeking to achieve,
- ii) The impact of our activity,
- iii) The evidence of our impact, and
- iv) The next steps

What we are seeking to achieve:

Improved School Attendance

What have we done differently and what was its impact?

Working closely with our schools the Education Welfare Service (EWS) have adopted a targeted approach to working with families where children's attendance has fallen to concerning levels.

- We have changed the structure of school meetings and have developed the range of information for example, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) have prepared more detailed planning and analysis prior to visits to enhance discussions with schools and establish a more consistent approach. Primary schools have a visit from their allocated EWO at least every half term and an EWO visits secondary schools every two weeks.
- The EWS team continue to work collaboratively with external supporting services to provide a holistic approach to supporting families to overcome barriers to school attendance. During this academic year, 2023/24, EWS has held 104 cases across the four clusters. This year, EWS has reviewed processes for closing cases where attendance has improved, there has been a change in provision, or a pupil has relocation to another area. As a result, 50 cases have been closed during the year, which has released additional time for EWOs to focus on the increasing number of complex cases involving a wide range of agencies. Across the year, only 18 referrals to the service have been declined and where this is the case, further advice on strategies to support attendance and guidance has been provided to schools. For the first time for several years, EWS has taken two prosecutions for non-attendance to court.

- For the first time has a team of Family Liaison Officers who work with schools and families to build relationships, overcome barriers to attendance and support pupils back into school. This means pupils and families are receiving support earlier, and EWOs have more time to deal with increasing numbers of complex cases and support schools to review systems and processes to secure high levels of attendance for all pupils. However, during the year, the capacity of the service has been impacted by a long-term absence and retirement which has left one cluster with limited support for an extended period.
- The team have developed their awareness of drivers of low school attendance through engagement in programmes such as Community Focused Schools (which focuses on the way in which families work with schools), Trauma Informed Schools and emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) approaches. This means that the team consistently reinforce the language, expectations and approaches used in other teams within the directorate. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this work on levels of attendance and engagement.
- More recently, EWO's have had training on the new SIMs system which means they will be able to support schools with this as they migrate to the Cloud. In the shorter term, this is having an adverse effect on EWS consultation processes and means that data collection taking longer at times of migration.
- The Local Authority Attendance and Engagement Policy has been updated to encompass all aspects of the Engaging, Belonging and Participating guidance issued by WG in October 2023 and is currently in draft form ready for consultation with schools. Alongside the policy, the team have created a draft handbook for schools to summarise the roles and responsibilities in the new policy, the graduated response for attendance, model policy and the local code for fixed penalty notices and prosecutions. The EWS team have also prepared training for governors as they implement the new policy.
- EWS have worked closely with the Inspire Outreach Team who offer support to secondary pupils with attendance below 50% through a reintegration and qualification approach for pupils who may be dis-engaged or have reasons for non-attendance such as EBSA.

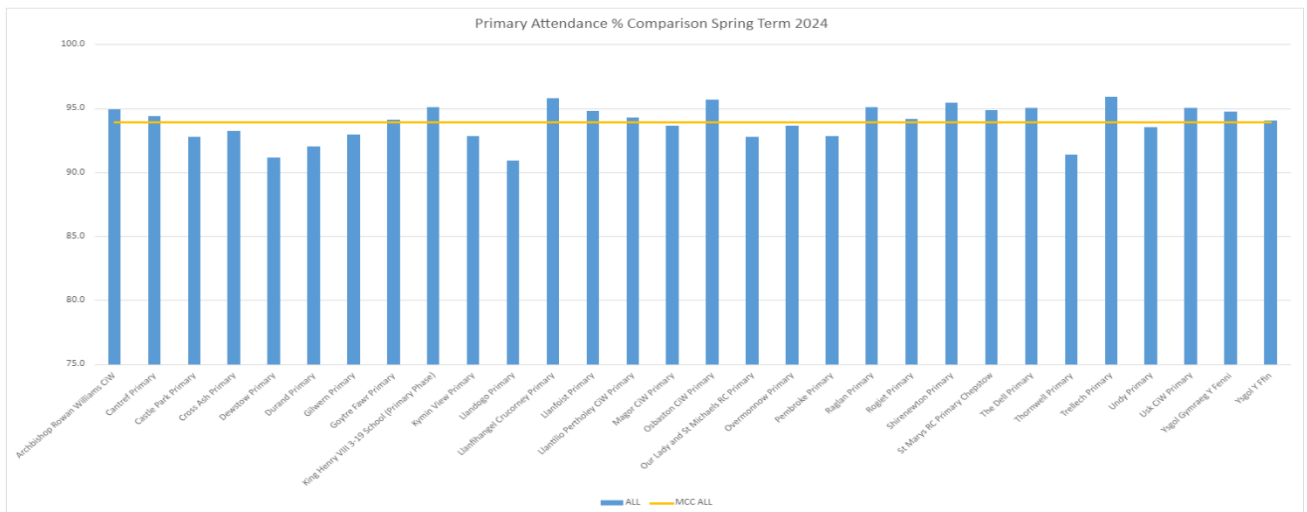
What evidence do we have to illustrate this?

Historically overall attendance in Monmouthshire has been consistently amongst the very highest for many years. However, the pandemic had a significant impact on levels of attendance across Wales, and Monmouthshire was no exception and when pupils returned to school full-time in 2022, attendance levels were much lower than at the end of 2019.

Primary Attendance

- Attendance in primary schools has increased steadily since Autumn 2022 when schools returned full time after the pandemic.
- Overall attendance in primary schools in the spring term 2024 is 93.9% for all pupils, 89.5% for FSM pupils and 94.5% for children looked after (CLA) pupils.
- For the first time since the pandemic, attendance in all primary schools is over 90% and there are seven schools with attendance over 95%. Llandogo has the lowest attendance at 90.9% and Trellech the highest at 95.9%.

- Overall, the increase in attendance compared to the end of the autumn term 2022 is 1.6pp and 1.3pp than at the end of the spring term 2023.
- Processes to secure high levels of attendance in primary schools are effective and as a result, attendance for all pupils is over 90% in all schools.
- FSM attendance in primary schools has been slower to improve compared to attendance overall with an increase of 0.8pp in spring 2024, compared to autumn 2022.
- CLA attendance in spring 2024 is 94.5% shows an improvement of 1.9pp compared to spring 23.



In school Inspections Estyn have commented:

“The school actively promotes the importance of pupils attending school regularly. Leaders monitor attendance closely and set high expectations that they communicate with pupils and parents consistently. They use reward systems to reinforce good attendance and encourage a positive attitude towards being in school and on time”

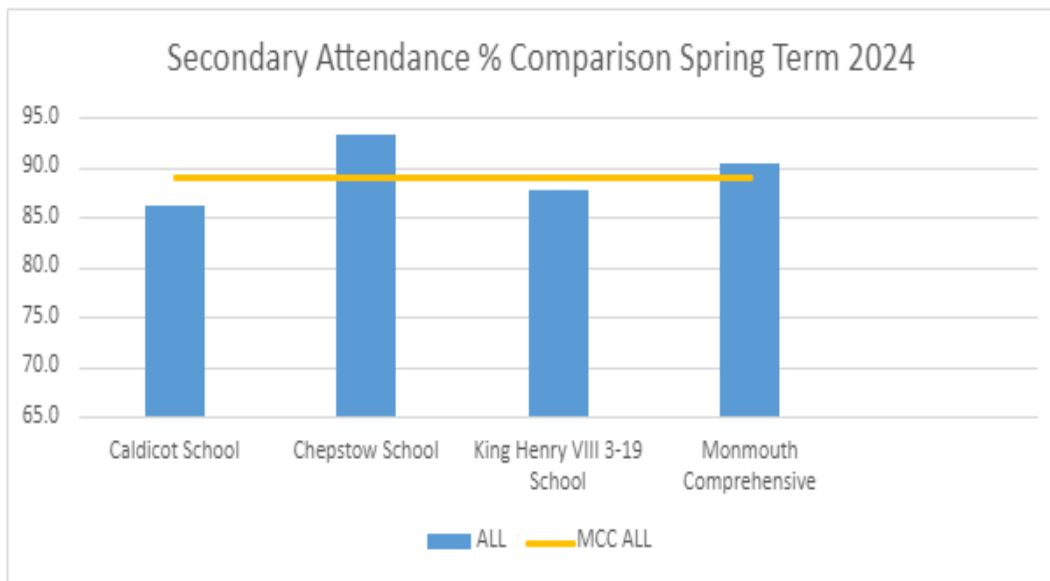
“Processes to promote positive rates of pupils’ attendance are effective”

“Overall, pupils’ punctuality and attendance are a strength. Following the pandemic, pupils’ attendance continues to improve and is above the national averages”

Secondary Attendance

- Overall attendance in secondary schools is 89.1% in spring 2024.
- Improvement overall has been slow since the return to school after the pandemic with an increase of just 1.7pp since Autumn 2022.
- Attendance in all secondary schools in spring 2024 is 86.0% or higher with Chepstow being the highest at 93.3% and Caldicot being the lowest at 86.3%.
- All four schools have increased the levels of attendance for all pupils with Monmouth making the greatest improvement since autumn 2022 at 2.4pp and King Henry VIII secondary phase making the least improvement at 0.9pp.
- FSM attendance overall is slow to improve and shows an increase of only 1.9pp since autumn 2022.

- The rate of improvement across the schools varies with Monmouth improving FSM attendance by 5.0pp and Chepstow by 3.8pp since autumn 2022, compared to a decline of 0.6pp and 1.3pp in Caldicot and King Henry VIII secondary phase respectively.
- Improvement in CLA attendance reflects the general trend of all pupils and FSM with an increase of 1.8pp since autumn 2022 and is 84.0% in spring 2024. However, there is significant variation in CLA attendance between the four schools with Caldicot at the lowest reporting 77.5% CLA attendance and Chepstow being the highest at 90.9%.



In school inspections Estyn have commented:

“There are suitable systems and procedures to monitor attendance and appropriate interventions for pupils with low attendance. However, currently this is not having enough impact on improving the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals.”

“Although attendance has considerably improved since last year a few pupils are persistently absent. The attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is notably lower than for other pupils in the school.”

What do we need to change and do differently next year?

- Complete the consultation on the new Attendance and Engagement Policy and processes. We will provide training to schools to support this work and review the impact on a termly basis.
- Work with schools to develop and embed new approaches to ensure levels of attendance return to pre-pandemic levels, particularly in secondary schools and for the most vulnerable pupils, including those eligible for FSM.
- We will allocate Family Liaison Officers on a cluster basis to support pupils from a 90% at an early stage, where there has been a decline in attendance. More complex cases already open to EWS will also utilise the Family Liaison officers to provide enhanced and

bespoke support to bridge the gap between home and school to engage and reintegrate pupils swiftly and successfully back into school.

- Update the referral form to reduce the workload for schools, whilst still providing key information as specified in the Belonging, Engaging and Participating Guidance.
- Extend the professional learning offer for schools and governing bodies to include advice and guidance on the new guidance, attendance coding and other area that may impact school attendance such as Children Missing in Education and Elective Home Education.
- Develop and launch an Attendance Campaign
- Ensuring all new staff are trained in Trauma informed and community focused schools and EBSA so that there is a consistent approach to language and support offered to school, pupils and their families from EWS staff.

What we are seeking to achieve:

Reduced Levels of Exclusions

What have we done differently and what was its impact?

The levels of exclusions in Monmouthshire schools are at an all-time high and is proving to be stubbornly difficult to reduce. The reasons and causes are complex, and the Directorate has worked hard to try and put in place systems to reduce this number. It should be noted at this juncture that we work closely with all our schools to support them in managing behaviours that challenge through better understanding some of their causes, but it is schools and their Headteachers who ultimately make the decisions about when a pupil should be excluded and the length of that exclusion.

In the primary sector the creation of the Education Support Team (EST) in March 2023 has enabled those learners most at risk of repeat Fixed Term Exclusions (FTE) or of Permanent Exclusions (PEX) to receive support from specialist professionals. This team have experience in responding to behaviours of concern/ challenge, an enhanced understanding of social emotional and mental health needs and additional learning needs (ALN) in a way that is trauma informed and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) aware. This supportive team has enabled learners to maintain their current placement by reducing the risk of PEX by stabilising behaviours and thus reducing risk, they have supported learners to integrate into other schools via managed moves to prevent PEX and supported in year transfers of learners with prior FTE.

The review of the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) has helped us to understand the current demand, while considering the future role and function of the PRS.

Senior officers from CYP directorate met with all four secondary head teachers and senior leaders to share the level of concern regarding the high levels of exclusion, the increase in behaviours that of concern/ challenge within our schools and the patterns, differences, and good practice across the county.

The issues of FTE and PEX also centres around both the management of learner behaviour but also ensuring school safety and thus health and safety is a key aspect of both inclusion and exclusion. Where learners are excluded, there should be a sound risk rationale for this that demonstrates that exclusion is necessary, but also where learners are included there is an overriding duty of care to staff and all learners to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable that the safety and wellbeing of others is not compromised. To support this, we have rolled out training alongside a learner behaviour risk assessment template to support the assessment and management of learner behaviours. This has enabled learners to either remain in school and avoid FTE or PEX or has enabled them to reintegrate.

The Vulnerable Learner Lead (VLL), the Lead officer for safeguarding in education (LOSIE) and Health and Safety corporate manager have worked together on several overlapping instances where exclusions were a feature.

The Vulnerable Learner Lead worked with officers in community partnerships to secure Home Office grant funding to support the reduction of violence in schools and to reduce exclusions (both FTE and PEX) associated with this. This funding enabled several learners at risk of PEX to avoid this outcome, including learners in their final year of school, who were able to complete their exams in school. Work is already underway on a bid for the current financial year to extend

and enhance this work. Further multi agency work has also been undertaken to consider how to reduce FTE and PEx linked to aggression and violence amongst both pupils and towards staff. Focused efforts are underway to improve representation at multi agency meetings (MAMS) in schools and with focused consideration of learners who have been excluded for these reasons in the intervening periods between each meeting.

Regular half termly meetings with regional colleagues who manage exclusions to enable enhanced sharing of good practice and understanding of shared issues and approaches to reducing FTE and PEx across the region.

What evidence do we have to illustrate this?

Our schools have engaged in a range of professional learning opportunities, which address local authority priority areas, and which align to individual school priorities and school improvement plans.

Schools have also continued to request and engage in professional learning aimed at developing Trauma Informed practices supporting school communities to become mentally healthy places for all. We have seen progress in trauma informed approaches being adopted in schools reflected in their use language and relational practices. Some schools have also engaged at a local authority level, to support the development of a Monmouthshire Trauma Informed Professional Learning offer and the supporting guidance and tool kits. By being trauma informed, or relational in our approach to children and young people, we are far more able to meet the needs of all vulnerable groups, including Children Looked After (CLA), and those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Schools have also engaged in the Autism in Schools and Setting project, with all schools identifying an Autism Champion, starting the journey towards developing understanding and practice, and driving change across the whole school setting.

What do we need to change and do differently next year?

Permanent Exclusion (PEx) and Fixed Term exclusions (FTE) have both increased over the past year. Local authorities across Wales and England have experienced similar trends post covid. The reasons for this are complex and not easily resolved. As of 30th March 2024, there were 12 upheld PEx. The number and rate of PEx for MCC is higher than the South East Wales consortia overall rate. The number and rate per thousand of FTE is higher than the consortia South East Wales overall rate.

To complete a peer moderation exercise of PEx to explore in more detail the following areas; threshold; evidence, process, and procedure; LA input to avoid PEx; LA representation and challenge at the Pupil Disciplinary Committee (PDC); support for learners prior to and following the PEx.

To continue to roll out training for all staff in all school and settings (i.e. ACEs and Trauma Informed practice) to increase the understanding of the impact on learner behaviours, strategies and approaches to deescalate and ensure safety and wellbeing.

Improved tracking and monitoring via Inclusion Panel for learners who have been excluded or require PRS provision due to risk of exclusion.

Better use of the multi-agency forums to enable earlier intervention support and challenge as part of a clearer graduated response for social emotional and mental health needs and associated behaviours to form a preventative approach to FTE and PEx.

Implement the outcomes of the PRS review including increasing the capacity of the PRS to provide preventative intervention for pupils at risk of PEx and enhanced support for learners to reintegrate into mainstream having had a period of support in the PRS.

Developing Trauma Informed Approaches in our schools

A key part of our approach to reducing exclusions is to improve an understanding of the drivers for children's behaviours. Our responses to any situation are a reflection of our own experiences and if we have experienced or are experiencing trauma this will have an impact. As professionals working with children being trauma informed is a key part of our necessary understanding.

Trauma Informed approaches form part of a universal, whole-school, preventative approach supporting school communities to become trauma informed and mentally healthy places for all. Being Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) aware and trauma-informed is recognised by the Welsh Government in guidance¹⁰¹¹ and reflects the evidence base that it is important to build relational practice to improve positive outcomes for all learners.

During 2021-22, a cross-directorate group allocated part of the Welsh Government Wellbeing Grant to offer Trauma Informed Schools training from Trauma Informed Schools (TIS-UK) at three levels of 1) a whole staff 2) a two-day training for Senior Leads, and 3) a ten-day course for Diploma level.

Between 2021-2023 over 500 Monmouthshire staff accessed the whole staff training, around 68 staff accessed the Senior Leads training, and 16 professionals completed the TIS Diploma. As well as school-based staff, around 21 different services across education, social care and health have accessed the TIS-UK training, including staff from Youth Service, SHIFT, Education Welfare Service (EWS) and Primary Care Mental Health.

Training evaluation data (2021-23) was extremely positive, with 100% of Senior Leads agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training was relevant to their needs and priorities in their school/setting. A strong theme which emerged from the qualitative data gathered related to requests for further training. A second theme related to whole school policy change.

A TIS Working group was set up in July 2023 to further develop and embed trauma informed/relational approaches in a way that could be sustained into the future without the reliance on external providers and the use of grant funding.

A project plan was developed for 2023-24, which included: the development of 'in-house' Monmouthshire training for schools and settings to further embed their trauma informed/relational practice; to create guidance for schools and settings; to develop an supervision model, as access to TIS Supervision is a requirement for those who have completed the TIS Diploma; to support the Pupil Referral Service to continue to develop their trauma informed/relational practice; and to understand and evaluate the impact of the introduction of trauma informed approaches in Monmouthshire.

A multi-agency TIS Steering Group, including colleagues from health and social care, has been established to achieve these aims, led by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), and a tiered training programme has been developed.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.wales/framework-embedding-whole-school-approach-emotional-and-mental-wellbeing>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-11/improving-school-attendance-easy-read.pdf>

Monmouthshire schools continue to request Trauma Informed training, and we have identified three schools to pilot our Trauma Skilled training in the Autumn Term 2024.

What we are seeking to achieve:

The benefits of the new curriculum in Wales are maximised through excellent teaching and learning

What have we done differently and what was its impact?

All schools within MCC have access to an extensive Education Achievement Service (EAS) Professional Learning programme for Curriculum for Wales (CfW) as well as access to focused support from Curriculum Partners and Partner schools across the region.

Professional Learning is brokered by the school improvement partner and can be bespoke to the needs of the individual or to the school. The Authority and the EAS work together to promote and support the regional and national professional learning offer for curriculum for Wales.

From September 2023, schools have accessed a wide range of professional learning from the EAS. This has included training and support for Curriculum Design, Progression and Assessment, Leadership of Assessment, Expressive Arts and Welsh. Humanities and Digimap have been the most popular with MCC schools.

In addition to the EAS professional learning offer available to schools; many also use external providers or work collaboratively with other schools to develop common areas of focus. Increasingly, Monmouthshire schools also engage in beneficial research projects to improve specific aspects of their work. For example, working with Impact Wales to evaluate how practice has changed across the school.

Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning across our schools has been a focus for the Authority. As a result, we have provided more focused challenge through our regional school improvement model, utilising universal, targeted and intensive provision provided by our School Improvement Partners (SIPs), through school-to-school support (S2S) and partner schools.

A small number of schools have received intensive support over the last year. This includes on-going support from the SIP, a Partner School and/or Curriculum Professional Learning Partner School. to improve the quality of teaching and leadership. These schools are part of the Team Around the School approach. The approach is open, collaborative and supportive. All meetings are underpinned by a commitment to transparency to enable information sharing and honest discussion about the school's improvements.

All schools receiving intensive support have precise support plans, that have been developed with SIPs, aligned to school improvement priorities. All schools have also access to an enhanced amount of professional learning from EAS relating to leadership, teaching and learning in line with their school development plan (SDP) priorities.

Furthermore, Monmouthshire Post 16 Network have engaged with E-sgol, Welsh Governments collaborative learning partner, to support the more equitable availability of post 16 academic courses across our schools. Our collaborative network will launch in September 2024 with the delivery of four courses, not previously consistently available across all four of our sixth forms.

We have engaged with directorates across Monmouthshire County Council, our schools and further stakeholders, to develop post 16 Pathways to Employment programmes in Sport, Leisure, Play and Childcare. These innovative courses, based both in schools and in the workplace, were offered as part of the sixth form curriculum for 2024-25. Although sustainable

cohorts did not coalesce for the coming academic year, all stake holders are committed to evaluate programmes ready for the 2025-26 post 16 transition cycle.

We have worked closely with Economy, Employment and Skills to develop a STEM strategy that draws together the new STEM curriculum and qualifications with the skill needs of current and potential businesses. We are building on existing relationships between STEM business and our schools to further develop vocational opportunities and pathways, for example two of our secondary schools include construction within their KS3 curriculum and construction qualifications, supported by business partners, within KS4.

What difference has this made?

Two primary schools have made good progress in increasing the proportion of good or better lessons. The main factors determining these changes has been the combination of support from the SIP and Partner School. The peer influence and support for consistency in assessment and feedback to learners secured a change in approach by most teachers. Bespoke support from the Curriculum and Professional Learning Partners has been fundamental in strengthening whole school planning processes which has resulted in clear progression of skills across the school.

In another primary school, leaders have improved capacity by empowering their team and ensuring they are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Systems and processes for self-evaluation and planning for improvement are now more robust and effective. As a result, leaders have a sound understanding of strengths and areas for development. The impact of the intensive teaching focus from the Learning and Teaching team, over the past three terms, has been successful in further improving teaching and learning experiences.

In a different primary school, the overall quality of teaching has improved. Many teachers have a clear understanding of what a good lesson should include and demonstrate pace, skilful questioning and clear differentiation. The school has implemented a range of beneficial strategies for assessment for learning, and improved learning environments are beginning to support independence well.

In two secondary schools, the leadership of teaching has improved due to the intensive work with the Partner Schools which has focused on the development of both senior and middle leaders. Departments are now better able to clearly articulate strengths of their team and the quality of learning and teaching.

In inspection reports Estyn have commented:

“The school has a clear vision for the Curriculum for Wales. This is based on disciplinary curriculum design where pupils are provided with valuable opportunities to develop in-depth subject knowledge and their literacy, numeracy and digital skills in authentic contexts. Leaders recognise the importance of good teaching and place it at the heart of their curriculum developments”

“The school has taken a positive approach to the implementation of Curriculum for Wales and has a clear vision which is embraced across all curriculum areas”

“The school has developed its rich and engaging curriculum to align well with the principles of Curriculum for Wales. The curriculum often focuses on pupils’ needs and interests, successfully combining areas of learning to enable pupils to make relevant links in their learning and to their own lives”

“Through its partnership with a school in Malawi and other curriculum work, many pupils have developed an understanding of diversity. The school celebrates its own Welsh culture through appropriate curriculum work with its visits to the local castle and bridge”

“There is a shared vision for the curriculum across the federation, which takes appropriate account of the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales. Systematic professional learning and collaboration between federation staff and stakeholders support the development of the school’s curriculum appropriately”

In school follow-up reports Estyn have commented:

“The school has transformed its environment to enable productive and independent learning that engages most pupils effectively. The school has continued to invest in their outdoor learning environments and teachers make effective use of opportunities for all pupils to benefit from the attractive and intriguing activities on offer outdoors, in all weather.”

“The school has developed its curriculum in response to Curriculum for Wales effectively. The learning experiences provided engage pupils well. A range of visitors and trips now enrich the curriculum appropriately. For instance, older pupils develop their understanding of online safety during workshops delivered by a visiting theatre group”

“Strategies put in place by the school are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Across the school, teaching is improving and is now more successful in supporting pupils to make effective progress”

Next steps

We will continue to implement the Team Around the School meetings, ensuring where appropriate that these are timely. Review the support for all schools at the termly Team around the School meetings to ensure that this continues to be bespoke to need.

SIPs and Partner Schools to support with robust self-evaluation and continuous school improvement.

What we are seeking to achieve:

A truly inclusive educational system that recognises learners' starting points, strengths and educational needs

What have we done differently and what was its impact?

This focus of our work has two elements; the first is related to supporting learners who are eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) or who are experiencing the impact of poverty, and the second is related to those learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

Within Monmouthshire there are currently at least 27% of children living in poverty, as compared to the Wales average of 34%. Over the past three years, schools have seen a consistent increase in the number of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM), ranging between 5% to 48% (LA average is 18%). Within Monmouthshire, schools are located within towns, villages and small rural farming communities.

In January 2023, as one of the EAS targeted actions agreed with the LA, the EAS delivered the Tackling Aspects of Poverty (TAP) professional learning programme, to support schools in addressing the impact of poverty on learners, their families, and the wider community. The programme was adapted for Monmouthshire schools to provide a one-day professional learning event to promote awareness of poverty within schools and their communities.

There was good engagement from schools with 32 schools attending the full day training event. Many schools provided examples of commitments to act following this professional learning which included developing an anti-poverty strategy, and other examples such as appointing an anti-poverty lead within the school and a governor to support. Many talked about developing a cluster approach developing a common strategy and poverty-proofing the school day. Following the training event, all schools and clusters were offered follow up-sessions and further support from the Health, Wellbeing and Equity team. A Microsoft Teams space was created where resources could be shared.

In September 2023 the EAS introduced a single page guidance bringing together all the strategies and support available to schools. This new regional guidance incorporated the following four linked areas:

- Family and Community Engagement (FaCE); Community Focussed Schools; Anti-Poverty Strategy Development; and PDG and the following professional learning opportunities for schools:
- Bespoke Anti-Poverty Strategy Development;
- Tackling all Aspects of Poverty (TAP) Professional Learning programme;
- Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters Programme (RADY); Children's University;
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) Cost of the School Day;
- Supporting Vulnerable Learners with Teaching and Learning;
- Welsh Government Family and Community Engagement Toolkit and
- Learning networks.

The EAS delivered network sessions to enable schools to collaborate and share practice and led professional learning sessions to improve practitioner knowledge and behaviours. This was further strengthened by EAS funding to enable schools to engage in the Foundation of

Community Engagement (FCE) Heart of the community award to support schools to drive this strategically within their school development planning.

The EAS also brokered support from Challenging Education the RADY (Raising Attainment for Disadvantaged Youngsters) Programme. RADY is a support programme for schools to mitigate the impact of poverty and disadvantage for identified learners through an 'equity not equality' approach.

During the spring term visits, school improvement partners focused on evaluating the impact of professional learning to help overcome aspects of poverty.

What difference has this made?

In schools engaged in the TAP training, professional learning to mitigate the impact of poverty has led to changes to whole school vision, policy, planning and curriculum provision. Nearly all have adopted an approach which is bespoke to the needs of their pupils, families and communities. Following the training, most schools sent out surveys to parents to ascertain need within the community. Across nearly all of these schools, there is a well understood and shared vision for raising aspirations and the wellbeing of all pupils. Staff are committed to working more effectively together to meet the needs of pupils. Nearly all schools have identified tackling aspects of poverty within their school development plan, reflecting the need of their learners and families.

Most schools are more aware of the financial pressures on families and are committed to reducing the cost of the school day. Most schools have modified their uniform policy to ensure equity for all and provide recycled uniform. Schools have found ways to reduce the cost of school trips and sign-post support to parents via newsletters and their website. Many schools provide support to individual families, for example, by working with local churches and charities to provide food parcels where needed. In a majority of schools, the PTFA have also made a commitment in their programme of events to reduce the cost to families.

Several schools have engaged well with RADY programme to support the raising of attainment for disadvantaged learners and in one the approach is well-established. As a result, in this school, there is a strong understanding of the needs of all pupils and the community within the school. The headteacher and staff know their pupils well. There is a shared a vision for raising aspirations and well-being of all pupils and a whole school approach to removing barriers to learning so that all learners have equitable experiences and chances.

In many schools, the curriculum offer has been reviewed to reflect the needs of the pupils and additional provision is made for these needs. For example, one school has a strong emphasis on learning outdoors, on developing independence, developing resilience through growth mindset, and developing a sense of belonging and community. The development of a Community Farm at the school has been successful in supporting the school with this.

Pupil learning reviews help to identify barriers to learning and gauge pupil interests which inform planning. Pupil voice activities help to understand the needs of all learners. For example, in one school pupil leadership teams are representative of the school's various vulnerable groups including eFSM pupils, who are encouraged to have an active voice in the school's improvement journey.

Many schools take advantage of opportunities to visit local places of interest rather than travelling further afield and incurring higher transport costs. For dressing up days, most schools

ask children to wear their own clothes as opposed to purchasing expensive dressing up items. For example, one primary school has built financial literacy into the curriculum in Years 5 and 6 to enable learners to have a greater awareness of the cost of running a home. As a result, combatting poverty locally, nationally & globally is considered within the whole school curriculum.

In most schools, PDG funding is used appropriately for staff to deliver tailored intervention or wellbeing programmes. In a few schools, a percentage of this funding used to provide individual music lessons.

In about half of schools, there are very small number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and in many of these cases there is very little difference in teacher assessment of progress across the school. This is consistent with Estyn reports where it is noted that many schools have effective arrangements to school provide support vulnerable pupils, including pupils eligible for free school meals and as a result, many make good progress or better progress.

Estyn commented.

"The school's approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage is highly effective. Staff work diligently to support the most vulnerable groups by providing specific intervention that impacts positively on their progress in learning."

"During their time in the school, most pupils including those who are eligible for free school meals make good progress in their learning during their time in the school"

"Pupils eligible for free school meals progress well from their individual starting points and achieve well against their individual targets"

Next steps

- EAS to continue to facilitate the dissemination of effective practice in relation to tackling poverty across all schools in Monmouthshire.
- LA to continue to promote regional professional learning in relation to RADY, especially to those schools where eFSM performance is below local and national averages.
- EAS to continue to work with schools to develop their whole school approach to curriculum provision to reflect the needs of their pupils, families and communities.
- EAS to continue to support identified schools to help develop effective teaching strategies that enable eFSM learners to make strong progress in their learning

Additional Learning Needs Provision and Development:

What have we done differently and what was its impact?

As a result of the outcomes of the additional learning provision (ALP) Review of Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) during March to May 2023 and wider requirements around the local authority duty to keep ALP under review in Chapter 7 of the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021, grant funding was used to recruit to a seconded post of Additional Learning Provision and Partnership Lead. This role focuses on quality assuring the provision in place to meet children and young people with barriers to learning or identified ALN. Most impactful is

the time available to work at a strategic level to implement systems and processes around quality assurance and support schools to take actions based on the findings.

Following the ALP Review of SRBs, feedback has been provided to the SRB Lead Teachers and host school Headteachers resulting in the development of robust Action Plans. These have identified the areas requiring development, which are reviewed with SRB Lead Teachers and an LA Officer at least termly, with clear updates supported by the quality assurance systems in place. This has allowed clear LA oversight of the SRB provision and the progress being made. The Specialist Provision and Outreach Team (SPOT) Network has supported the development of consistent policies, provision, recruitment, training offer and admissions across our specialist provision. Upskilling of SRB Lead teachers has been evident. We have also brought all SRBs staff together in two twilights, one focused on developing the collective vision and another supporting consistency of training. Consistency of practice is developing and will be further supported through the Partnership Agreement between SRB host schools and the LA.

Secondary SRB Leads have worked in collaboration to further hone the pathways available for young people in Key Stage 4 and at Post 16. This has included community links, work experience / volunteering roles and suitable and purposeful vocational qualification routes to support increasing independence and securing appropriate pathways at Post 19 (further education, training or employment).

Robust quality assurance processes have been developed around ALN at a school, cluster and LA level. Working with schools to develop these processes has been positive. These are contributing to the duty for the LA to keep ALP under review, alongside the developing practice and provision required to meet ALN cohort needs. An ALP offer has been developed through cluster meetings and is currently under consultation; this is supporting equitability of the offer across Monmouthshire. Cluster and LA wide Individual Development Plan (IDP) moderation sessions demonstrate the wide range of provision available across Monmouthshire to support children and young people with ALN.

The secondary ALNCo cluster team has been re-established, ensuring a clear method of collaboration and support for ALN development across our secondary schools. This has resulted in the development of an ALN / ALP supported self-evaluation review process.

One primary ALNCo cluster has trialled a supported self-evaluation approach of ALN / ALP across three schools. Feedback and reflections from this trial has led to an agreement to embed this approach across all ALNCo primary clusters from September 2024.

The Education Support Team (EST) was fully staffed from September 2023 and aims to support schools to meet the needs of primary aged children presenting with behaviours that challenge/ concern, including those with ALN, neurodevelopmental differences, and those at risk of exclusion. They also support schools to meet the needs of Children Looked After (CLA). EST work collaboratively with the Vulnerable Learners Lead, the Educational Psychology Service, and Lead Teachers in the Specialists Resource Bases (SRBs), to support schools in a joined up and coherent way. Early feedback from schools has been extremely positive, and the model continues to develop.

Our ongoing work with Autism Education Trust (AET) has led to the establishment of a Monmouthshire Autism in Schools and Settings training team from across the directorate. The Making Sense of Autism initial training package has been developed, taking into account the views of Monmouthshire children/ young people, families and professionals some of whom

feature in films developed for the training. Autism Champions are in place in every school and setting. The baseline of practise has been captured to allow a clear measure of impact.

What evidence do we have to illustrate this?

SRB

Through a clear tracking and monitoring process of our agreed Action Plans, it is evident that progress for nearly all children and young people in our SRBs is good and our SRBs can meet a greater complexity of ALN, evidenced through the reduced number of children and young people accessing out of county specialist or independent specialist placements. Through this process and the Specialist Provision and Outreach Team (SPOT) Network, the SRB ALP offer has become more equitable, with nearly all children and young people attending their local SRB at point of entry and transition to secondary in September 2024. There continues to be a reduction in the number of out of county and independent specialist provision being required for the areas within the designation for the SRBs.

There is a reduction in SRB learners seeking specialist placements at Post 19. Learners are showing an increase in independence at an appropriate level when reviewing their outcomes.

In school inspections, Estyn have identified and shared a case study on the inclusivity and integration of the specialist resource base.

In a school inspection report, Estyn have commented:

“Teaching in the SRB is highly effective. Teachers use a wide variety of strategies that are carefully matched to pupils’ individual needs. This includes multi-sensory approaches and a range of practical activities, such as cookery, gardening in the community and working in the school food hall. This helps these pupils to make good progress, especially in their social and communication skills.”

“Pupils across the school, including those who access the SRB, take on leadership opportunities.”

“Staff in the SRB provide high levels of care and support for pupils with an extensive range of needs. Pupils who attend the SRB are given valuable opportunities to develop their life skills through a wide variety of activities, which they value highly. They access mainstream lessons where appropriate, and staff prepare them well to integrate with the wider school community.”

Mainstream

Cluster meetings have allowed the sharing of best practice around ALP. IDP Moderation sessions demonstrate the range of ALP available across Monmouthshire and how the needs of children and young people with ALN are met in our mainstream settings. The ALN / ALP supported self-evaluation review completed across all secondary schools demonstrates the range of ALP available and the positive progress of the majority of children and young people with ALN. This is supported through annual review paperwork and in the majority of cases, the tracking of learner outcomes. This in turn has seen an increase in the confidence of ALNCoS to meet their statutory duties around ALN.

Increasing attendance and engagement of ALNCOs through the Professional Learning is evident. Evaluations highlight the positive impact of training, cluster meetings and forums for the majority of ALNCOs. Access to wider staff training, including person-centred practice and RISE (resilient, independent, successful and engaged) learners has been well received. Further focus is required around the sustained impact of training on practice, provision and learner progress.

In school inspections, Estyn have commented:

“The school’s provision for pupils with ALN is effective. The ALN co-ordinator works proactively with staff to identify when support is needed and to implement a range of beneficial interventions.”

“The ALN Co-ordinator, supported by a motivated team of staff, ensures highly effective provision for pupils with ALN across the school. As a result, most pupils with ALN make strong progress over time. The school has robust systems to identify pupils with ALN and ensure that they receive the provision they need.”

“The school’s provision for all pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is robust. The class teachers and highly effective teaching assistants plan and deliver tailored programmes that meet the pupils’ individual needs effectively. Staff track the progress of pupils requiring additional learning support carefully and, as a result, these pupils make the expected level of progress.”

“Support for pupils with ALN and other barriers to learning is a particular strength. The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCO) has a clear vision for how the school identifies needs and provides pupils with individualised support. The ALNCO is supported well by the ALN team. All staff are updated regularly and access important information to inform their planning.”

What do we need to change and do differently next year?

SRBs

Develop the approach to the SRB ALP review and determine the bi-annual cycle. This aims to review previous outcomes and update action plans. A peer supportive approach to this may be appropriate to allow the ongoing sharing of best practice and further equity of the offer.

Continued projection of SRB numbers will be essential to ensure we have the ALP available within Monmouthshire to meet the needs of Monmouthshire children and young people.

Consider the development of more therapeutic provision to meet the needs of our children and young people with the most complex presentations of ALN. This should further reduce the requirements of independent specialist placements at significant cost to the LA and take children and young people out of their community.

Mainstream

Implementation of the ALN / ALP Supported self-evaluation process across all settings will provide us with a clear overview of school led provision and its impact, to determine any insufficiencies in provision. Continued consideration around systems, processes and provision for children and young people with social emotional and mental health (SEMH) challenges. This

includes the ongoing training offer to ALNCos and schools, as well as the outreach support provided through EST and OASIS.

Continued development of the Professional Learning offer, being responsive to school needs and requirements, as well as focusing on quality assurance of the sustained impact of training delivery.

Delivery of the Making Sense of Autism training across all schools and settings, with the quality assurance around impact on practice and provision for our autistic population and its sustained impact.

Changing Perspectives – the development of EBSA approaches

One of the most significant changes in the period post-pandemic has been the growth of children who cannot access school because of their emotional and mental health needs. This can lead to school avoidance, if we want to create a system that is truly inclusive then we must ensure that our learners can access our schools and provision. The EBSA approach provides a framework to tackle this.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is a complex area of need and in Monmouthshire we provide an embedded training and support programme for school staff, and other professionals supporting children and young people and their families. 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.

The need for work in this area was first highlighted prior to the pandemic, however, it provided a catalyst and the programme took root in light of the expected increase in child and parent/carer anxiety following the prolonged closure of schools. In a study¹² looking at pupil views on their education in the context of the pandemic 1,758 children and young people completed questionnaires. A key message emerged about the development of a graduated response to EBSA so that local authorities could better support schools in identifying and working with children/ young people who present with EBSA, and their families. In Monmouthshire we recognised the need for preventative work and early intervention, with the need for a 'continuum of intervention' for pupils who were beginning to present with EBSA.

In line with the evidence base that highlights the importance of a multi-agency approach Monmouthshire Educational Psychology Service (EPS) established a cross directorate EBSA group to coordinate a professional development training programme and pathway of graduated response to EBSA which focuses on early identification and enhanced understanding of the complexities facing children/ young people and their families.

The project included developing and producing Monmouthshire EBSA Guidance and Resources, including an EBSA Pathway, an EBSA Support Plan, good practice support guidelines for schools for attendance and wellbeing, and downloadable resources to meaningfully gain the voice of the child/young person. An 'Introduction to EBSA' training package was created and has been part of the professional learning offer since May 2021. It highlights the importance of the development of EBSA awareness, EBSA processes and a whole-school approach for working with children and young people. The training has been attended by a wide range of school staff (e.g. senior leaders, Emotional Literacy Support Assistants, and Wellbeing Leads); health professionals and other professionals and LA officers, with 100% of attendees agreeing that the training increased their understanding of EBSA and its impact on children/ young people's wellbeing, and an average rating of 4.5 out of 5 in terms of the training having a high impact on their work with children/ young people.

Alongside the cycle of professional training, support was embedded to ensure sustainability and fidelity, including an offer of online EBSA Consultation sessions facilitated by the EPS and Family Support Services, with one session each year focusing specifically on transition to secondary school. These sessions provide a solution-focused space, where good practice is shared between schools, professionals and LA officers supporting EBSA across Monmouthshire.

¹² <https://www.aep.org.uk/articles/exploring-pupil-views-their-education-during-pandemic?vAction=swpTextOnly>

Since the EBSA project was launched, all four of Monmouthshire's secondary schools have also received bespoke EBSA training, and one secondary school, in partnership with the LA, piloted a bespoke provision for a small group of pupils presenting with EBSA.

In Monmouthshire in response to the long waiting times to access CAMHS support, the requirements for accessing education other than at school (EOTAS) provision changed to include Educational Psychology reports. This ensures a reduction in the potential period of time that a child/young person has to wait for EOTAS provision if they are experiencing entrenched EBSA and are not currently able to access school-based provision.

"The resources will help us to identify better and earlier children at risk of EBSA. I also think that the resources and guidance will help us to be more systematic and thorough in our approach to supporting these children." (Wellbeing Lead in a Primary School)

"I think it will help me change my language around school avoidance to be less "blaming". (HLTA Inclusion and ELSA)

What we are seeking to achieve:

Continue our programme of school modernisation.

What have we done differently and what was its impact?

We have continued our programme of school modernisation. The new King Henry VIII 3-19 School opened in September 2023. The establishment of the 3-19 school has provided increased and beneficial opportunities for pupils in years 5 and 6 to experience a wider curriculum offer this year, particularly in science, arts, and languages. For example, pupils have had frequent opportunities to be taught by staff in the upper phase, which is significantly enhancing the transition processes, particularly for vulnerable groups of pupils. Similarly, increased opportunities for staff across all phases to work together in two areas, supporting curriculum development and progression well. However, the full benefits of the 3-19 school will not be maximised until the school move into their new building.

In addition to the maintained nursery, there will also be a Flying Start setting on the site of King Henry VIII 3-19 School offering wrap around childcare and Flying Start childcare places.

Construction of the new building for King Henry VIII 3-19 School has been ongoing since July 2022 and completion and handover of Phase 1 will be April 2025 and hand over and final completion of the project April 2026. There have been delays to the project which were outside the control and influence of both the Local Authority and Lead Contractor. These delays contributed to the handover being delayed until April 2025 rather than November 2024.

The new school will be the first 3-19 Net Zero Carbon operation school in Wales.

We are also in the process of building a purpose-built childcare facility on the grounds of Trellech Primary School that will house the non-maintained setting and provide early education and childcare places for children aged 2-5 years. This will enable them to develop strong links with the school and facilitate a positive transition experience for children moving from the early years setting to school.

We have continued our programme for increasing growth in Welsh medium education concluding the statutory consultation period to establish a Welsh medium seedling school in Monmouth. The school will be based on the Overmonnow Primary School site from September 2024. The school will be called Ysgol Gymraeg Trefynwy

This proposal will see the replacement of 2 temporary classrooms with permanent build and the remodelling of part of Overmonnow school site to provide completely discreet accommodation for the seedling school. The project will provide shared facilities, such as dining hall, school hall and playgrounds, all of which will be managed through timetabling thus facilitating complete immersion for those wishing to learn through the medium of Welsh. There are currently 14 scheduled to start at Ysgol Trefynwy from September 2024 ranging from Nursery to Yr 1

Following the transfer of the pupils to the new 3-19 school in Abergavenny, pupils from Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni will relocate to the former Deri View school site. This will give sufficient space for the school to grow and provide 420 places plus nursery for those wishing to attend Welsh medium education in Abergavenny and its environs. This proposal is still subject to consideration of any objections to the Statutory Notices and a final Cabinet decision.

Members will recall that a commitment was made to replace all 4 secondary schools in the County and a piece of work has commenced to look at a review of education in the Chepstow

area. Architects were appointed to undertake a master planning and site appraisal exercise of the Chepstow school site. The exercise concluded that there are special requirements to fit a 3-19 school plus SRB and wraparound childcare on the site, should this be the chosen way forward.

A piece of work has been undertaken with staff and pupils at Chepstow school to understand their vision for education and for a new school building. Further work will be undertaken during the next academic year with primary schools in the area and the community to conclude this piece of work and develop a brief for education in the Chepstow area.

What evidence do we have to illustrate this?

The new build in Abergavenny is making significant progress and will open in the spring of 2025.

We have undertaken a statutory consultation to determine the establishment of Ysgol Gymraeg Trefynwy and worked alongside the Governing Body of Overmonnow Primary School to help facilitate this development. Working with our partners across the region we have secured the support of Kath Matthews, Headteacher of Ysgol Cwm Derwen to lead the seedling school.

What do we need to change and do differently next year?

We will build on the progress we have made this year to finish King Henry 3-19 School and develop Welsh medium education in the north of the County, both in Abergavenny and Monmouth.

We will develop further our plans for education in the Chepstow area involving headteachers and by listening to the community voice.

What we are seeking to achieve:

Promote whole school approaches to support the mental well-being of children and young people.

What have we done differently and what was its impact?

Building momentum from the previous year, we have highlighted the benefits of the Welsh Government Statutory [framework](#) on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing via our cluster wellbeing meetings, encouraging schools to share their practice and work collaboratively. Focussing our resources to work with individual schools on a robust self-evaluation has seen school engagement levels almost double during the past year. Stakeholder surveys have been developed in collaboration with school colleagues, supporting schools to scope their current practice, to celebrate what is working well and to understand what needs to improve in their school community by listening to the whole school community. This is a key principle in whole school approaches. In some schools, this has improved the role governors play in the wellbeing provision in school. A webinar has also been developed by the EAS that aims to further support governors in their role.

During the scoping stage schools are supported to identify their areas of development to improve the health and wellbeing of their school communities. The most common areas of development in Monmouthshire schools are staff wellbeing, the health and wellbeing curriculum and effective communication of wellbeing support for the whole school community. We have already seen improvements to staff rooms in some schools, the use of the School Health Research Network (SHRN) pupil health and wellbeing survey data to inform curriculum development continues to grow from strength to strength and many schools are reviewing and improving how they communicate their wellbeing support. Supporting schools to write clear actions plans and to seek support from external partners is work in progress and a key focus during the next year.

What evidence do we have to illustrate this?

- Currently 29 schools (85%) are engaged in this work programme. This is an increase from 16 schools (47%) in the last year.
- 14 schools (41%) have completed a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing self-evaluation tool in full. A further 8 schools are over halfway through completion.
- 21 schools (62%) have made good progress in engaging with key stakeholders. Of the 21 schools, 9 schools have fully engaged with all stakeholders.
- 20 schools (59%) have clear actions in place to improve the health and wellbeing of their school communities.

What do we need to change and do differently next year?

We have made progress in developing a cluster model of support and collaboration. Schools have started to identify similar areas of development and the benefits of working in partnership. We will build upon this during the next year and aim to further support schools to share effective practice.

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA)

Monmouthshire has placed significant value on the availability of adults to work with children to promote their emotional wellbeing. The ELSA programme operates across Monmouthshire and allows learners to access well trained, familiar adults who can provide support at any time. They are a key component of our whole school approaches.

ELSA was first established in Monmouthshire in 2016, it is widely implemented across the UK. Currently we have 67 practicing ELSAs, with every school having at least one active ELSA. This model is led and delivered by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and teaching assistants (TAs) complete six days of initial training, before working as ELSAs in their settings. They receive ongoing, half termly EPS led group supervision and an annual CPD day.

ELSA is an evidence based, targeted school intervention designed to build capacity of schools (or settings) to support the emotional needs of their learners from within their own resources. This is achieved by TAs to develop and deliver individualised support programmes to meet the emotional needs of children and young people in their setting. This recognises that children and young people learn better and are happier in school if their emotional needs are well met.

As well as providing time-limited ELSA intervention for individual learners, ELSAs often also offer preventative and universal support across the school, for example, check-ins and early support for pupils experiencing school worries/emotionally based school anxiety.

There is a wealth of published research around the impact of ELSA, this is highlighted in Estyn's 2019 report *Healthy and Happy*¹³ which highlighted (a Monmouthshire) primary school's use of ELSA. In Monmouthshire three pieces of in-depth research around ELSA have been completed by Trainee EPs associated with Cardiff University.

As a result of evidence of high standards in training and supervision of ELSAs, in November 2023, Monmouthshire was awarded the ELSA Quality Mark.

Feedback from schools in the EPS Annual Evaluation 2022-23 showed that 100% of respondents had an active ELSA and 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the ELSA had made a positive impact on the wellbeing of children/young people in their school.

¹³ [Healthy and happy – school impact on pupils' health and wellbeing \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/healthy-and-happy-school-impact-on-pupils-health-and-wellbeing)

Conclusion

To conclude I come back to the very beginning of this report, its purpose was to provide Council with a review of the last year, the progress we have made and the areas where we must still improve further.

There is an absolute belief and commitment across all the services in the Children and Young People's Directorate to provide the very best services and support for our schools and settings as possible. The demands upon the services and the complexity that the teams work with is increasing but through evidence informed practice we can develop new interventions.

There are significant reasons to be positive about education in Monmouthshire. We conclude the Estyn inspection cycle with no schools in a follow up category. While some schools have needed intensive support through the year I have been greatly reassured by their engagement with the authority and the EAS which has seen improvements gained.

It has been hugely positive to read Estyn reports that cite the progress our learners are making in their learning. This will be a relentless focus for us in the coming academic year and we are discussing with schools how we can develop authority wide approaches to capturing the impact of their teaching.

Our ambition to provide excellent learning environments continues. The next year will see our first net-zero carbon school open and plans to develop a new school in Chepstow have begun. Alongside these major investments we have also seen commitments to develop the Welsh medium schools and the provision for learners in the PRS.

I am, however, not complacent about the position of our system. The introduction of the new Estyn inspection framework with the removal of the Estyn Review category will, inevitably, see some schools move into a statutory category. This will require us to provide greater levels of support to them at a time when the school improvement system is moving through a period of change. It is vital therefore, that we can learn as much as we can about the practice in our schools to ensure that there are no unexpected inspection outcomes.

Societal changes in the period following the pandemic continue to place pressures on our schools and the services that support them. Our response to this must be to support our schools to develop practices that are inclusive and based on managing potential risks in a safe and well understood way. Alongside this support for the workforce, we also need to ensure that services like the PRS can provide early engagement and preventative services.

In conclusion, our education system is in a good position to move forward. Our schools are well led and have an experienced workforce who are working well to deliver excellent teaching and learning for our children. But there are challenges, funding and demands weigh heavily on system leaders' minds and these are increasingly acute challenges. Our focus will continue to be to meet the ambitions of the Community and Corporate Plans but also to address the Estyn recommendations from our 2020 inspection. These still hold true; to create and lead an education service that has equity and excellence at its heart.

My final word must always be one of thanks to all of my colleagues; in the Directorate, across all our partners and of course, our schools. Their commitment is exceptional, and this report could not have been written without their dedication and energy.