

SUBJECT: Estyn Inspection of Monmouthshire's Education Services

MEETING: Performance and Overview Committee

DATE: 10th March 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE

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

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3. KEY ISSUES

Leadership, Evaluation and Governance

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

School Improvement and Financial Sustainability

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

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

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

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

Attendance and Inclusion

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

Welsh Language and Welsh-medium Education

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

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR SCRUTINY

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

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

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

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

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

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

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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

8. CONSULTEES

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

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 Not applicable

10. AUTHOR

Will McLean, Strategic Director, Children, Learning, Skills and Economy

11. CONTACT DETAILS

WillMcLean@monmouthshire.gov.uk

07834435934