

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 10th March 2026

Report Item 4: Estyn Report

The Committee undertook thorough scrutiny of the report, highlighting the following important issues:

Members focused on how effectively elected Members are informed about school deficits and financial recovery, particularly when responding to concerns raised by residents. Questions explored whether current reporting clearly explains the causes of individual school overspends, the scale and growth of the overall schools deficit, and whether this represents isolated cases or system-wide pressure. Members also raised concerns about industrial action and financial recovery at King Henry VIII School, seeking clarity on recovery timescales and the balance between restoring financial stability and protecting learners.

Further questioning examined how the Council evaluates its own impact, including how Estyn's concerns about under-evaluation are being addressed. Members asked how scrutiny could move beyond snapshot reports to track improvement work over time, and whether a Task and Finish Group could help build shared understanding of complex issues such as school deficits and enable more informed recommendations. There was also challenge around the absence of a clear, outcome-focused performance framework, and how issues such as attendance, exclusions, ALN outcomes and intervention impact are consistently captured and reported.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair confirmed that the report and recommendations were agreed, noting that while scrutiny had rightly focused on the more challenging issues, there was also a great deal of strong and positive work in the report that should be acknowledged and fed back to the wider team. The Chair also confirmed that the committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to look more closely at some of the matters raised, such as school deficit recovery, with the detailed scope and timeframe to be picked up outside the meeting.

Report Item 5: School Examination Results (Key Stage 4)

The Committee undertook thorough scrutiny of the report, highlighting the following important issues:

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Members questioned how school performance data should be interpreted, including the meaning and usefulness of family rankings and whether variation between schools indicated systemic issues or school-specific challenges. Questions explored why some schools had improved while others continued to face difficulties, what learning could be shared from stronger-performing schools, and whether strong outcomes in some areas might be masking weaker performance elsewhere, particularly among lower-attaining learners.

Questions were raised about the real performance of our schools in the competitive environment of education – as there is no comparative information on educational outcomes in the UK. The only comparative information available to parents and learners is contained in the bi-annual PISA results that show Wales as a whole substantially below the OECD average, also with the lowest outcomes in the UK.

Additional lines of enquiry focused on equity and outcomes for vulnerable groups, including pupils eligible for free school meals and those leaving Key Stage 4 with no qualifications. Members asked about post-16 tracking arrangements, the appropriateness of qualification pathways for at-risk learners, and whether earlier identification could better guide pupils towards more suitable routes. Questions also examined the FSM attainment gap, how emerging trends align with the Council's inclusion objectives, and what targeted interventions are in place to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions.

Report Item 6: School Attendance

The Committee undertook thorough scrutiny of the report, highlighting the following important issues:

Members explored the drivers of non-attendance, particularly the gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils and the implications for long-term outcomes. Questions focused on how attendance is tracked and analysed, including breakdowns by year group, school, pupil group and authorised versus unauthorised absence. Members also asked how changes to Welsh Government definitions of persistent absence are being managed and how early identification is used to trigger proportionate intervention.

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Further discussion examined the support provided to pupils and families, including responses to persistent absence, reintegration following long absences, and the use of trauma-informed and preventative approaches. Members queried how attendance issues intersect with exclusions, mental health, behavioural needs and elective home education, and how services across the directorate work together to identify root causes and intervene early. The importance of early intervention, particularly in primary schools and at key transition points, was highlighted as a means of preventing entrenched disadvantage.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions.