



CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMITTEE SUMMONS

C.Hanagan
Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale CF40 2XX

Meeting Contact: Sarah Daniel - Principal Democratic & Scrutiny Officer (07385 086 169)

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a hybrid meeting of the **EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** to be held on **MONDAY, 16TH OCTOBER, 2023** at **5.00 PM.**

Non Committee Members and Members of the public may request the facility to address the Committee at their meetings on the business listed although facilitation of this request is at the discretion of the Chair. It is kindly asked that such notification is made to Democratic Services by Thursday, 12 October 2023 on the contact details listed above, including stipulating whether the address will be in Welsh or English.

AGENDA

**Page
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SCRUTINY RESEARCH

A scrutiny research facility is available within the Council Business Unit to support Members' scrutiny responsibilities and their roles as Elected Members. Such research strengthens Scrutiny Committee work programmes to ensure outcome-based topics are identified. For any scrutiny research requirements please contact scrutiny@rctcbc.gov.uk

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and

2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

2. MINUTES

To approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on the 14th September 2023.

5 - 14

REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS

3. CONSULTATION LINKS

Information is provided in respect of relevant [consultations](#) for consideration by the Committee.

4. BI-ANNUAL CABINET MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

To provide Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to challenge and scrutinise the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language

15 - 20

5. MEMBER NOMINATION - CHILD POVERTY

To nominate two Members of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee to be invited to attend the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to contribute to discussions on the [Child Poverty Notice of Motion](#)

OFFICER'S REPORTS

6. CHILD POVERTY AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS UPDATE

To scrutinise and challenge the Child Poverty and Community Focused School approach in RCT.

21 - 44

7. AN UPDATE ON YEAR 2 OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND EDUCATION TRIBUNAL ACT 2018 IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

To scrutinise and challenge the implementation of the ALNET (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal) Wales Act (2018) and its associated ALN Code for Wales (2021) in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) during the academic year 2022/23.

8. CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

To reflect on the meeting and actions to be taken forward.

9. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any items, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication**Circulation:-**

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee (County Borough Councillor S Evans and County Borough Councillor K Webb respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor M Ashford, Councillor J Brencher, Councillor J Cook, Councillor J Elliott, Councillor S Emanuel, Councillor R Evans, Councillor S Hickman, Councillor C Lises, Councillor M Maohoub, Councillor C Preedy, Councillor J Smith and Councillor D Wood

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr P Booth, Voting Diocesan Authorities Representative
 Mr M Cleverley, Representing NASUWT and Teachers' Panel
 Ms A Jones, Representing UNITE
 Mr C Jones, Representing GMB
 Mrs R Lydon, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
 Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
 Mr D Price, Representing UNISON
 Mr M Thomas, Representing NEU
 Mr M Veale, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday,
14 September 2023 at 5.00 pm.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor S Evans (Chair)

Councillor M Maohoub Councillor C Preedy

The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present online:-

Councillor K Webb Councillor J Brencher
Councillor J Cook Councillor J Elliott
Councillor S Hickman Councillor C Lises
Councillor D Wood

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr P Booth, Voting Diocesan Authorities Representative
Mr M Cleverley, Representing NASUWT and Teachers' Panel
Mrs R Lydon, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr M Thomas, Representing NEU
Mr M Veale, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms L Howell, 21st Century School Organisation and Business Manager
Ms A Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Ms K Hill, Head of Learner Support Service
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Mrs T Watson, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors Ashford, Emanuel and Smith, Co-opted Member, Mr L Patterson, the Head of Access & Inclusion Services, Ceri Jones, the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language, Cllr Lewis and the Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications, Christian Hanagan.

17 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Agenda item 4 – Consultation on a proposal to develop a new 3-19 special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf

- County Borough Councillor C Preedy - Personal - 'One of the Schools named in the report, Ysgol Ty Coch, sits in my ward'
- Mr R Lydon, Co-opted Member – Personal – 'I am Chair of Governor of Park Lane Special School'

Agenda Item 5 - Consultation on the proposals to realign Additional Learning Needs mainstream Learning Support Class provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf

- County Borough Councillor S Evans – Personal – 'The school that my son attends is named in the report'
- County Borough Councillor C Lises – Personal – 'I am Chair of Governors at Hawthorn Primary and Member of the Governing body at Hawthorn Secondary School'
- Mr M Veale, Co-opted Member – Personal – 'I am Governor at Hawthorn Highschool and of the temporary Governing Body for Ysgol Afon Wen'

18 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 19th July 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting subject to the following amendment:-

That the Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance should read Head of Service, Transformation, Admissions & Governance.

19 CONSULTATION LINKS

Members were advised that the latest open consultations being run by Welsh Government, were circulated on the 1st September, and at this time, there are no new relevant Welsh Government consultations to bring to Members attention.

20 PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the purpose was for the Committee to formally respond to the Council's consultation which proposed to develop a 3-19 new special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation provided Members with information regarding the proposals to develop a new special school in RCT and took Members through the report.

A Member asked about the parental responses to the consultation, how engaged they were and what the process was for consulting with parents of children with existing needs.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation acknowledged there had been individual meetings with each of the

special schools, as part of the school organisation code process, including governors, pupils, school council, and parents. In addition, an open evening was held at Clydach Vale, which was poorly attended. The consultation document had also been sent to schools within RCT for comment.

The 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager confirmed that all parents with children at special schools were sent the link to the consultation documents and to date, there were 44 responses, with less than half being negative. It was noted that it hadn't been considered to be a controversial consultation, and the feedback had been positive on the whole. Meetings with existing staff members and the governing bodies at all the schools had seen relatively low attendance.

A Member asked for a summary of response from Menter Iaith, Mudiad Meithrin and the Welsh Language Commissioner.

The 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager confirmed that to date, no responses had been received. The only statutory consultee response received to date was from Estyn.

The Member asked how many pupils transitioned from a special school to mainstream learning support class and vice versa.

The Head of Learner Support Service explained that in the last five years she had known only one child who had gone from a special school to mainstream. In terms of LSC through to special schools, lots of parents would give the child the opportunity in the safe environment of a primary school, but the step into secondary was just too big.

The Member also asked for clarification about the differences in data.

The 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager explained that within the Code, the minimum needed to be used was the last 5 years data in terms of attendance, although she acknowledged the other report used 10 years. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services added that the data within the special school report demonstrated significant growth, in terms of demand.

The Member noted the significant out of county provision and the cost attached to that and sought assurance that this provision may alleviate some of that cost, with the new expanded provision.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that with regard to out of county provision the Council was good at keeping children within county and within existing provisions. There were exceptions e.g., when children and young people required a residential placement, or when the local authority was directed by Tribunal to place learners in provisions out of county. There had been a reduction in out of county costs, but it was difficult to give any reassurance in relation to

future placements given the increase in complexity of need and demand for special school placements, but the proposal should significantly enhance capacity.

A Member referred to Page 49 and asked what options had been explored in terms of post 16 provision.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that some really good work had been done in developing post 16 specialist provision on college campuses, which had worked really effectively but there were restrictions on some school sites, with regard to expanding post 16 provision.

A Member referred to the maintenance costs associated with the existing special schools, and asked if those maintenance costs would be alleviated by the proposal.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation acknowledged that the maintenance costs would still be there, but through the Council's Capital Programme, would look to support the schools to reduce the backlog of repairs and maintenance, although it was a challenge. Existing Capital had also been invested in special schools, over the last 3 years to improve them.

A Member noted the Council's commitment to becoming carbon neutral and asked for clarification around the impact of transportation.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation acknowledged that there would not be much of a reduction in cost, so it was more about keep children within catchments, as some of the distances would not be as great as they were now, which would be a benefit. It was acknowledged that there would not be any savings, but it was not expected that transport costs would increase significantly.

A Member asked if the Council had considered contracting environmentally friendly vehicles e.g., electric.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation confirmed that a lot of the taxis and school transport, encouraged by the integrated school transport team, was reverting to electric vehicles, so this was an encouraging outlook.

A Member asked if out of county provision would be visited to look at examples.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that they had already been to see one provision, as well as meeting with specialist design teams, with workshops held about what a new school could potentially look like, highlighting that the design team worked across the UK, so they could draw on best practice, with further visits to be held

where deemed appropriate.

The Member also sought clarification around speech and language support available in non-specialist units in schools.

The Head of Learner Support Service acknowledged that there were a couple of strategies and approaches available including outreach teams in the schools, as well as dedicated outreach teachers, whilst working in partnership with Health. In addition, there was a pilot project on early language, which was in the second year. This ensures schools are equipped to meet the needs of children who present as non-verbal on entry.

A Member sought clarification around the workforce, and asked if it already existed in RCT, acknowledging the need for highly skilled and trained teachers and support staff.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that any new setting was an incredible draw for people in terms of recruitment and didn't anticipate that would be a significant problem, in attracting to the sector. However, it was acknowledged that a new setting could have a knock-on effect on staffing in existing provisions, which needed to be mitigated against. It was hoped that this proposal would attract staff from beyond existing specialist settings as well.

A Member expressed concern with regard to the equality impact screening and requested that a full impact equality assessment is carried out.

A Member referred to the capacity calculations, and felt it needed to be clear, in terms of predictions, for the number of special school places to be clarified in the future and whether the new set-up would cover that.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation explained it was difficult because Welsh Government don't specify capacity calculations for a special school, instead there are building bulletin guidelines, , and recognised it was a moving feast with children with varying needs.

A Member was fully supportive of gender-neutral toilets noting that their primary consideration was design and safety, and the preferable model was with everything contained within a single unit.

A Member fully concurred with the Member, and agreed this was the model that should be aimed for.

A Member asked if consideration had been given to a specialist Welsh Medium support e.g., Welsh speaking staff or a stream.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that as far as

possible in existing special school provision, where staff spoke Welsh, and children stemmed from Welsh speaking homes, every endeavour was made to provide those language experiences. Appointing bilingual speakers into any setting, was a benefit, because the WESP was about developing Welsh speaking skills in all settings. It would need to be needs led, as well. So, if significant numbers of children coming into a provision were from Welsh Medium school settings, then this would need to be looked at creatively, to ensure those needs were met. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that this was going to be a designated English Medium setting, but that wasn't to say that the setting could provide Welsh language opportunities within the confines of that provision. We need to be flexible and ensure we do everything we can, to support children with the development of Welsh language skills.

The Head of Learner Support Service advised that one of the WESP actions currently being undertaken was an audit of the bilingual skills of all staff, across every specialist provision, and central specialist services, so it was something actively looked at being developed.

A Member asked if there was a commitment to recruit Welsh speakers actively. It was acknowledged that CfW was a bilingual delivery, but there also needed to be thought given to developing understanding around Welsh d heritage and history and how that could be actively promoted in the new school.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that in the main, the report was about a proposal to consult on a new school. The detail in terms of the curriculum offer, had perhaps not been a the focus for this report, but agreed with everything the Member said, as it was important to develop cultural identity. It was noted that this is an important part of the new CfW, and this would be covered off as part of the curriculum in the new setting. Also, the development of Welsh language skills across a special school, was actively reinforced across all schools, with a number of special schools working with CSC to gain some awards. In terms of Welsh language skills, most job descriptions had desirable Welsh language skills referenced, but if there was a situation where the need was significant, there would be nothing from preventing a headteacher reflecting Welsh language skills were essential when recruiting. for a particular cohort.

Members were very much in support of the proposal and thanked and commended Officers for their time in preparing the proposal. Members then formulated their response to the consultation document.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To respond as consultees upon the proposals detailed in Appendix 1.
2. To provide further comments, observations/recommendations in respect of these proposals prior to Cabinet consideration.
3. To request the Service Director for Democratic Services &

Communications to provide Cabinet with the feedback of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee.

21 CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSALS TO REALIGN ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS MAINSTREAM LEARNING SUPPORT CLASS PROVISION WITHIN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the purpose was for the Committee to pre-scrutinise the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of the proposal to realign the mainstream Learning Support Class (LSC) provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). The Head of Learner Support Service then provided Members with an overview of the decision made by the Council in May 2023 (Appendix A) to give approval to begin formal consultation on the 5 proposals to realign the LSC provision within the County. The Head of Learner support then took Members through the 5 proposals, before continuing through the background at section 4 of the report, and the outcome of the consultations, with respect to the proposals, at section 5, noting the good response. Members were then taken through the remainder of the report.

A Member referring to page 138, table 1, sought clarification, as the majority of the responses disagreed with the proposal, and asked if the reason for this was largely due to the move in location. The Member asked for reassurance that these concerns were mitigated. The Member also sought reassurance that sufficient support was in place for pupils and parents during the transition, including transport.

The Head of Learner Support Service confirmed this was the reason, and explained that some pre-emptive steps had been taken, with 3 pupils who were due to move at the start of the term, remaining until a decision was made. In addition, by moving the start date, it would only be 5 pupils and staff, who would transfer with them, with lots of the opportunities for visits. In terms of transport, it was unlikely to be any different, with a lot of the children already transported into schools. The LSC had really well-established protocols for liaising with parents.

A member noted the School Council's response highlighting their sadness at the proposed move and recognised this as a testament to the school's integration and inclusion of the Learning Support Class, which was to be celebrated.

A Member sought reassurance, that the move in location would not mean a difference in the quality of facilities or experiences received noting from the responses received in the consultation the praise provided for Abercynon Primary School.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation advised that Perthcelyn was one of the newer schools and the facilities were equal to Abercynon.

The Head of Learner Support Service confirmed that all the LSCs ran on the same basis, so there was the same expectations for the delivery of the curriculum, the teachers all had the same support and training, although the way it was going to be delivered was different to capitalise on the opportunities within that school.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that change was difficult, with the impetus around some of the changes was to minimise future transitions by developing all through provisions. If this went ahead, there would be a person-centred approach adopted, in order to mitigate any stress and anxiety for the learners. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that Abercynon and Perthcelyn were both lovely schools and had every confidence that the level of provision would be the same.

A Member queried the consultation process outlined in the report and sought clarification on the information regarding notification of governing bodies to provide responses as part of the consultation. The Member expressed concern that those comments had not been identified within the report. The Member, who is a Member of a governing body affected, noted they could not recall being sent the consultation. The Member also noted on page 145, in respect of proposal 5, Comments/Issues raised 'however responders felt further LSCs are needed' noting the answer talked about 'further reviews will be undertaken' as needed, which they felt was not representative of the original question and response received during the consultation. The Member also noted the comments by Estyn on page 146, where a number of matters had been listed, that they didn't feel had been properly addressed within the consultation document. Whilst the majority of the things were 'should', 3 of them were 'must'.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services advised that to her knowledge the links were sent to all schools/consultees identified, but if it was felt they weren't received, this could be looked into. In terms of the points raised by Estyn, looking at the feedback provided, some of the points raised were quite valid and those had been taken onboard. Despite all the experiences of undertaking statutory consultations it was recognised that a bit more detail in some of the key areas, should have been included, although hopefully the responses had assisted. In terms of the feedback around learning support provision at primary, there was a statutory duty on LAs to keep all ALN provision under review and that was something that was constantly looked at and if there was a need in RCT that was un-met, then that would be looked at.

The Head of Learner Support Service reiterated that as part of the consultation a link to the consultation was sent to each school and the school then shared this with all of the governing bodies and staff, so if that was not happening, this needed to be followed up. In terms of provision, in the current review there was ample primary provision, in terms of meeting the needs of learners with ASD in the locality, but it was the secondary provision that needed to expand. This linked back to the

previous conversation, where children's needs could be more easily met in primary school within the mainstream, but that move to secondary school put more demand on the areas that children with ASD found difficult, so there was more of a demand for places.

The Member clarified their question was regarding proposal 5 and felt this was positive but queried in relation to Learning Support at primary level. The response they received at the time was that provision was not required in this area. The Member noted that the information provided in the report did not accurately reflect this.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that the comments could be noted and would be reflected in the information shared.

A Member referred to paragraph 13.2 of the report, which outlined the Council's aim to work toward a fully operative bilingual ALN provision. The Member was pleased to see that 2 classes were proposed for Welsh Medium, which was certainly very positive, however felt that they were nowhere near fully bilingual as highlighted by response in the Welsh Language services comments. The Member felt the proposal went somewhat but didn't fulfil the requirements upon the Council or the Council's own Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The Member also sought assurance if Welsh language provision was the preference, regardless of location in county borough, that transport would be provided to ensure access. The Member also noted the impact of travelling long distances to receive Welsh language provision would have on the carbon footprint and raised the ideal scenario of ensuring provision across the borough in the future should be a key priority for the Council.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services confirmed that transport would be provided. It was recognised there would be 3 new provisions, if the proposal went ahead, and it was going back to the statutory responsibility to keep provision under review, so clearly if these classes became full, then that would be looked at and responded to.

The Member asked if the numbers of pupils that had attended Welsh medium provision and then transferred to LS provision previously through the Medium of Welsh and then had to transfer to English Medium, were included in this report.

The Head of Learner Support Service said she was sure she'd seen those numbers in respect of the WESP, so would look into this.

Members recognised that a lot of work had been undertaken and were supportive of the proposals. Members were mindful of the challenges that change would present for individuals affected by the proposal and were clear that this should be considered when detailed implementation plans are made should the proposals be adopted by Cabinet. Overall, the Committee noted its support in favour of the proposals.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To undertake pre scrutiny of the report (attached at Appendix A & 1), thus providing Scrutiny with an opportunity to comment upon this matter prior to consideration by the Cabinet.
2. To request the Service Director for Democratic Services & Communications to feedback the comments, observations and/or recommendations of members to Cabinet Committee.

22 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair acknowledged there had been excellent engagement from Members and thanked them for coming prepared with their questions. The Chair also thanked Officers for answer questions and the preparatory work and wished them well with their reports to Cabinet.

23 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 6.56 pm

**Cllr S Evans
Chair**

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023-24

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH OCTOBER 2023

BI-ANNUAL CABINET MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. To scrutinise any arising matters with the portfolio holder responsible for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language and to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee

- 2.1 Scrutinise the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language in respect of matters considered and agreed by Cabinet, and any key decisions taken, during the period 11 May – 16 October 2023.
- 2.2 Identify any areas arising from those matters determined within this period which Committee wish to further scrutinise, as part of revisions to the committees published work programme, in relation to Education and Inclusion

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the Cabinet in respect of the decisions taken in the defined decision-making period.
- 3.2 The recommendations seek to provide a structure to these sessions, to enable discussion and challenge to be focused upon a defined period and those individual decisions taken

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 As part of this Council's ongoing commitment to improve the function of Scrutiny as a critical friend of the Council, this item is being brought before the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee as part of Cabinet and Scrutiny engagement.
- 4.2 Such an approach will provide Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to further challenge the Executive, as the Cabinet Member can provide details relating to the investments being taken forward within the portfolio and the challenges faced by the Council.

5. SCRUTINY OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER

- 5.1 The role that the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee can play in holding the Council's decision-makers to account makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy. Scrutinising the Executive serves an important purpose in ensuring that decision makers of the Council are held accountable for their actions and decisions.
- 5.2 By Scrutinising the Cabinet Member, the public can gain a better understanding of their decision-making process and hold them accountable, which will promote openness and transparency within the Council. It will also ensure that those in Leadership positions are acting in the best interests of their constituents.
- 5.3 Scrutiny can also identify areas for improvement and drive positive changes, strengthening our governance arrangements. Effective scrutiny helps secure the efficient delivery of public services and drives improvements within the authority itself. Conversely, poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership and service failure.
- 5.4 Under the [Terms of Reference](#) of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee, Members have the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge areas that fall under the remit of the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language. The main responsibility areas of the Cabinet Member for Education cover the following areas:
- Secondary, Primary, Nursery, Welsh Medium, dual language and Special Needs Education
 - Liaison with further and higher education
 - Schools and Community
 - Learning Access, Engagement, and Inclusion
 - Governor Support
 - Education other than at school
 - Childcare

- Welsh Language
- Early Years Education including Flying Start
- Youth Engagement and Participation Service

5.5 Scrutiny in various forms is essential to ensuring accountability, transparency and fairness and ensures that political decisions are taken in the best interests of our residents.

5.6 **Decisions taken forward by the Portfolio holder during the period 11 May - 16 October 2023**

The decisions can be found by clicking on the following links below:-

- 15 May 2023 [21st Century Schools Programme: Naming of the New Schools](#)
- 15 May 2023 [Consultation on the Proposals to realign Additional Learning Needs Mainstream Learning Support Class Provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf](#)
- 28 June 2023 [Proposals to develop a New Special School In Rhondda Cynon Taf](#)
- 17 July 2023 [Pre-Scrutiny: Estyn's Report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council](#)
- 17 July 2023 [Standard Advisory Council on Religious Education \(SACRE\)](#)
- 18 Sept 2023 [Statutory School Organisation - Proposal to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School](#)
- 18 Sept 2023 [Consultation on the Proposals to Realign Additional Learning Needs Mainstream Learning Support Class Provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf](#)

6. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO ECONOMIC DUTY**

6.1 None arising as a direct result of this report.

7. **CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

7.1 There are no consultation requirements emanating from the recommendations set out in this report.

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with paragraph Part 4 of the Constitution (Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules).

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 To provide the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and make recommendations for policy improvement under the remit of the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language's portfolio.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION & INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH OCTOBER 2023

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATIONS**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023-24

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16th OCTOBER 2023

CHILD POVERTY AND COMMUNITY FOCUSED SCHOOLS UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES

Author: Daniel Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members on the Community Focused School approach in RCT. The report provides a further update on this agenda following the report provided to Members in December 2022.
- 1.2 The report discusses the approach to family engagement and utilisation of Welsh Government and Cabinet funding in this area as well as some of the Capital Grant that has been provided to RCT by Welsh Government.
- 1.3 The report also covers elements of the work undertaken to mitigate the impacts of poverty on learners and their families so that, where possible, barriers are removed to education.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the positive impact of the work undertaken around the Community Focused School and Child Poverty agenda as well as next steps.
- 2.2 Consider whether there are any aspects of the report that the Committee would like further information on in the future.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 RCT has been a champion of work around family engagement, which falls within the wider Community Focused School agenda, since 2020 and can therefore be seen as an early adopter of some of the more recent focus from Welsh Government.
- 3.2 A survey was previously run with schools to understand the existing approach to Community Focused Schools in the summer of 2022, with these findings

presented to Members later that year. That survey has been re-run with schools to inform this report and provide comparative data.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In the academic year 2018/19, secondary school attendance (including special schools) in RCT declined 0.1% from the previous year to 92.8%. This was the lowest point since the 2012/13 academic year.
- 4.2 As an attempt to improve attendance in some of our most deprived school communities, on 13th February 2020, a proposal was approved by Cabinet to fund a Family Engagement Officer pilot across six secondary/through schools. The rationale for these six schools was a combination of attendance and deprivation data. They were the six lowest performing schools for secondary mainstream attendance in 2018/19, with five also being the lowest performing schools for attendance in the previous academic year as well. All but one ranked in the five most deprived secondary/through schools when looking at datasets from the WIMD at the time of proposal.
- 4.3 Cabinet approved £174,000 for the employment of the six positions with an April 2020-August 2021 window for the pilot to take place. As specified in the original proposal, the positions were to be managed by each school with a bespoke action plan created and reports being centrally monitored by the Head of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service.
- 4.4 In June 2021, the initial pilot was brought back before Cabinet for review. At this stage, due to the impact of COVID-19, Cabinet agreed to an extension of the pilot for an additional year at secondary/through schools and the introduction of a 24-month primary pilot for 13 settings on a match-funded basis. The same rationale for inclusion was used for this phase which included a combination of attendance and deprivation data.
- 4.5 In 2022/23, the Council was provided with funding by Welsh Government of £341,237.23 for the expansion of Family Engagement Officers and an additional £30,000 for a Community Focused School post. In July 2022, we appointed a Lead for Community Focused Schools who now sits within the Attendance and Wellbeing staff structure whilst Cabinet agreed to utilise the Welsh Government funding for the expansion of Family Engagement Officers on a 50% match-funded basis to 9 primary schools, 3 secondary schools and a PRU. This brought the total offer to 32 settings who were offered match funding for the employment of a Family Engagement Officer.

5. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 Family engagement is a central element of the Welsh Government Community Focused School approach and to support this agenda, Welsh Government has provided additional funding for 2023/24 of £527,840.35 which is a marked increase on the funding provided the previous year.
- 5.2 Due to the financial situation facing schools, it was decided that this grant funding would be utilised to support those schools who were already part of funding arrangements so that we could ensure the FEO positions remained as part of the staffing structure. 29 of the 32 schools offered support were actively

employing Family Engagement Officers or were advertising for new staff members due to fill recruitment gaps. We have therefore extended the offer of support to these 29 schools on an improved match funding basis of 80% from the Local Authority/Welsh Government grant and 20% funding from schools since 1st April 2023. The continued use of Cabinet funding alongside the Welsh Government grant has allowed us to extend the period of funding until August 2024 for all schools.

6. OUR APPROACH TO COMMUNITY FOCUSED SCHOOLS

- 6.1 As outlined in 3.2, we previously surveyed our schools during the summer term 2021/22 to better understand and baseline their approach to family and community engagement and how they utilise their buildings as hubs for community activity. We split the survey into three areas – family engagement, community engagement, and multi-agency engagement.
- 6.2 We received 96 responses to the original survey in 2022 and 59 responses to the 2023 survey. The reasons behind the lower response rate include a shorter window for the survey as well as the continuation of the Action Short of Strike.
- 6.3 Since the initial survey was undertaken, we employed a Lead for Community Focused Schools in September 2022 to lead in this area. Part funding is provided by Welsh Government for this post.

6.4 Family Engagement

- 6.4.1 In 2022, the majority of respondents (61.5%) indicated that they had explicit reference in their School Improvement Plans to how they will work with families to improve the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils. In 2023, this figure now stands at 76%. The most common approaches utilised to strengthen family engagement across all schools has also changed during that time. Regular communication with parents remains the most popular approach but whereas in 2022 providing resources to parents to support learning at home and annual parental voice strategies were 2nd and 3rd respectively, these have now been superseded by family participation in school events and workshop opportunities for parents. This suggests that in the last year or so, school focus has shifted from 'passive' approaches to direct face-to-face participation and engagement with parents and families.
- 6.4.2 Schools told us that the overwhelming majority offer support to parents that will, in turn, help parents to support their child's learning at home (96.9% in 2022, 93.2% in 2023). Although there is a slight decline here, there is a significant increase in schools who offer tailored workshops to parents (50% in 2022, 78% in 2023). The three most popular themes for the workshops remain the same - the development of literacy, development of numeracy and emotional health and wellbeing. Other subject areas offered include Welsh language development, digital skills and speech and language support. The frequency of the tailored workshops varied with the most popular frequency being termly in both surveys.
- 6.4.3 In 2022, only 26% of respondents stated they offer parenting programs on site which has increased to 46% in the latest survey. There has also been a shift in how consultation is undertaken with parents/carers – those who responded

'mainly via surveys' fell from 85.4% in 2022 to 63.8% this year. This may have been impacted in 2022 by continuing concerns around face-to-face consultation following the pandemic but it is hopeful that this is now easing. Termly consultation was the most popular timeframe for consultation from our schools in both surveys.

6.5 **Community Engagement**

- 6.5.1 In 2022, most schools (61.5%) did not explicitly reference how they work with the community to improve the wellbeing and achievement of pupils within their School Improvement Plans. In 2023, there was a nearly even split with 49.2% of respondents now saying that they do explicitly reference the community.
- 6.5.2 We have also seen an increase in the percentage of schools who offer activities or services to children outside of the school day (82.3% to 89.7%). There is also a small increase (34.4% to 35.6%) of our schools who offer activities or services to children during the school holidays. This includes Food and Fun, holiday childcare provision, forest school sessions, Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) provision as well as sporting activities.
- 6.5.3 Although still a minority of schools, there has also been an increase in the percentage of schools who offer activities/services to families or the community outside of the school day (20.8% to 37.3%) and a slight increase in those also providing an offer during the school holidays (13.5% to 15.3%).
- 6.5.4 Adult Community Learning (ACL) opportunities on school sites was an area identified for development in the previous report where only 8.3% of schools stated they had offered these opportunities. This has increased to 20.3% of schools in the latest survey. We have also employed a Schools Family Learning Coordinator in September 2023 to promote the central government funded Multiply programme and offer mathematics/numeracy courses for parents. We are leading on an area focused on parents/carers and have secured a healthy budget to support this work in relation to outcome 'W45: Courses for parents wanting to increase their numeracy skills in order to help their children and help with their own progression.' We hope this will continue to increase the opportunities on offer within our schools. Funding is in place until the end of March 2025.
- 6.5.5 Co-location and strong partnership working is a feature of Welsh Government guidance on Community Focused Schools. In 2022, 24% of schools indicated they had third sector partners regularly work from their school and these ranged from Cylch Meithrin and Flying Start provisions to childcare, sports clubs and performing arts and dance groups. This figure has now increased to 33.9%. It is encouraging that schools are now working more closely with partners and their communities but co-location remains low and remains largely unchanged in the last year (13.5% to 13.6%). Wider integration with public sector and third sector partners could develop these opportunities further which would hold multiple benefits for the organisations, schools and service user. A focus of some of our capital works discussed in 6.8 aims to support increased opportunities for co-location in some settings.

6.6 **Agency Engagement**

- 6.6.1 We have also seen a considerable increase in the percentage of schools who responded indicating that their School Improvement Plan makes explicit reference to working with agencies to improve the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils (47.9% to 61.0%).
- 6.6.2 Although the explicit reference has increased, there has been a small decrease in the number of schools (61.5% to 59.3%) who have a designated member of staff with responsibility for developing and improving multi-agency working as part of their roles and responsibilities. This may be due to the role being shared amongst staff members but further exploration of this decrease is needed.
- 6.6.3 We have also seen an increase in the percentage of schools who provide wrap around provision before/after school on the school site (34.4% to 47.5%).
- 6.6.4 Of the schools responded, many offered varying strategic initiatives they employ to develop mental health, well-being and support services as a whole system model. This includes linking closely with statutory and third sector partners including the CAMHS SHINE project, Whole School Approach Implementation Lead and Place2Be.

6.7 **Community Focused Schools Strategy**

- 6.7.1 As outlined in 5.3, Welsh Government has provided funding for the last two years to support a pilot of Community Focused School managers/leads in each local authority. We appointed a Lead for Community Focused Schools in July 2022 with a start date of September 2022. The Lead sits within the Attendance and Wellbeing structure in Education and Inclusion Services.
- 6.7.2 This post has worked closely over the last year with schools across the LA but with a particular focus on the Treorchy cluster as an area who have developed strong community links and where family engagement has been prioritised by schools for several years. The intention is for the role to work cluster-by-cluster across the LA in the coming years. Initial work has also started with the Mountain Ash cluster working in collaboration with NofskyWIT – a community interest company.
- 6.7.3 The Lead has worked closely with the Family Engagement Officers/Community Focused Schools lead officers in the Treorchy Cluster at co-constructing a framework utilising guidance from Welsh Government. Work has been undertaken with the officers, parents/carers, learners and the community to map current provision and to look at actions to further develop opportunities to increase engagement with families, the community and agencies. This includes the exploration of co-location opportunities within schools and encouraging the use of school buildings by the community on a more frequent basis.
- 6.7.4 In line with the guidance documentation released by Welsh Government, the lead has also worked with partners to develop a draft Community Focused School strategy which signposts to the many areas which serve as Guiding Principles to the Community Focused School ethos. This is included in Appendix Two.
- 6.7.5 The Lead has also worked closely with colleagues in 21st Century Schools on the capital project to support the Community Focused School agenda. The

initial survey in 2022 was used to identify some of the schools who were in need of capital support to develop their approach to Community Focused School. The Lead also established an all-Wales Community Focused Schools Leads/Managers group who meet every 6 weeks to discuss different LA approaches, links with Welsh Government and sharing of good practice.

6.8 Capital Works

- 6.8.1 Welsh Government has supported capital programmes for Community Focused School improvements for the last two years. In the 2022/23 financial year the grant terms and conditions were focused on 'Supporting Small and Medium Scale Practical Projects to Safely and Effectively Open Schools to the Community Outside Traditional Hours'. RCT received just over £1.6 million in 2022/23 to support these small and medium scale projects which were focused on extending existing facilities rather than completely new projects.
- 6.8.2 The funding was therefore utilised to support works in 10 schools across the local authority. The range of projects included enhancing community rooms provisions, upgrading gymnasiums and changing rooms to support wider community use, fencing to ensure appropriate access arrangements and storage and seating for outside groups to utilise on school sites.
- 6.8.3 In the 2023/24 financial year, the funding level was in line with the previous year but Welsh Government criteria for inclusion was changed. Instead of small and medium scale projects, expressions of interest were invited for larger programmes of work.
- 6.8.4 Expressions of interest were therefore provided to Welsh Government earlier in the year for four projects with each receiving feedback that Welsh Government were content to support pending the completion of a Project Information Proforma for the three projects with a value below £500,000 (Trehopcyn Primary, Porth Community School and Treorchy Primary School) and a Business Justification Case for the one project above £500,000 (Hawthorn High School).
- 6.8.5 These have been submitted and, at the time of writing, Welsh Government has sought further clarification around some areas of the Business Justification Case which have been submitted by the deadline of 25th September 2023.
- 6.8.6 The projects included in the proposals include new community facilities in unused or underutilised buildings in Trehopcyn Primary School and Hawthorn High School, a remodel and refurbishment of the sports hall and changing facilities in Porth Community School that are fit for community use and the creation of a Health Hub for co-location opportunities in Treorchy Primary School.

7. ANTI-POVERTY INITIATIVES

- 7.1 In addition to the support provided for Family Engagement Officers in deprived school communities outlined in sections 4 and 5, Education and Inclusion Services have also been involved in other initiatives to try to mitigate the impact of poverty on learners and their families.

- 7.2 One example is the Big Bocs Bwyd scheme which is running in 10 RCT schools. This scheme is aimed at providing low or no cost food, and other items, to the school community from a shop unit on the school site. It has several purposes including support families with access to produce, a reduction of food waste by repurposing stock from local shops and supermarkets, as well as curriculum offers for learners who are involved in growing schemes as well as the running of a shop unit.
- 7.3 The Big Bocs Bwyd scheme was supported centrally during the initial launch of these units with a group established to share intelligence and good practice as well as providing links to other areas of the authority including the Sustainable Food Coordinator. This supported schools to access and work with local community groups including allotment societies to source fresh produce for the Big Bocs Bwyd.
- 7.4 Other elements of support have also been sourced for schools including links forged with the RCT Citizens Advice Bureau. Outreach sessions have been run in a number of RCT schools to provide local advice for families and the wider community. Citizens Advice also provide a termly newsletter for schools which is distributed to all settings from our central team.
- 7.5 Where individual families are in need of wider support, Education and Inclusion Services and schools work closely with the Resilient Families Service who provide financial appraisals to take an in-depth look at where support may be needed.
- 7.6 Additional support for families facing financial hardship are also operational at a school level including food pantries on site, referrals to Food Banks, school uniform swap schemes, amongst others. The LA leads in areas including the rollout of Universal Free School Meals, the Schools Essentials Grant, the Childcare Offer for Wales and Period Dignity. All of these schemes are aimed at alleviating the financial burden on families.
- 7.7 Last year, there was also a project in the Cynon Valley which involved six schools looking at the 'Cost of the School Day'. This project was supported by the Child Poverty Action Group and involved the whole-school community identifying and reducing the financial barriers faced by learners and their families. This raised many issues important to families to provide support and remove stigma. This involved steps such as:- schools encouraging online payments for fundraising days to prevent the need for children to carry cash or families to feel the pressure of having to pay; payment plans for school trips to spread the cost instead of one-off payments; simplifying non-uniform days so that costumes were not needed to be bought and items could be made in school.
- 7.8 As a result of this work, and the excellent practice displayed during an Estyn inspection, Llwydcoed Primary School were invited to write a case study on Poverty Proofing the School Day. This can be found here: [Poverty Proofing the School Day | Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#). This also formed part of a presentation by the Headteacher in a recent Primary Headteachers' meeting in September 2023 to share this element of best practice with colleagues across the local authority.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been needed for the work to date.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Not applicable. Surveys were available to schools in both Welsh and English but the results of these do not impact on the Welsh language. Any resources produced for supporting the Community Focused School agenda will be made available bilingually.

10. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

10.1 The 2023 survey undertaken with schools outlined in section 5 is included in summary as Appendix One. The FEO pilots have been approved by Cabinet.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no additional financial implications as a result of this report. The Lead for Community Focused School is part funded by Welsh Government for the 2023/24 financial year. There may be a need to consider how this role is funded in future years if Welsh Government funding is not forthcoming.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

12.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

13. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

13.1 The resource provided in the form of Family Engagement Officers meets the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan for People by 'ensuring people are independent, healthy and successful' through improving services for children and young people as well as their families. It also meets the Prosperity target by ensuring we have good schools, so all children have access to a great education.

13.2 The Community Focused School agenda meets the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by fostering school and community relations to create a Wales of cohesive communities while improving the prosperity and resilience of our children, young people and families.

14. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

14.1 The schools chosen for Family Engagement Officer funding have been based on need from attendance and deprivation data. The Lead for Community Focused Schools will work on a cluster-by-cluster basis across the County and is not specific to any one electoral ward although initial stages have focused in the Treorchy Cluster area which covers the electoral wards of Treherbert, Treorchy, Pentre and Ystrad.

15. CONCLUSION

- 15.1 The focus that RCT has placed initially on Family Engagement Officers and then later on the wider Community Focused School agenda is already showing improvement in several areas.
- 15.2 The surveys undertaken provide a good starting point for wider discussion points with schools and the developments of next steps for our LA support for this area.
- 15.3 Wider work is likely needed on the Community Focused School agenda to engage with partners on a strategic level. There are also initial plans in place to scope governors' training to be developed and delivered to increase governor awareness of the Welsh Government and LA strategic approach.
- 15.4 Additional work will also continue into supporting learners and their families facing financial barriers to education. A dedicated area of the RCT website is under development for families to access 'Help and support for Education Related Costs'. Providing this information in one space will hopefully further support families in need.

Summary of Survey Results (Open ended questions have been omitted)

1. Do you have explicit reference in your school improvement plans to how you will work with *families* to improve the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils?

Yes	45
No	14

2. What approaches have you used to strengthen family engagement within your setting?

Regular communication with families	58
Provide parents with resources to support the learning at home	48
Workshops opportunities for parents to support children's learning at home	49
Family volunteering opportunities	22
Family participation in school events	50
Communications that support different cultures and languages	24
At least annual parental voice strategies to help shape what you do in school	46
Other	15

3. Does the school offer support to parents to encourage them to support their child's learning at home?

Yes	55
No	4

4. Does your school offer tailored workshops to parents?

Yes	46
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No	13
----	----

5. If yes, what type of tailored workshop does your school provide?

Development of literacy	36
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Development of numeracy	24
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Emotional health and wellbeing	32
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Welsh Language	11
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Digital skills	15
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Speech and language	11
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Other	12
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6. How frequently do you offer tailored workshops?

Weekly	4
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Half-Termly	7
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Termly	13
--------	----

Annually	11
----------	----

Other	11
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7. Are parenting programs run on your school site?

Yes	27
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No	32
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8. How does the school consult with parents?

Parental surveys	37
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Face to face consultation	9
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Other	13
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9. How frequently does the school consult with parents?

Weekly	10
--------	----

Half-Termly	12
-------------	----

Termly	17
Annually	9
Other	11

10. Does your school have a Family Engagement Officer (FEO)?

Yes	31
No	28

11. Do you have explicit reference in your school improvement plan to how you will work with the *community* to improve the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils?

Yes	29
No	30

12. Does your school currently offer activities or services to children outside of the school day?

Yes	52
No	7

13. Does your school currently offer activities or services to children during the school holidays?

Yes	21
No	38

14. Does your school currently offer activities or services to families/ the community outside of the school day?

Yes	22
No	37

15. Does your school currently offer activities or services to families / the community during the school holidays?

Yes	9
No	50

16. Does your school offer or co-ordinate any adult community learning (ACL) opportunities?

Yes	12
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No 47

17. Does your school have a dedicated community room available for parents and families to use?

Yes 30

No 29

18. Do any third sector organisations regularly work from your school?

Yes 20

No 39

19. Do you provide school assets for wider community use?

Yes - during school hours 5

Yes - outside of school hours 10

Yes - both during school hours and outside of school hours 9

No 35

20. Does the school have any services co-located at your school e.g. police, health, GP, YEPs

Yes 8

No 51

21. Does the school have a senior lead for developing family and community engagement?

Yes 37

No 22

22. To what extent does the school have a vision and plan for family and community engagement (1 being no vision and 5 being clear vision and plan)

3.64

23. As a school do you have explicit reference in your school improvement plan to how you will work with *agencies* to improve the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils?

Yes 36

No 23

24. In your school do you have a designated member of staff with responsibility for further improving multi-agency working as part of their roles and responsibilities?

Yes 35

No 24

25. Does your school provide wrap around provision before/after school on your school site?

Yes – just before school 12

Yes – just after school 4

Yes – both 12

No 31

Draft Community Focused School Strategy

RCT Education and Inclusion Services

Strategy for Community Focused Schools

2022-2025

Issued: September 2023

Due for review: September 2024

Introduction

In RCT, our Education and Inclusion Services Directorate Strategic Plan for 2022-2025 outlines the mission, vision, values, and ambition of the Directorate over the next 3 years. Our mission is:

**‘To deliver equity and excellence in Education
and enhanced well-being for all.’**

To support the delivery of equity and excellence in education and enhanced well-being for all our approach to Community Focused Schools will encompass and include:

1. Family engagement -

- Creating meaningful opportunities for families and carers to be involved in school life and decision making and to be engaged in children’s learning.
- Working closely with families to give children and young people the best home learning environment possible.
- Ensuring families have the skills, confidence, and resources to actively support their child’s learning at home and in school.
- Working in a constructive way with families to address any barriers to engagement.

2. Community engagement –

- Encouraging schools to draw upon and utilise links with community groups and organisations and also offer support and opportunities to community members.
- Acting as a key part of the local community, offering opportunities to use the school facilities for adult learning, well-being, play, sporting, cultural and other community activities.
- Signposting to other support or advice services.
- Utilising the skills and organisations within the community to extend and enrich learning opportunities and to positively influence change.

3. Multi-agency engagement –

- Developing partnerships with wider services and interventions to remove any barriers to learning. A Community Focused School makes links with these services and supports the child and family to access the right support at the right time.
- Collaborating effectively with other key services and agencies to ensure that all children thrive and learn.
- Sharing information where appropriate so that children and young people and their families can access the appropriate support at the right time.
- Supporting access to wider services which may be co-located in a school premises or located elsewhere within the community.

We are committed in RCT to providing excellent services which improve the lives of children, young people, their families, and the wider community. This includes the experience and quality of schooling and services they will receive from us. We have

therefore developed this strategy that will run alongside our Education Strategic Plan for the years 2022-2025.

There are 4 key enablers which support the progression between family, community, and multi-agency engagement.

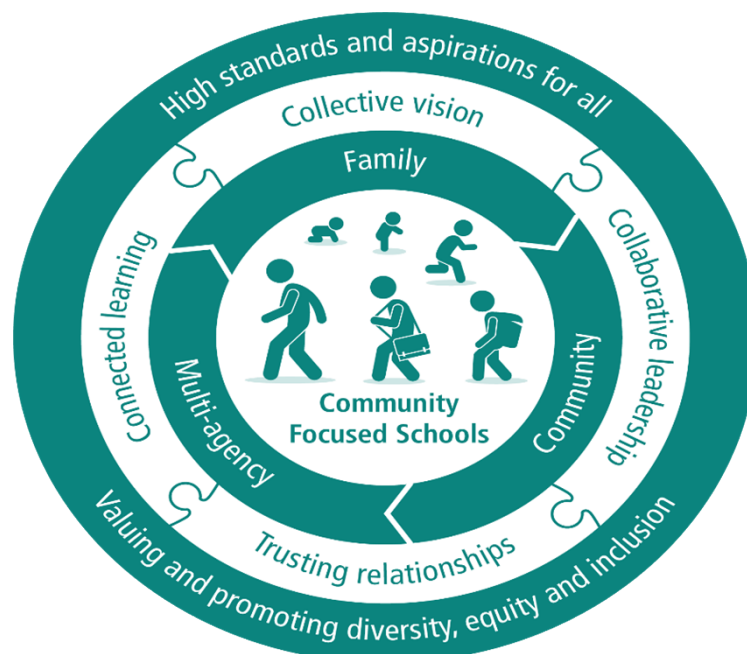
1. **Collective vision** - The need for all stakeholders to help develop and realise the vision for the school, families, and communities.
2. **Collaborative leadership** - Leadership across stakeholders to ensure shared voice, decision making and goals.
3. **Trusting relationships** - Trusting and non-judgmental relationships between schools, families, and community members, and between staff and children or young people allowing everyone to feel listened to, valued and respected.
4. **Connected learning** - A strong focus on high quality and connected learning across home, school, and the community, maximising the opportunities in each sphere.

For a number of years, we have demonstrated the strong partnerships schools have with their families and wider communities. This strategy has been developed to embed good practice and strengthen those relationships and further progress engagement with community and multi-agency partnerships. It is also aimed to provide consistency and guidance in the approach to Community Focused Schools in RCT, this document will be supported by additional guidance. Stakeholder voice will be vitally important in the design and delivery of the approaches. This strategy is aligned with cross-directorate work to ensure that our services work in partnership with all stakeholders.

In developing this strategy, we have utilised these key documents, policies and the approaches contained within them to inform our practice:

<https://www.gov.wales/community-focused-schools>

Welsh Government's model for Community Focused Schools



This model reflects a whole-system approach. Working from early years to post-16 is crucial to the success of our children and young people.

The elements of family, community and multi-agency engagement are interconnected. Each element does not work in isolation but has an influence and impact on the others, combining to become a self-perpetuating model.

Guiding Principles

- **Adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed approaches (ACEs)** – ACEs are traumatic events, or experiences, that happen before the age of 18 and can continue to have an impact throughout that person’s life. [ACEs - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)
- **Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan** – Welsh Government Anti-racist Action Plan was launched on Tuesday 7th June 2022, it is built on the values of anti-racism and calls for zero tolerance of all racial inequality. [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Childcare** – The Childcare sector covers a wide range of different types of provision, which are subject to a set of National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare. [National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Children and young people’s plan** – Welsh Government have set out the part they can play in making Wales a wonderful place for children and young people to grow up, live and work, where everyone feels valued. Community Focused schools are an integral part of this vision. [Children and young people's plan \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Curriculum for Wales** – This allows the opportunity for schools and school clusters to develop programmes of learning that suits their community needs. Equality and diversity are at the core and this supports the Community Focused Schools approach. Building better relationships between schools and families, communities and employers will support educational achievement and [Careers and work-related experiences](#). This will lead to developing meaningful partnerships and allow the next steps opportunities for employment, education and training to be explored. <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>
- **Cymraeg 2050** - The ambition of Welsh Government is to have 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 and the Community Focused Schools approach aligns with this aim. The strategy and framework will support the promotion of the Welsh language. [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers \(gov.wales\)](#)
- **Early childhood education and care** - It is important for schools to work with the early years providers in their area to support a smooth transition for every child from childcare to early education. Working with partners offering the Childcare Offer further supports the transition into full-time education. High quality early childhood education and care has been shown to be the most effective and cost beneficial single early intervention strategy to enhance child developmental outcomes, in particular language and cognitive development. [Get 30 hours of childcare for 3 and 4 year olds | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) and Electively Home Educated (EHE)** - Although Community Focused Schools is a school-based policy there is recognition that some children are educated elsewhere either at home or in other settings and school has a role in supporting transition.

- **Enriching the school day** - Creating academic and sporting activities and offering a wide range of social and cultural opportunities will broaden opportunities for learners, especially for those who are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This will support their well-being, wider development and engagement with the school. The school has an important role in supporting the enrichment activities provided by a wide range of partners.
- **Families First** – This programme uses a multi-agency approach, focusing on early intervention and prevention depending on the needs of the family. The range of support can be offered to individual members or the whole family. <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/ChildrenandFamilies/ParentandFamilySupport/Financialsupportforfamilies/FamiliesFirst/WhatisFamiliesFirst.aspx>
- **Food and Fun (also known as School Holiday Enrichment Programme)** – Welsh Local Government Association run this scheme and the programme is a valuable part of providing good nutrition, educational provision and fun activities during the summer holiday. There are strong links between the Community Focused School approach and Food and Fun. <https://www.wlga.wales/food-and-fun-school-holiday-enrichment-programme>
- **Flying Start** - Is the Welsh Government's early years programme that helps families with children under 4 years old in disadvantaged areas of Wales.

Help available includes:

- part-time childcare for 2 to 3 year olds
 - an enhanced Health Visiting service
 - access to parenting programmes
 - support for children to learn to talk and communicate
- <https://www.rctfamilies.co.uk/EN/ParentsCarers/SupportServices/FlyingStartChildcare.aspx>
- **Free school breakfasts** - The Welsh Government is 'maintaining our commitment to provide free breakfasts for all primary school learners.' The primary breakfast offer is an element of the food in school policy and supports the ambition that no child in Wales goes hungry during the school day. <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/SchoolsandLearning/Schoolcatering/Freeprimaryschoolbreakfastclubs.aspx>
 - **Further education** - There are strong links between Community Focused Schools and further education providers. It is important for schools to make positive links with providers to not only engage learners but to also help signpost families or carers to adult education services and even provide adult education on their premises to support family learning.
 - **Healthy Start scheme** - The scheme applies to those who are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child aged under 4. It can help those eligible to buy healthy products and foods like milk or fruit or get free vitamins. [Get help to buy food and milk \(Healthy Start\)](#)
 - **Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales** – is the Welsh Government's long term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity. Alongside the strategy are 5 two-yearly plans that focus on the early years, children and adolescents, as well as tackling health inequalities for all.

The strategy is made up of 4 national themes:

- Healthy environments
- Healthy settings
- Healthy people
- Leadership and enabling change

A Community Focused School also supports these themes.

<https://www.gov.wales/healthy-weight-strategy-healthy-weight-healthy-wales>

- **Parenting supporting – Parenting. Give it time.** – is a Welsh Government scheme that offers free practical tips and expert advice for all parenting challenges of all ages.

The core purpose of parenting support is about working with parents to:

- reduce risks
- strengthen parenting capacity
- develop and build resilience
- sustain positive change in the best interests of children

A Community Focused School also supports these aims.

[Parenting. Give it time. | GOV.WALES](#)

- **Play** - Playing is a vital activity for children of all ages and supports their well-being, resilience and development. As identified by Public Health Wales outside play encourages a high level of activity and is an important step towards healthy weight for children. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) creates a specific right for all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. Community Focused Schools can play an active part in ensuring school grounds are fully utilised by their communities. Opening school grounds for organised play activities and events has a significant part to play in addressing the urgent need to ensure that more children can access outdoor play.

[Home - Play Wales](#)

- **Pupil Development Grant** - The purpose of the PDG is to improve outcomes for learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and Children Looked After (CLA). It is intended to overcome the additional barriers that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential. Community Focused Schools approach aligns with these objectives.
- **Speech language and communication** - The Welsh Government wants every child to have the best start in life. Supporting children in their early years makes a real difference to their futures. That includes developing speech, language and communication skills by the right person, in the right place and at the right time. [Talk With Me: Speech, Language and Communication \(SLC\) Delivery Plan | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Sustainable communities for learning** - Through investing in the premises of schools we hope to create better facilities that can be used by learners and the wider community. This includes access to adult learning and sports and leisure activities.
- **Tackling child poverty** – Community Focused schools have a vital role to play in building community resilience and well-being. Taking this approach will help address the significant barriers to progression for children impacted by poverty. It is a statutory duty to tackle child poverty and mitigate its impacts, including

the educational inequalities that children experience as a result of living in poverty. [Education in Wales: action plan 2017 to 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)

- **The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code** - adopts a person-centred approach which places children and their families at the heart of the decision-making process. It also requires all services to work together for a child or young person with ALN. Community Focused Schools will make links will external agencies and services to ensure appropriate support is accessed.
[The Additional Learning Needs Code and regulations | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Universal Primary Free School Meals** – All primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by 2024. This commitment is in response to the rising cost-of-living pressures on families and the shared ambition from Welsh Government in tackling child poverty and ensuring no child goes hungry in school. Universal Primary Free School Meals will help to:
 - tackle poverty
 - secure the well-being of future generations
 - reduce the inequalities of outcomes linked to socio-economic disadvantage across education, health, and prosperity[Universal Primary Free School Meals \(UPFSM\) | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Wider communities’ policy** - The Welsh Government is committed to working with and supporting our communities, both local places and communities of interest, in every aspect of social, environmental and economic life as well as through educational provision. Community Focused Schools is an important part of this approach.
[Programme for government | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes** – Is delivered by Public Health Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government and takes a whole school approach to promoting health and wellbeing. The approach to a ‘healthy school’ is one which takes responsibility for maintaining and promoting the health of all who ‘learn, work, play and live’ within it not only by formally teaching learners about how to lead healthy lives but by enabling learners and staff to take control over aspects of the school environment which influence their health. Community Focused Schools align with the scheme as healthy schools actively promotes, protects and embeds the physical, mental and social health and well-being of its community through positive action.
[Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes - Public Health Wales \(nhs.wales\)](#)
- **Whole school approach to mental health and well-being** - Is a framework document issued by Welsh Government that contains both statutory guidance and non-statutory advice. It provides direction to address the emotional and mental well-being needs of all children and young people, as well as school staff as part of the whole-school community. Community Focused Schools closely align with this approach. The framework seeks to support good emotional and mental well-being by promoting a positive cultural environment in schools, where children and young people form positive relationships with staff and other learners, and relationships are strengthened:
 - between children and young people
 - between teaching staff
 - with the school senior leadership team and wider school staff
 - with parents and carers
 - with other professionals working with the school

- with the wider community that surrounds the school
[WG42005 \(gov.wales\)](#)

- **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework** - Is a Welsh Government programme that helps identifying the young people at risk of disengagement or at risk of homelessness and helping them back on to a learning pathway that is right for them. Community Focused Schools should form close partnerships with Youth Engagement and Participation Service to help provide support to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training and those at risk of homelessness.

<https://www.gov.wales/youth-engagement-and-progression-framework-overview>

<https://www.rctfamilies.co.uk/EN/Professionals/CWRSservices/TheYouthEngagementandParticipationService.aspx>

YEPS - RCT's Youth Service

- **Youth work** - offers young people aged 11 to 25 opportunities for learning that are educative, expressive, participative, inclusive, and empowering. Youth work supports young people through significant changes in their lives and encourages them to:
 - gain and develop knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values
 - make constructive use of their skills, resources and time.

It is important for Community Focused Schools to:

- be aligned to and work with local youth work services
- signpost young people to local youth work services
- identify how youth workers could be utilised in the school

[Youth work and engagement | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](#)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION and INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH OCTOBER 2023

CHILD POVERTY AND COMMUNITY FOCUSED SCHOOLS UPDATE

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AND INCLUSION SERVICES**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023/24

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH OCTOBER 2023

AN UPDATE ON YEAR 2 OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND EDUCATION TRIBUNAL ACT 2018 IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES

Author: Ceri Jones, Head of Inclusion Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with an update on the implementation of the ALNET (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal) Wales Act (2018) and its associated ALN Code for Wales (2021) in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) during the academic year 2022/23.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.
- 2.2 Consider if any further information is required.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following the enactment of the ALNET Act (2018) and the implementation of associated statutory ALN Code (2021) in September 2021 local authorities (LAs) in Wales are currently entering Year 3 of a phased national ALN Implementation Plan to move from the outgoing Special Educational Needs (SEN) system to the new ALN system.
- 3.2 The overarching aim of the ALN Code is: *'To support the creation of a fully inclusive system where all children and young people are given the opportunity to success and have access to an education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit from, and enjoy learning'* (ALN Code 2021, Section 3:1).

- 3.3 The new ALN legislative framework ensures that all children and young people from age 0–25 with an identified ALN will have a statutory Individual Development Plan (IDP) which sets out the additional learning provision (ALP) they will receive to address their identified ALN. The legislation also places a statutory duty upon LAs to keep under review the sufficiency of their provision for learners with ALN and to address any identified gaps or areas for improvement. This also includes a statutory duty to develop a bilingual ALN system where all reasonable steps are taken to deliver ALP through the medium of Welsh, increasing the delivery of Welsh medium ALP over time.
- 3.4 Acknowledging the significant demands placed upon LAs to implement such transformational reforms Welsh Government made the decision to take a phased approach to implementing the new legislation over a period of three academic years, initially from September 2020 to August 2023, later revised to September 202 – August 2024 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Implementation Phases of the ALNET Transformation Programme 2021-2024

Implementation Phases	Transfer to ALN System for learners currently at School Action/School Action Plus (mandated year groups)	Transfer to ALN system for learners with statements of SEN (mandated year groups)
Year 1 2021/2022	Nursery, Y1, Y3, Y5, Y7, Y10	N/A
Year 2 2022/2023	Nursery, Y2, Y4, Y6, Y8, Y10, Y11	Nursery, Reception, Y6, Y10, Y11
Year 3 2023/2024	Nursery, Y2, Y4, Y6, Y8, Y10	Y2, Y3, Y4, Y5, Y6, Y8, Y9, Y10

- 3.5 On 20th March 2023, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, issued a written statement reporting on the increasing pressures highlighted to the Welsh Government by a range of stakeholders, including ALNCos, local authorities, special schools, head teachers, and other education and third sector organisations and the need to have more time to embed effective change. Consequently, the Minister decided to extend the implementation of the ALN Act from three years to four years.
- 3.6 The extended ALN Implementation Timetable means that children who were due to move to the ALN system in year 3 between September 2023 and August 2024 as shown in Table 1 above will now move to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2025. This will not affect timescales for the flow-through to Post-16 provision from September 2023.
- 3.7 Welsh Government continues to provide grant funding to LAs to support ALN Implementation. The aim of the funding is to provide additional capacity to LAs, schools, special schools and PRUs to implement effectively new ALN processes alongside the outgoing SEN processes, develop both local and national collaborations and provide enhanced additional learning provision (ALP) to

support to support children and young people with complex needs. Allocations to Rhondda Cynon Taf since 2020/21 are detailed below in Table 2:

Table 2

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
ALN	593,285	591,495		
ALN COVID (Learner Provision in 22/23)	727,495	744,029	755,355	757,600
New System funding		597,380	456,648	920,598
ALN special schools and units		356,654	106,642	
	1,320,780	2,289,558	1,318,645	1,678,198

- 3.8 Grant funding continues to be used to support a range of training and quality assurance processes relating to the new ALN system. For example, grant funding allowed the LA to provide backfill to release ALNCo cluster leads for 12 days during academic year 2022/23 to support ALNCoS to develop their knowledge and skills in relation to ALN systems. In response to concerns raised by head teachers and ALNCoS regarding workload, all ALNCoS were provided with 3 days back fill to enable them to engage in cluster working. In addition, schools reported that their school-based grant allocations were used to support to their ALNCo, provide whole school training for staff, enable the school to engage in projects such as Nurture UK and, overwhelmingly, to strengthen collaboration through cluster-based approaches.
- 3.9 A delegated decision was made by the Director of Education and Inclusion Services in discussion with the Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services in December 2021 to approve the deployment of additional funding of £500,000 already set aside by the Council to enable Access and Inclusion to meet its enhanced statutory ALN duties during Year 2 of ALN Implementation. As a result, Access and Inclusion implemented a restructure to introduce a new Additional Learning Provision & Early Years Team and an enhanced Family Liaison and Complex Case Team to its existing structure. The Educational Psychology Team was also enhanced by the introduction of 1 full time Educational Psychologist.
- 3.10 In September 2022 a report was presented to Cabinet to update Members on the implementation of the new ALN legislation during Year 1 of the National ALN Implementation Timetable. The report also identified potential risks and further possible additional resources needed to implement Year 3 of the timetable, ensuring that the LA would be able to fulfil its new statutory ALN duties. Cabinet gave approval to progress with the proposals contained within the report. An update is provided on the above within the body of this report.

4. UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION – YEAR 2, 2022-2023

- 4.1 **Transfer from Statements of Special Educational Need (SEN) to Individual Development Plans (IDPs):** By the end of the National Implementation Timetable, non-statutory Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and statutory Statements of SEN will be replaced by statutory IDPs. In 2020/21, RCT maintained 1306 Statements. This increased during Year 1 of the

Implementation Timetable (2021/22) to 1425. (See Table 3). During 2022/23 (Year 2) 531 statements have been closed and, where appropriate, an IDP has been put in place.

Table 3

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23 (as at Sept 23)
Number of statements maintained by LA	1074	1165	1220	1306	1425	894

4.2 Pupils who have transferred to the ALN system and who access specialist placement or who fall within specific categories e.g. Early Years 0-3, Children Looked After (CLA), Education Other Than At School (EOTAS), Elective Home Education (EHE) will have an IDP maintained by the LA. As of 12th September 2023, 534 children and young people have an IDP maintained by RCT LA, 418 of which were transferred from Statements to IDPs during 2022/23. The latest PLASC data (January 2023) indicates that there were 449 school based IDPs at that point in time.

4.3 **Additional Learning Provision (ALP) Team:** The introduction of the 4 ALP Co-ordinators continues to provide essential additional capacity to the Access and Inclusion Service to support both the LA and schools to meet new enhanced statutory duties in relation to the IDP process. Key activities undertaken by the ALP Coordinators in academic year 2022/23 included:

- The drafting of 418 new LA maintained IDPs and 50 review IDPs.
- Facilitating 188 meetings, including Person Centred (PC) meetings and progress reviews in relation to Early Years Children with emerging needs/ ALN.
- Advice/guidance and training for mainstream schools, which included 47 IDP Quality Assurance (QA) sessions held across the academic year, 74 support sessions for PC meetings, 6 IDP drafting workshops attended by 24 schools, bespoke training sessions for schools and meetings with parents.
- Providing 65 support sessions for Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRU) with a combination of bespoke support and training visits and undertaking quality assurance of 250 Special School and PRU IDPs.
- Support for ALNCoS through collaborative cluster-working: ALNCo cluster leads were identified in 2022 and have worked closely with the ALP Coordinators to ensure consistent support for ALNCoS across the local authority and improve communication between Access and Inclusion and schools. 3 formal Cluster Leads meetings have taken place with regular contact throughout the year. 47 cluster IDP drafting sessions have been held for schools alongside quality assuring 279 mainstream IDPs across the academic year. Cluster Leads have produced progress reports for their cluster schools, and these have been monitored by the ALP team. All

Cluster Leads have agreed to remain in post for the second year to ensure this work can be further developed and will be identifying new key priorities.

- Close collaboration with the CLA team through training and IDP drafting. This included Quality Assurance of IDPs and liaison with out of county placements.
- Key role in supporting a range of panel and forum processes.
- Supporting the outgoing SEN system including review and approval of 85 Statements of SEN.

4.4 **Reviewing arrangements for children and young people with ALN:** The ALN Code 2021 places a statutory duty upon LAs to keep under review the arrangements made both by the authority and by governing bodies of maintained schools in their area for learners who have ALN in relation to the identification of ALN and the ALP needed to meet learners' needs.

4.5 The Code states that such a review should support the local authority's strategic decision making as to whether it has the *'correct types, quantity and quality of provision to meet the current and future needs of children and young people with ALN and establish the steps that should be taken to remedy any insufficiencies'* (Section 7.9). This includes the sufficiency of ALP available in Welsh.

4.6 **Quality Assurance:** A key function of the ALP Team is to undertake a range of quality assurance (QA) processes in relation to the effectiveness of provision made for learners with ALN in schools:

Person Centred Practice (PCP) Quality Assurance: The first year of a 3-year PCP QA cycle was implemented during academic year 2022/23. To date 45 PCP QA visits have taken place at individual schools and an interim report completed.

The interim report acknowledges that there are many good PC practices being used in our schools including a range of effective methods to obtain pupil voice and parental views, bespoke PC ALP for individual learners and support from ALNCo to other school staff to develop whole-school PC approaches.

Areas for development include developing review and monitoring processes for PCP, increasing the use of PC tools/resources to develop consistent approaches and further developing processes for gaining parental views.

IDP Quality Assurance: Following on from the intensive support schools have received in relation to IDPs, as detailed in paragraph 4.3, the ALP team quality assured 324 school based IDPs during 2022/23.

Through the QA process good practice was identified in relation to key information included in IDPs regarding the specific needs of individuals, and the ALP identified to meet needs, including levels of support and interventions. It was notable that where schools have engaged fully with the ALP Team for advice and guidance the quality of IDPs was of a higher standard.

Areas for development identified through this process will be fed back to schools through the ALNCo Cluster Leads to enable them to action areas for

development within their clusters. This will be further supported by the ALP Team through drop-in sessions and cluster support sessions.

Provision Map Quality Assurance: A key function of the statutory ALNCo role is the strategic coordination of ALP and ALN resources within their school setting. As such, ALNCoS have received extensive training and support on ALN provision mapping in ALNCo forums, drop-in sessions and targeted 1:1 support.

As part of the LA's mechanisms for keeping ALP under review, ALNCoS/schools are required to submit their updated provision maps to Access and Inclusion on a termly basis. This has enabled the LA to undertake an annual QA process of provision maps over the past two academic years and to help inform the LA's response to referrals from schools in relation to both individual pupils and systemic school support.

Both good practice and areas for development have been identified through the QA process and will be shared via the ALNCo cluster leads, ALNCo forums and drop-in support sessions. Where necessary, targeted support will be offered to ALNCoS.

- 4.7 **Keeping ALP under review:** As part of its statutory review of the overall ALP available within the county borough to meet the needs of its population of learners with ALN (ALN Code Section 7.7), Access and Inclusion undertook a review of the sufficiency of learning support class (LSC) specialist placement provision in RCT during academic year 2022/23. Based on the outcomes of the review and initial consultation Cabinet has given approval to progress to the statutory consultation phase on the following proposals:

Proposal 1 (amended): To relocate the Observation and Assessment LSC at Penrhiwceiber Primary School to Abercynon Community Primary School taking effect from September 2024. (*Amended from April 2024*).

Proposal 2 (amended): To transfer the LSC for pupils in years 3-6 with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at Abercynon Community Primary School to create a through provision in the Primary Phase at Perthcelyn Primary School taking effect from September 2024. (*Amended from April 2024*).

Proposal 3: To establish one Early Years Assessment and Intervention LSC for pupils under statutory school age with significant presenting needs at Abercynon Primary School taking effect from April 2024.

Proposal 4: To establish two Welsh medium primary phase LSCs at the new Welsh medium primary school in Rhydyfelin for pupils with significant ALN taking effect from September 2024.

Proposal 5: To establish one LSC for pupils in years 7-11 with ASD at the new 3-16 school on the Hawthorn Primary/High School site taking effect from September 2024.

- 4.8 If successful, the proposals will ensure that the local authority's review:

- addresses an identified need to increase Early Years LSC provision and secondary phase ASD LSC provision
 - improves the quality of the Observation & Assessment LSC provision through relocation to a 21st Century Environment
 - improves provision for pupils in Abercynon and Perthcelyn LSCs by removing the need for unnecessary transition.
 - Increases the availability of Welsh medium LSC provision and ensures specialist provision is available as a continuum throughout primary and secondary phase Welsh medium education.
- 4.9 To address the well documented pressures on special school placements in RCT Cabinet agreed to progress with a statutory consultation for the proposal to open a new 3–19 special school on the current site of the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale, Tonypany. The new school would provide much needed additional capacity by increasing special school provision within the county borough by 175 individual learner placements.
- 4.10 As the new proposed special school would not be operational until academic year 2026/27, it has been necessary to explore interim measures to ease the current pressures on special school placements. The establishment of an Early Years LSC at Abercynon Community School would provide additional capacity to place children whose ALN is not yet sufficiently explored in terms of identifying the most appropriate specialist provision necessary to meet need. In addition, an agreement is in place with Coleg y Cymoedd and Park Lane Special School to establish a satellite provision for Park Lane post-16 pupils at the Aberdare Campus. This will replicate the well-established and successful post -16 satellite provisions at the Rhondda Campus for Ysgol Hen Felin pupils and at the Nantgarw Campus for Ysgol Ty Coch pupils whilst providing additional capacity for special school placements for pupils aged 3–16 within the main body of Park Lane Special school.
- 4.11 **Development of Welsh medium ALN provision:** One of the underpinning principles of the ALN Code 2021 is the development of a *'bilingual system where all reasonable steps are taken to deliver ALP in Welsh for children and young people who require support through the medium of Welsh'* (ALN Code 2021, Section 3.2). When considering the sufficiency of its ALP in Welsh the Code allows scope for LAs to work proactively to increase their available Welsh medium ALP 'over time'.
- 4.12 In collaboration with schools and other relevant professionals the LA has identified a range of priorities to review and develop Welsh medium ALP which are reflected in Outcome 6 of the LA's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). Year 1 actions during 2022/23 included a review of available Welsh medium ALP in Early Years settings and Welsh medium schools and an initial scoping exercise of Welsh medium provision available at Coleg y Cymoedd, proposals to open new Welsh medium LSC provisions, an audit of Welsh medium ALN workforce within Access and Inclusion and specialist settings in RCT and the development of a joint professional development opportunity for head teachers, ALNCoS and Central

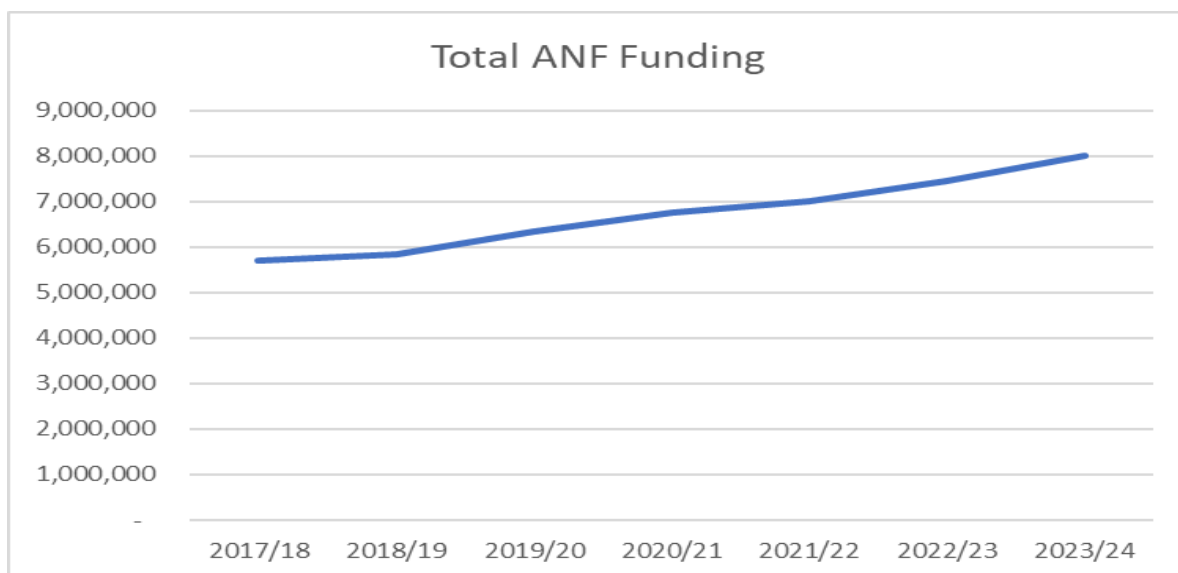
South Consortium Improvement Partners to ensure a shared understanding of effective self-evaluation of ALN.

- 4.13 In addition, consultations were undertaken with Welsh medium staff from Access and Inclusion and Welsh medium ALNCos to gather information on the barriers to providing effective Welsh medium ALP. Barriers identified included: lack of Welsh medium resources, insufficient appropriately trained Welsh speaking ALN workforce and limited Welsh medium specialist provision.
- 4.14 An evaluation of the Year 1 WESP Outcome 6 Action Plan has identified provisional actions for Year 2 (2023/24). These include ensuring that all Teams in Access and Inclusion have Welsh essential posts, improve the uptake of early years settings in Welsh medium ALN training, considering the feasibility of establishing Welsh medium special school hub provision in designated special schools and a review of Welsh medium ALN resources on a local and national basis.

5. ENSURING ENHANCED CAPACITY FUNDING TO MEET NEED

The Enhanced Capacity Funding (ECF) delegated to schools (formerly ANF - Additional Needs Funding) has continued to increase in 2023/24 financial year by approximately 13%. (See Graph 1). This is in line with the previous 5 financial years ensuring that the budget reflects the growth in complexity of need amongst pupils with ALN and continues to supplement schools' overall delegated budgets to enable them to make appropriate ALP for their learners as stipulated in their IDPs.

Graph 1: Delegated Enhanced Capacity Funding (ECF) for schools:



- 5.1 Additional learning provision (ALP) identified in IDPs for children aged 0-3 in early years settings must be funded by the LA. As anticipated, there has been a growth in the required ECF for this cohort from approximately £21k in financial year 2022/23 to £42,553 in 2023/24 (to date). This will require

further monitoring and provision made for a continuing potential growth in Early Years ECF during the next financial year.

- 5.2 As the National ALN Implementation Timetable has only recently been enacted for pupils aged 19-25 who are attending an FEI there has not been any expenditure incurred for Enhanced Capacity Funding requested by FEIs to assist them in meeting the ALP of learners. However, this is likely to change as we progress through Year 3 of Implementation. This will require the LA and the local FEIs to agree robust processes and clear eligibility criteria to ensure fair and transparent decision making. At this early stage in the implementation of the ALN system for the 19-25 cohort it is still not possible to estimate the additional cost to the council in relation to post-19 ECF.

6. MEETING ENHANCED STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE EARLY YEARS (0-3)

- 6.1 **Early Years Forum:** Referrals to the Early Years Forum (EYF) remain high for the second year since implementation, with 175 new referrals received during 2022/23 (179 in 2021/22), of which 46 referrals resulted in the completion of IDPs. This is an increase of 8 IDPs compared to academic year 2021/22. A further 45 referrals identified the likely need for an IDP to be initiated on attendance at a pre-school or school setting.
- 6.2 **Specialist Placement:** As anticipated, due to the number of children aged 0-3 being identified as having ALN, there has been an increase in the number of Early Years children requiring specialist placement in a LSC and/or special school from 20 in 2021/22 to 29 in 2022/23. Hence the current school organisation proposals to increase both early years LSC and special school provision in the LA.
- 6.3 **Early Years ALN Transition:** In recognition of the importance of effective transition for pre-school children with ALN from their early years provision into a school setting, and the continuing high number of referrals to EYF, Access and Inclusion increased the capacity of the Early Years Transition Support Service (EYTSS). EYTSS provides enhanced transition support to mainstream schools to meet the needs of incoming early years learners with ALN. In an evaluation of the Service undertaken in Summer 2022, 94% of schools reported that the service was useful and that the child was well supported through transition.

During academic year 2022/23 EYTSS received 108 new transition referrals and worked with schools to support a total of 223 children. This a significant increase from 100 children during the previous academic year. In addition, the Service made 630 supportive visits to schools and early years settings, attended 184 Early Years Team Around the Child Meetings to advise on ALP. EYTSS work closely with the Family Liaison and Complex Case Team (FLACC) to support families with starting school.

EYTSS report schools are engaging more proactively with the Service and are demonstrating a better understanding of effective transition for early years children with ALN. As a result, many schools are now initiating Early Years

Team Around the Child meetings independently and are using advice and support from EYTSS to inform their graduated response and IDP content.

Actions identified by EYTSS to further improve Early Years ALN Transition processes during 2023/24 include the introduction of a termly Transition Forum for schools and pre-school settings, transition training to upskill schools and settings to implement Early Years ALN Transition processes independently and a follow-up evaluation with stakeholders.

6.4 **ALN Early Years Advisory Teacher (ALN EYAT):** This post has been operational since September 2022 following Cabinet approval to enhance the capacity of Access and Inclusion to support the new statutory 0-3 age ALN cohort. Key activities undertaken by the EYAT during academic year 2022/23 include:

- 96 support visits to pre-school settings, including direct support for 74 children in early years settings.
- Support for settings/relevant professionals to ensure referrals to EYF are timely and appropriate, successfully decreasing the number of inappropriate referrals and subsequent referral rejections.
- Supporting the Early Years IDP process through attendance at Person-Centred Meetings, IDP progress reviews and Early Years Team Around the Child Meetings.
- Delivery of training, drop-in sessions and support clinics resulting in support for 26 Early Years settings, ensuring that consistent messages are being delivered regarding statutory duties and ALP and providing supporting evidence and professional advice to the EYF and Transition Panels.

Positive impact of this support has been evident through the quality of referrals to EYF and the appropriate and meaningful support children are receiving in the settings to meet identified needs.

Actions identified for further development of the role in 2023/24 include the development of additional training based on the professional development needs identified through feedback from settings and schools in 2022/23 and devising a process for monitoring the longitudinal impact of ALN training upon the quality of provision in Early Years settings.

7. **MEETING ENHANCED STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE 19-25 AGE RANGE**

The new statutory ALN duties for young people with ALN in the 19-25 cohort were enacted in September 2023 for those young people who transferred to the new ALN system by 30th August in line with the national ALN implementation timetable.

7.1 Through Welsh Government ALN Grant funding Access and Inclusion funds a part time Post-16 ALN Project Manager who has extensive experience of working with students with SEN/ALN in the Further Education (FE) Sector. This

post has provided valuable additional capacity and expertise to work collaboratively with the FE ALN Sector both regionally and on a national basis, supported by the Welsh Government FE Implementation Lead.

7.2 Update on 2022/23 post-16 workstreams:

Scoping of numbers of learners who express a clear preference to progress to FE during academic year 2023/24

The Post-16 ALN Lead Officer worked closely with the local FEIs and schools, and other agencies such as Careers Wales, to track destinations of pupils with an ALN in their final year of compulsory schooling. Outcomes of year 11 IDP reviews and transition planning meetings helped identify learners seeking to apply to college. Accurate information on the destinations of school leavers with a LA maintained IDP is important to deal effectively with the transfer of responsibility from the LA to a FEI. RCT now has an agreed process in place with the local FEI for making this official request in writing. At the time of writing, there were 35 young people in receipt of a LA maintained IDP in 2022/23 who enrolled in a FEI as indicated below in Table 4:

Table 4

FEI	Number of learners with an LA maintained IDP enrolled at an FEI (as of September '23)*
Coleg y Cymoedd	32
Bridgend College	2
Petroc College (England)	1

**These numbers can change with late enrolments*

Establishment of a multi-agency post-16/19 ALN steering group with representation from LA services, Health, and FE colleges.

RCT's ALN Post-16 Steering Group was launched in January 2023. Core membership consists of key representatives from schools, the local FEI, Health, Careers Wales, and a range of LA services. The group has developed an ambitious but realistic Development Plan which identifies key priorities and time scales (see below).

Undertake a post-16 enhanced transition pilot for learners with ALN in mainstream and specialist settings.

This was a joint pilot implemented by the LA and Coleg y Cymoedd. In line with the aims of the ALN Code, which requires much closer working practices between pre- and post-16 sectors, schools now have named links with the local college and a greater understanding of the learning support and transition arrangements available. Information and training sessions with ALNCoS and specialist school staff took place in face-to face meetings in schools, online sessions, and a workshop presentation at the ALNCo forum. An online session was also held for Careers Wales advisors. New ALN transition posts have been introduced to the Coleg y Cymoedd staffing structure, providing greater capacity to liaise with schools and support vulnerable learners in their final year of compulsory schooling who are considering going to college. In addition, written resources to support this

process, such as a 'Learner Information Guide to Enhanced Transition' have been developed.

Following the pilot, Coleg y Cymoedd report that 88 RCT school leavers benefited from an Enhanced Transition into Coleg Y Cymoedd for academic year 2023/24.

Work continues this academic year on running 'Multi-Agency Transition Screening Meetings' (MATSMs) in schools, to improve timely information sharing and the effective involvement of professionals, services, and organisations to support the learner in their transition.

Working group to develop a collaborative graduated response for supporting FE learners in terms of universal and additional learning provision and thresholds for implementing college based and LA funded IDPs.

A key workstream identified in the Post-16 ALN Steering group's Development Plan, is the development of a graduated response to support learners in college. Developments include:

- An information sharing event hosted by the college to give the LA a clear picture of its Universal and Additional Learning Provision.
- Agreement between Access & Inclusion Senior Management Team and Coleg y Cymoedd ALN team on the identification of ALN and 'thresholds' for implementing college based and LA funded IDPs.
- Sharing LA ALN resources with the college to ensure a consistent approach.
- Training provided to college staff by the Access and Inclusion ALP Team to support the college in undertaking the statutory IDP process.
- The development of an agreed Process Chart outlining 'Y11 transition Process.'
- Attendance of college staff at RCT ALNCo cluster groups and ALNCo forum to increase awareness of college provision.

7.3 Current post-16 workstreams: Four overarching development priorities have been identified by the Post-16 ALN Steering Group and form the basis of the 2023/24 Post-16 ALN Development Plan as follows:

1. Identify future needs of young people in RCT leaving statutory education, to inform future planning.
2. Develop consistency of practice in the transition of young people from RCT Learning Support Classes, PRU and Special Schools to FEI.
3. Develop operational processes to support the LA and partners to deliver statutory duties in relation to young people post-16 and criteria for when it would be reasonable for the LA to secure ALP.

4. Provide consistent and transparent information and advice about post-16 options available within RCT for young people aged 16-25 with an ALN.

Progress to date includes the creation of a Post-16 ALN forum, the development of processes to support and manage referrals for potential specialist college placements and guidance for schools, young people and their families on the transfer of a school IDP to a college based IDP.

7.4 **Post-16 Independent Specialist Post-16 Institution (ISPI) Placements:**

Historically Welsh Government has been responsible for agreeing and funding placements for young people with learning difficulties aged 16 to 25 who require access to highly specialist post-16 college provision. This responsibility will now transfer to LAs. The process for devolving the specialist college budget and responsibility for determining eligibility criteria/processes for agreeing placements commenced this academic year 2023/24, with the LA now being responsible for making decisions regarding placements at ISPIs for young people in the ALN system.

An interim funding mechanism and reporting schedule to WG is in place and WG anticipate that funding will fully transfer to LAs by the end of the 2024 to 2025 school year, although final confirmation has not been received as yet.

This will create significant new duties for the LA in assessing and meeting the reasonable education and training needs of young people via the newly established Post-16 ALN Forum. The forum will need to make decisions relating to identifying the specific ALN of individual young people, the preparation and maintaining of IDPs, securing placements at ISPIs and for agreeing the costs, terms and conditions of the young person's programme of study.

In turn the Welsh Government will reimburse local authorities for the costs of the education element of the placement via the Local Authority Education Grant Funding from the 2023 to 2024 financial year onwards. However, it is the responsibility of the LA to secure joint funding for costs related to transport, medical, domestic, or social care.

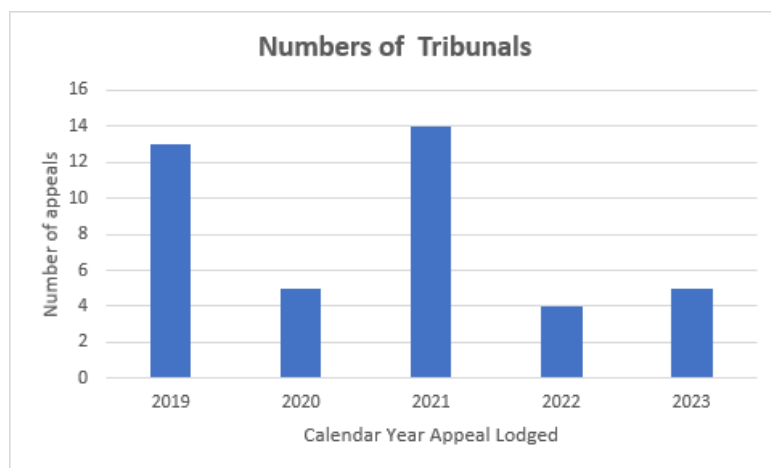
The ALN Code is clear that if needs can be met locally at a maintained school or FEI, this should be the first choice. There is further scope for the LA (Education and Social Care departments) and local FEIs and Health Boards to work in partnership to explore opportunities to improve the local offer for young people and thus reduce the need for them to leave their community and local services. This is a complex area and requires time and financial commitments of all partners. RCT submitted a nil return to Welsh Government for 2023-24 ISPI placements. Historically, there has been a small number of young people with significant and complex ALN from RCT accessing highly specialist college provision. However, with increased awareness of the new statutory 19-25 age range within the Act, together with the uncertainty that the transfer of funding responsibility from WG to LAs may bring, it is possible there will be an increase in the number of young people and their families expressing a preference to attend an ISPI. It is important, therefore, that the LA continues to adopt a proactive approach in identifying and managing potential applications.

8. **AVOIDING DISAGREEMENTS AND EARLIER DISAGREEMENT RESOLUTION**

Within the three overarching principles and the 11 core aims of the ALN legislation there is a requirement for LAs to implement a fair and transparent system for providing information and advice to families and children and young people and to resolve concerns and appeals at the earliest opportunity. Additional funding approved through the delegated decision of the Director of Education and the Elected Cabinet Member for Education enabled Access and Inclusion to create two new posts to create two new posts, a Complex Case Manager and a Family Liaison Officer, to form the Family Liaison and Complex Case (FLACC) Team in September 2022. The FLACC Team is key to ensuring more effective liaison and collaboration with families, parents/carers and a range of other stakeholders, such as Children’s Services, the Local Health Board and local parent/community ALN groups.

- 8.1 Over the past academic year the FLACC Team has worked with 197 families, supporting them to understand ALN Panel and referral outcomes, to support with school based ALN concerns and to provide advice, guidance and signposting for families to a range of services. Individual case work has been effective in providing early dispute resolution to avoid escalation to formal tribunal appeals. Although it is not possible to quantify the actual number of disputes that would have resulted in a formal Tribunal appeal to Education Tribunal Wales if it had not been for the early intervention of the FLACC Team, the number of tribunal appeals lodged against the LA during the last calendar year remained low compared to previous years (See Graph 2 below). It is notable that the number of appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Tribunal doubled over the first four years of implementing the SEND reforms in England from 2014.

Graph 2



- 8.2 In addition to individual case work, the FLACC Team work systemically via a Family Engagement Plan to engage parents, families and other stakeholders through planned activities. Activities undertaken during 2022/23 included parent information sessions on understanding the ALNET Act and ALN Code, meeting with parent groups across the county borough and internal service areas to ensure families receive consistent and accurate information about Access and Inclusion processes and available ALP. Feedback received has been positive and has

resulted in stronger relationships between the LA and parent/carers and ongoing regular planned meetings with some parent groups.

- 8.3 The 2023/24 Family Engagement Plan aims to build upon the work undertaken during 2022/23 and includes actions to work with a wider range of LA services and community groups, to provide joint information sessions with SNAP Cymru, the independent parent partnership organisation commissioned by the LA, and the development of a pupil voice project in collaboration with the Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS).

9. VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Following the publication of a research paper by Sir Alasdair Macdonald commissioned by Welsh Government – *An integrated approach to improving educational outcomes for looked after children in Wales* - the LA is currently embarking on Year 2 of a Virtual School Model pilot for supporting CLA learners. The paper sets out five recommendations including one to develop a Welsh Virtual School Model replicating the well-established statutory Virtual Schools in England. The key role of the Virtual School is to promote the educational achievement of CLA.

- 9.1 The RCT Virtual School, led by the Virtual School Head Teacher, has put in place a range of robust mechanisms to ensure CLA learners with ALN receive appropriate access to ALP in line with the requirements of the ALN legislation. Developments over the past academic year include the implementation of a CLA IDP QA process, the development of a revised Personal Education Plan (PEP), the creation of a Virtual School Power BI data dashboard to enable the Virtual School Head Teacher to track the attendance of CLA pupils in every school in RCT and enhanced scrutiny of the use of the PDGLAC. The Virtual School also has responsibility for RCT CLA learners educated outside of the county borough. To this end, the Virtual School has developed an Out of County Monitoring Protocol to ensure robust monitoring and challenge in relation to CLA learners' academic progress, wellbeing and learning experiences and to ensure compliance with ALN duties.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

11. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 One of the underpinning principles of the ALN system as set out in the ALN Code (Wales) 2021 is 'a bilingual system where all reasonable steps are taken to deliver ALP in Welsh for children and young people who require support through the medium of Welsh, with scope for increasing the delivery of ALP in Welsh over time'. Therefore, the LA has a responsibility to comply with the statutory duties imposed by the Act about to review the sufficiency of its ALP in Welsh and work towards developing a fully bilingual system.

12. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 12.1 No consultation exercises have been undertaken. The report is for information purposes only.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 There are no financial implications contained within this report.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 14.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

15. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 15.1 The report reflects the mission outlined in RCTCBC's Education and Inclusion Services Strategic Plan for 2022 to 2025 '*To deliver equity and excellence in Education and enhanced wellbeing for all*' and compliance with statutory ALN legislation and delivering high quality, effective ALP supports delivery against the five strategic priorities within the Plan, in particular:

- Strategic Priority 2: Supporting educational settings to deliver a transformational curriculum, high quality teaching and learning and improved outcomes for all.
- Strategic Priority 3: Ensuring equity and support for vulnerable learners and their families.

- 15.2 Through the activity outlined in the report the Education Directorate will support the delivery of two of the three priorities of the RCT Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 'Making a Difference':

- Ensuring PEOPLE: are independent, healthy and successful.
- Enabling PROSPERITY: creating the opportunity for people and businesses to: be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper.

- 15.3 Organising services to focus on early intervention and prevention is a key statutory requirement of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015 and a key element of RCTCBC's Corporate Plan.

16. CONCLUSION

As we embark on Year 3 of the National ALN Implementation Timetable the Access and Inclusion Service will ensure that it works collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders and partners to continue to meet the LA's statutory duties as set out in the new ALN legislation. An evaluation of key actions undertaken to implement the third year of transition from the SEN system to the ALN system will

inform both strategic and operational priorities for the fourth and final year of the National Implementation Timetable in academic year 2024/25.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION & INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH OCTOBER 2023

**AN UPDATE ON YEAR 2 OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ADDITIONAL LEARNING
NEEDS AND EDUCATION TRIBUNAL ACT 2018 IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AND INCLUSION SERVICES**