



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

27TH MARCH 2023

**UPDATE ON PROPOSALS TO STRENGTHEN THE CONTINUUM OF
SCHOOL-BASED PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND
BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES (SEBD)**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN
DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH
PARTICIPATION AND WELSH LANGUAGE**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to:

- 1.1 Update Members on a two-stage pilot to allocate funding to secondary schools to establish school-based alternative curriculum Step 4 provision for learners with significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).
- 1.2 The report will provide an overview of the impact of the provisions established to date in building the capacity of schools to meet the needs of their learners with SEBD, thus adopting an inclusive approach to strengthening the continuum of SEBD provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council in line with the underpinning ethos of recent Welsh Government Additional Learning Needs legislation and statutory guidance on developing a whole-school approach to supporting wellbeing.
- 1.3 The report also seeks approval to utilise an existing earmarked reserve to enable schools to continue to implement Step 4 provisions as part of their graduated response to meeting the needs of learners with SEBD.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the progress made to date with the Step 4 pilot (Tranche 1 and Tranche 2).

- 2.2 Approve the proposal to support secondary/all through schools to maintain their current Step 4 provision or to establish a new Step 4 provision as set out in the report.
- 2.3 Note that the £500k per year funding from September 2023 – August 2025 is already in place to support these new proposals.
- 2.4 Note that this new funding, will be in addition to the £2.645M funding already invested in Step 4 provisions since 2020.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To inform Members of the impact of the additional funding provided to a number of secondary schools to establish alternative curriculum/specialist Step 4 provision that enhances their capacity to meet the increasingly complex needs of learners with SEBD within their mainstream setting and, in turn, reduce the demand for local authority led specialist SEBD placements.
- 3.2 To ensure secondary/all through schools can continue to implement Step 4 provisions to meet the needs of learners in their catchment school in this critical post pandemic phase.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The model describing the local authority's approach to managing learners' behaviour is outlined in Appendix 1. Step 4 is the fourth of five steps of the Council's approach to supporting the social, emotional and behavioural needs of learners, where a learner's educational provision is provided in a local alternative provision or pupil referral unit led and managed by schools.
- 4.2 The establishment of school-based Step 4 provisions is supported by the following principles of the new statutory ALN Code (2021):
 - Early identification, intervention and prevention where needs are identified and provision put in place at the earliest opportunity and where possible interventions are put in place to prevent the development or escalation of ALN.
 - Inclusive education where the majority of children and young people with ALN are supported to participate fully in mainstream education and a whole setting approach is taken to meeting the needs of learners with ALN.
 - A bilingual system where all reasonable steps are taken to deliver Additional Learning Provision (ALP) in Welsh over time.

4.3 In March 2021, Welsh Government published its statutory guidance '*Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing*'. The school-based Step 4 model is supported by the overarching principles outlined in the Framework, which include:

- The responsibility for all school staff to take a whole-school approach to the promotion of good mental health and emotional well-being is universal and integral to a successful school environment.
- A whole-school approach that puts the child at the centre of decisions made about them needs partnership and involvement with families, the community, other statutory bodies and the third sector.
- A whole-school approach promotes equity for all, reducing variation and using evidence-based practices consistently and transparently, in terms of both use of data for planning and any interventions.

4.4 On 24th March 2020, the Cabinet Member for Education approved a delegated decision to allocate a sum of £500k per annum for two years to fund a number of mainstream secondary schools to establish their own alternative curriculum provision (Step 4 provision) or pupil referral unit for learners with significant social, emotional and behavioural needs. This proposal extended the earlier pilot (Tranche 1) where £200k per annum was allocated to secondary schools to establish Step 4 provisions for a two-year period commencing September 2019.

Further to this, in June 2020, due to the impact of COVID, Cabinet agreed to lapse a statutory consultation to create four new Learning Support Class (LSC) provisions for SEBD. A revised proposal was agreed to pool the £416k per annum originally set aside to fund the LSCs with the above £500k allocated in the delegated decision of 24th March 2020 to extend the second phase of the pilot (Tranche 2) to additional secondary schools for a two-year period commencing September 2020.

A further tranche (Tranche 3) commenced in September 2022, continuing to utilise the core funding originally earmarked to fund the LSCs (minus the funding directed to open the Welsh Medium LSC in Ysgol Garth Olwg, i.e. £300k) for a further two academic year period until July 2024.

4.5 Schools wishing to establish a Step 4 provision were required to submit a proposal setting out clear target priorities and impact measures in relation to improved outcomes for their learners with SEBD. In addition, a key element to the proposals was a clear commitment by schools to match fund any local authority contribution for the duration of the pilot and an overview of the school's long term financial planning to develop a sustainable and effective provision.

4.6 The schools that submitted successful proposals are as follows:

Tranche 1 (September 2019 – July 2021):

Aberdare Community School – Dare Valley Provision (off-site)

Porth Community School – Gate Provision

Rhondda Collaboration (Ferndale Community, Tonyrefail Community, Ysgol Nantgwyn, Porth)

Tranche 2 (September 2020 – July 2022 – *extended until Spring Term 2023 due to underspends as a result of the impact of Covid*):

Aberdare Community School – on-site nurture provision

Ferndale Community School

Ysgol Nantgwyn

Treorchy School

Hawthorn High School

Pontypridd High School

Bryncelynnog Comprehensive

Ysgol Garth Olwg

Ysgol Cwm Rhondda

Mountain Ash Comprehensive School

Tranche 3 (September 2022 – July 2024)

Ferndale Community School

Mountain Ash Comprehensive School

Ysgol Cwm Rhondda

Ysgol Nant Gwyn

Y Pant

Pontypridd High School

5. PROGRESS UPDATE

- 5.1 Despite the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon schools since March 2020, all successful schools remained committed to implementing their Step 4 provisions. However, several periods of school-closure, Covid related staff and pupil sickness absence and the need to introduce remote and blended learning approaches have inevitably impacted upon the implementation of individual school proposals over the course of the two pilots. This resulted in a number of Tranche 2 schools being delayed in setting up their provisions until much later during academic year 2020/21 than originally anticipated.
- 5.2 The pandemic has also posed difficulties for schools and the local authority in making direct comparisons of specific impact data relating to some of the schools' original target improvement priorities. However, all schools have been able to demonstrate the impact of their Step 4 provisions through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and information.
- 5.3 **Impact upon behaviour and exclusions**

- 5.3.1 Whole school exclusion data in relation to the number of fixed term exclusions issued by the Step 4 schools highlights a mixed picture in terms of improvement, with seven out of the 12 schools demonstrating a reduction in incidents or rates per 1000 pupils of exclusion in comparison to pre-Covid pandemic data in 2018/19 and with a further school demonstrating an improvement in the rate of exclusion between 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- 5.3.2 Analysis of data for the majority of individual pupils directly accessing the Step 4 provisions indicates a clear reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions issued. For example, during academic year 2020/21, no exclusions were incurred by pupils accessing the Step 4 provision at Aberdare Community School having previously accrued a total of 32 fixed term exclusions collectively, resulting in 43 days lost to exclusion. During academic year 2021/22, only five days of exclusion were incurred to one pupil within the Step 4 cohort, in comparison to a total of 28.5 days and a permanent exclusion from another school being incurred by the same cohort of pupils prior to accessing the Step 4 provision. Ferndale Community School reported a reduction of 35% in the number of exclusion sessions incurred by its Step 4 cohort in 2021/22 and Treorchy reported no exclusions for their target cohort of 10 pupils last academic year.
- 5.3.3 In addition to exclusion data, both Tranche 1 and 2 schools report a significant positive impact that the provisions have had upon reducing the negative behaviours of Step 4 pupils and together with an increase in their positive behaviours at school. Pontypridd High School reported that pupils accessing the provision significantly reduced their negative behaviour points from an average of 102 points to 41 points. Six out of seven pupils attending the provision in Ysgol Nant Gwyn saw an average improvement of 31.7% between the start and end ratio of negative versus positive behaviour points during an academic year.
- 5.3.4 Encouragingly, several schools are reporting a revolving door approach to their provision, with a clear ambition to re-integrate learners into mainstream classes supported by access to enhanced, targeted support and intervention, as necessary.
- 5.3.5 More generally, exclusion data and reported evidence from schools highlights the considerable challenges that many schools are facing in the post pandemic phase, with increasing numbers of learners experiencing challenges in conforming to school rules and expectations, and routinely displaying defiant behaviour.

5.4 Attendance/Engagement

- 5.4.1 Despite the complexities surrounding direct data comparisons relating to attendance as a result of the pandemic and concerns regarding attendance in general, Step 4 schools have identified some improvement in attendance for pupils accessing their Step 4 provisions. For example, learners

accessing the provisions in Mountain Ash and Bryncelynnog Comprehensive Schools showed an average improvement in attendance of 54% and 22% respectively during 2020/21. Attendance of nine out of the 10 pupils accessing the provision in Mountain Ash Comprehensive in 2021/22 improved again, with five pupils gaining between 88% and 95% attendance. Ysgol Nantgwyn and Treorchy Comprehensive School have reported improved attendance in general for their Step 4 cohort.

- 5.4.2 Most notably, schools have observed an overall improvement in the quality of pupil engagement during lessons, with an increase in the number of positive behaviour points awarded to Step 4 pupils during lessons/school-based activities.
- 5.4.3 Mountain Ash Comprehensive reported an average improvement of 29% in class chart positive points gained by the target cohort, with two pupils who were new to both the school and the provision achieving 75% and 85% positive points respectively.
- 5.4.4 Ferndale Community School reported a significant increase in the number of positive behaviour points awarded to pupils, particularly within the lower year groups, thus reinforcing an underpinning objective of school-based Step 4 provision to provide access to early intervention so as to prevent the escalation of need.
- 5.4.5 In addition, many schools have reported that the Step 4 provisions have provided them with enhanced capacity to develop positive relationships with both the Step 4 learners and their parents. This was particularly effective during periods of school closure during the Covid pandemic in ensuring pupils' continued engagement in learning and in enabling schools to support any reported wellbeing concerns. For example, Porth Community School reported making over 430 wellbeing calls to the families/learners of their Step 4 provision, 'GATE', and Ysgol Cwm Rhondda reported that their Step 4 provision provided them with additional targeted capacity to make daily contact with families and learners between the extended hours of 8am – 8pm during weekdays and to provide support at the weekend during exceptionally challenging circumstances.
- 5.4.6 This enhanced contact with parents and pupils has continued effectively post-pandemic. In Mountain Ash Comprehensive, staff in the Step 4 provision make at least weekly telephone contact with parents to update them on their child's engagement and any concerns or notable positive event or incident. Parents of pupils in the Treorchy provision receive daily phone calls from Step 4 staff and are invited to termly Pastoral Support Plan review meetings. In Hawthorn High School strengthened relationships have resulted in staff, pupils and parents collaborating to develop a person-centred approach to developing a bespoke curriculum offer to the pupils in the provision. The Step 4 provision at Ferndale Community School hosts monthly learner progress meetings with pupils, parents/carers where all

stakeholders have the opportunity to voice concerns and to celebrate successes.

5.5 Impact on learning

- 5.5.1 Many schools engaging in the Step 4 projects have prioritised key stage 4 learners to access their provision. The curriculum offer to these targeted learners has been bespoke to individual needs and, crucially, structured to ensure future pathways are secured for the young people.
- 5.5.2 Models have varied from school to school, but all key stage 4 offers have been designed to ensure a more vocational approach to learning, that key performance indicators are met where appropriate and that the bespoke vocational offer is provided alongside the pupils' statutory core curriculum entitlement. Wider vocational qualifications have included BTEC SWEET (linked to Health and Wellbeing, Relationships and Sexuality Education), LiFE (Lessons in Financial Education), Prince's Trust, Agored qualifications, as well as offering off site experiences such as work experience.
- 5.5.3 Staff with specific expertise have been assigned to deliver appropriate areas of the curriculum and, where needed, training has been undertaken to provide the highest quality provision to the learners.
- 5.5.4 As a consequence of these actions, together with intensive wellbeing support to improve attitudes to learning and attendance, schools have reported that the Step 4 provisions have supported them to plan clear pathways and post-16 destinations for pupils, with nearly all key stage 4 learners gaining at least level 1 in all qualifications undertaken.
- 5.5.5 In Hawthorn High, all targeted learners gained Level 1 in core and vocational qualifications, all achieving or exceeding predicted grades. In the Nurture class in Aberdare Community School, year 8 learners achieved higher standardised scores on the national adaptive reading tests than in previous years. All year 11 pupils exceeded their predicted capped nine score in Pontypridd high school by an average of 109 points in 2021. More recently the school has reported that 100% of Year 10 pupils accessing the Step 4 provision full time are on track to achieve nine qualifications including Maths, English and Science; 100% of learners will achieve vocational qualifications such as Agored, Workskills and the Prince's Trust, whilst also securing their BTEC qualification in Construction; 80% of the learners attending Step 4 are on track to achieve their target grade in English; 100% are on track to achieve their target grades in Science and Maths. In Treorchy Comprehensive, all Step 4 pupils sat GCSE Maths and English summer examinations in 2022 and completed BTEC SWEET Level 2 qualification.
- 5.5.6 In addition, the establishment of Step 4 provisions has promoted more effective partnership working with a range of external agencies to develop alternative curriculum opportunities and bespoke prevention and

intervention approaches for their pupils. Examples include collaboration with Vibe Youth, Empire Fighting Chance, Bard, The Women's Aid, Police School Liaison Officer and Eye to Eye Counselling.

5.5.7 A few schools have utilised the Gatsby+ programme alongside the academic offer. This is in line with the new 'Extended work placement' protocols for RCT schools.

5.5.8 In light of this work and the evaluations received, RCT is now offering a bespoke programme, 'Gateway to Employment' which allows learners to study for core qualifications and gain at least a Level 1 in work skills. This is delivered across many different work placements to ensure the young people can experience the varied choices of employment open to them.

5.6 Wellbeing approaches

5.6.1 The Welsh Government '*Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing*' provides a clearly defined process for schools to develop their wellbeing provision. This includes a three-stage process of scoping need and mapping strengths and weaknesses, the development of an action plan to address identified gaps and which includes how both universal and targeted provision will be delivered in collaboration with external agencies to support the wellbeing of **all** learners, and, finally, an evaluation of the effectiveness of any measures/provision put in place.

5.6.2 As expected by the new Framework schools have ensured that their Step 4 provisions are integral to their whole-school graduated response to meeting need, for the most highly complex and vulnerable learners. As such, some schools have defined entry and exit criteria to their Step 4 provisions, to ensure a robust approach to matching need to intervention, with one school operating a panel process to determine eligibility for access to the Step 4 provision, which includes scrutiny of the quality of the graduated response put in place up to that point.

5.6.3 In other schools, when targeted learners are identified, robust assessments for behaviour and wellbeing are undertaken (e.g. Boxall, PERMA, Thrive) which inform individualised action plans and interventions for learners such as ELSA, Lego therapy and mindfulness.

5.6.4 The use of PERMA, a wellbeing tool developed by Rhondda Cynon Taf Educational Psychology Service on behalf of the Central South Consortium has been an influencing factor in the planning of provision in Step 4 settings and reflects the underpinning principle that good wellbeing is a key factor in improving pupil behaviour, resilience and engagement in learning. For example, in Porth Community School, the GATE provision routinely tracks pupils' wellbeing through PERMA which enables them to tailor their wellbeing approaches to the individual. In Mountain Ash Comprehensive

School during academic year 2020/21, all learners improved their rating about school in at least one PERMA area and 54% of pupils improved their ratings about school in half or more PERMA areas. The school reported that this led to improved engagement and outcomes in learning for this cohort of learners, with all pupils making good progress against their individual targets. This increased to 73% of the target cohort during academic year 2021/22.

- 5.6.5 In Treorchy Comprehensive, other wellbeing and behaviour assessments such as Boxall, Thrive and PASS surveys indicate a significant improvement in pupils' feeling of self and wellbeing.
- 5.6.6 The use of a range of wellbeing and behaviour assessments has enabled Step 4 provisions to identify specific areas for development relating to individual pupils and develop bespoke, individualised intervention programmes. For example, many of the provisions use one page profiles/about me profiles to ensure that teaching and learning is specific to the pupils' needs and learning styles. Through diagnostic assessment, the Step 4 provision in Ferndale Community School identified that the target cohort had a clear need for tailored interventions designed specifically to build resilience. In Ysgol Nantgwyn Step 4 pupils have had access to therapeutic intervention to assist with anxiety, stress and self-harm de-escalation. The provision takes a nurture focused approach (in small group and at an individual level) to support pupils' needs with particular social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which were creating barriers to learning within a mainstream class. Most Step 4 provisions ensure pupils can access a high level of support from a trained ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant).
- 5.6.7 A key element to the success of developing and evaluating the whole-school approach to wellbeing is the importance of the 'voice' of learners and parents/carers/family. One school stated that pupils and parents of pupils accessing the alternative curriculum provision inform them that pupils are happier and more engaged in education while attending the provisions. There is frequent contact between the staff and parents/carers, and the pupils thrive from having a 'keyworker' in the school setting. They report that being a part of the provision has improved their self-confidence and wellbeing, noting that several of the pupils would have been considered for permanent exclusion or become non-attenders if they had not accessed the provisions. Learner voice is an integral part of the planning process to ensure that a person-centred approach is taken to teaching and learning. Feedback from the whole school pupil voice survey undertaken by Pontypridd High School demonstrated that 88% of pupils like attending an alternative provision at the school and nearly all (93%) pupils feel safe within the alternative provision environments.
- 5.6.8 In Treorchy Comprehensive School pupils are given ownership of their learning at the Multi-Agency Planning meeting that follows their Step 4 referral to the school's Behaviour Panel. All key stakeholders collaborate to

co-construct a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) with clearly identified targets. When reviewing their termly PSP pupils have the opportunity to discuss how they feel through sharing their strengths and areas for development.

5.6.9 Direct feedback from learners regarding their Step 4 provision includes the following comments:

Pupil A

"They give me options and listen to me more. Things don't feel so rushed."

"When I need to talk to someone, they always listen to me."

"I don't really enjoy coming to school, but I feel better in nurture."

Pupil B

"I feel a bit more comfortable here than in mainstream lessons."

"It makes me less worried about coming to school."

Pupil C

"I feel safer coming to school knowing I can go to the nurture room."

"I feel like I understand things more and get more done."

5.6.10 Schools have identified specific case studies to demonstrate the positive impact of their Step 4 provisions on the behaviour, attendance/engagement and educational outcomes of individual learners. Examples have been provided in Appendix 2.

5.7 Whole-school impact and sustainability

5.7.1 Schools have reported clear evidence of the wider positive impact that their Step 4 provisions have had upon a range of whole-school areas for improvement. These include whole-school behaviour management, curriculum development, the roll-out of newly adopted wellbeing approaches to wider cohorts of pupils and the development of effective partnership working with a broad range of partner agencies.

5.7.2 Porth Community School, a Tranche 1 pilot school, initially introduced a range of vocational qualifications for their Step 4 learners which have now been rolled out to the wider school cohort. The use of PERMA was instrumental in developing strategies to support improved wellbeing within the Step 4 provision, and, as a consequence, the school has rolled out the use of PERMA to track the wellbeing needs of the wider school cohort of learners and to identify appropriate interventions where necessary.

5.7.3 Ysgol Cwm Rhondda has reported on how targeted wellbeing strategies used in their Step 4 provision have informed whole-school development of the new Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience (AOLE) under the New Curriculum for Wales framework as part of an early intervention and preventative approach to meeting needs.

- 5.7.4 Bryncelynnog Comprehensive noted a significant reduction in the number of daily behaviour incidents that needed to be addressed by the school's Senior Management Team, thus providing additional capacity to senior staff, and also how improved behaviour across the wider school environment had had a positive impact upon individual staff members. Similar feedback was provided by Hawthorn High School.
- 5.7.5 Following an Estyn inspection in 2018 Aberdare Community School was placed in an Estyn statutory category of Significant Improvement with a recommendation to improve attendance and behaviour. As part of the Tranche 1 pilot, an off-site Step 4 provision was set up at the Dare Valley Wellbeing Centre to deliver a bespoke curriculum and wellbeing support to a small number of key stage 4 pupils requiring the most intensive support.
- 5.7.6 The Estyn monitoring report dated November 2021, cites the above provision as one of the school-based approaches that
'have led to improved engagement, attendance and positive behaviour for learners at risk of disaffection' (Estyn Monitoring Report, 2021).
- 5.7.7 Crucially, the Step 4 provision has been a core element within the school's overarching approach to behaviour management. It has been a significant contributing factor in the notable improvement in whole-school exclusions over the past four academic years (see Tables 1 and 2 below), resulting in an 81% reduction in the number of incidents of exclusion and a 75% reduction in the number of days lost to exclusions over this period of time.

Table 1:

Aberdare Community School	
Number of Incidents which led to a Fixed Term Exclusion	
Year	Number of Incidents (Sept to Whitsun half term)
2018/19	269
2019/20	41
2020/21	20
2021/22	51

Table 2:

Aberdare Community School	
Number of Days Lost to Fixed Term Exclusion	
Year	Number of Days Lost (Sept to Whitsun half term)
2018/19	447.5
2019/20	103.5
2020/21	37.5
2021/22	112.5

Aberdare Community School is no longer in a statutory Estyn category for improvement and was reported by Estyn as having made 'notable

improvements' against **Recommendation 1: Improve attendance and Behaviour.**

- 5.7.8 Due to the success of the secondary phase Step 4 provision (called 'GATE') in Porth Community School, a decision was made to establish and fund a similar provision called 'NEST' to support pupils in the primary phase of the school in September 2021. This ensures a consistent approach to supporting behaviour and wellbeing across both phases of the school and ensures a more targeted approach to early intervention within the school – both key factors of the whole-school approach outlined in the national Wellbeing Framework. Similarly, the POD Step 4 model for Key Stage 4 has been replicated for Key Stage 3 pupils with significant SEBD at Treorchy Comprehensive from school's resources.
- 5.7.9 As part of the monitoring and governance arrangements established by the Education Directorate, all schools are required to provide information to the local authority Step 4 Monitoring and Governance Group on a termly and annual basis on how identified improvement priorities relating to their Step 4 provision feed into their School Improvement Plan. This also includes a requirement for schools to report on their planning for sustainability. In view of the increasing financial pressures facing councils and schools, there are significant concerns expressed by school leaders that existing provisions may no longer be affordable in the long term. It is hoped that by creating a further funding stream via Tranche 4, it will be possible to provide greater resilience in the system at a time of significant financial pressures and increasing concern about learner wellbeing, behaviour and engagement.

5.8 Reduction in PRU placements

- 5.8.1 Trend data for the last four years demonstrates a reduction in the number of pupils requiring a placement at Ty Gwyn Education Centre, the local authority's secondary phase pupil referral unit (PRU).

Table 3:

Number of pupils accessing Ty Gwyn PRU			
Sept 18	59	April 19	55
Sept 19	43	April 20	47
Sept 20	38	April 21	36
Sept 21	19	April 22	23
Sept 22	39		

- 5.8.2 Prior to the establishment of Step 4 provisions, Ty Gwyn was set up to cater for a maximum capacity of 88 learners, and it was not unusual to see pupil numbers rise significantly in-year during each academic year. This inevitably impacted upon the quality of provision available to learners accessing PRU provision.

- 5.8.3 Since September 2019, approximately 200 pupils have accessed school-based Step 4 provisions and it is anticipated that this will increase further during the Tranche 3 phase. The availability of flexible, local-based SEBD provision, that can be accessed swiftly without the need for referral on to the local authority, has undoubtedly contributed to the reduction in local authority PRU placements required over the past two academic years.
- 5.8.4 The reduction in the number of pupils accessing Ty Gwyn is enabling the PRU to develop as a more specialist provision that provides bespoke learning and therapeutic provision to meet the needs of learners with the most significant and complex social, emotional and behavioural needs within the local authority, thus reducing the demand for costly out of county placements and supporting efficiency saving targets.
- 5.8.5 Following an inspection in October 2019, Estyn determined that special measures were required in relation to Ty Gwyn PRU. Pleasingly, following a period of rapid improvement, Estyn removed Ty Gwyn from requiring special measures in November 2021. Within their monitoring report, Estyn acknowledged the contribution that the development of the continuum of SEBD provision, which includes Step 4 provisions, has made to the ability of the PRU to improve:

'A positive professional working relationship with the local authority is also supporting improvements across the PRU. This collaborative working relationship continues to develop as the local authority establishes the PRU's role as part of the wider behaviour provision across the authority'

Monitoring Report, Ty Gwyn, Estyn. November 2021

5.9 Governance Arrangements

- 5.9.1 Robust monitoring and governance arrangements have been established to support schools to develop their Step 4 provisions. This includes a strategic Monitoring and Governance Group consisting of senior officers within the Education Directorate and Finance Department of the local authority, Principal Improvement Partners from the Central South Consortium and Head Teacher representatives. The group is supported by the Step 4 Operational Group. Both groups meet on a termly basis.
- 5.9.2 Schools are required to submit a termly progress/impact report, together with an annual impact report to the local authority.
- 5.9.3 A key function of the monitoring groups is to co-ordinate support for those Step 4 provisions where there is an identified need for improvement which includes promoting the sharing of effective practice through school-to-school support. Examples of support provided to schools include advice regarding the use of specific assessments for behaviour, the effective use

of the PERMA wellbeing tool and the implementation of evidence-based wellbeing interventions.

6. PROPOSAL

- 6.1 In light of the positive impact of the Step 4 pilot, and the commitment of schools to continue to develop their own school-based Step 4 provisions, it is proposed to invest an additional £500k per annum over a 2 year period to support pupils with an ALN, including those with social, emotional, behavioural and wellbeing needs, to enable more secondary/all through schools to establish/maintain Step 4 provisions, thus building on the effective and inclusive practice developed during the pilot. This funding is already earmarked and set aside.
- 6.2 It is proposed that all secondary schools will be invited to submit a detailed proposal for consideration by the local authority during Summer Term 2023 in order to establish or maintain their Step 4 provision from September 2023. Selection will be based on an evaluation of the current level of need in the school; the existing stepped approach to managing behaviour; commitment to match funding; development of a high quality and sustainable provision that will deliver improved outcomes for learners in their local communities and that supports the implementation of both the new Welsh Government legislation in relation to learners with ALN and the national *'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing'*.
- 6.3 Providing schools with additional resources to establish alternative curriculum provision or specialist provision tailored to accommodate the needs of learners with SEBD in their local community will ensure that the Council is taking an inclusive and flexible approach to developing its continuum of SEBD provision within the county borough. This reflects the emphasis within the national Framework upon the value of high-quality inclusion that provides equity of opportunity to all learners within a whole school setting and the recognition that each school needs to take an individual approach to meeting the needs of its learners based on their local context *'so there is no one-size-fits-all approach'* (Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing, Welsh Government 2021).
- 6.4 Schools will continue to be expected to provide termly and annual progress/impact reports alongside their financial claims. Robust monitoring arrangements as outlined in paragraph 5.9 will continue to ensure that schools are provided with all possible support and guidance to achieve improved outcomes for learners accessing Step 4 provisions.
- 6.5 A progress report will be presented to Cabinet of the impact of the Step 4 provisions. This will allow the Council to keep its specialist SEBD provision under review and, if necessary, consider whether the approach outlined

above continues to make effective use of Council funding in improving outcomes for this particularly vulnerable group of learners.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 7.1 Welsh Language, Equality, and Community Impact Assessments are not required for the purpose of this report.

8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 In line with the requirements of Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (ALNET) 2018, which stipulates that all local authorities must provide bilingual ALN provision, and the Council's vision to increase the number of Welsh medium learners, the proposal will provide an equitable process for Welsh medium schools, alongside English medium schools, to submit a bid to the local authority to access funding to establish a school-based Step 4 provision. This would enable pupils to access Welsh medium specialist provision/alternative curriculum opportunities in their catchment school and local community, in line with the underpinning principles relating to inclusion reflected in new ALN legislation and to develop a whole school approach to supporting the wellbeing needs of learners as outlined in the Welsh Government statutory guidance '*Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing.*' The proposal extends the current Step 4 pilot where two Welsh medium schools have successfully gained Step 4 funding.

9. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 9.1 There are no consultation implications arising from the content of the report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 It is recommended that £500k per year is invested to further support the continuation of Step 4 provisions over a 2 year period (from September 2023 to August 2025). This funding is in addition to the £2.645M already invested into Step 4 provisions (Tranches 1-3) since 2020.
- 10.2 Schools wishing to establish a Step 4 provision will be required to submit a detailed funding bid and make a clear commitment to match funding with the aim of developing a sustainable and effective provision.
- 10.3 With this additional investment, it is anticipated that the demand for secondary specialist SEBD placements will continue to diminish. The reduction in the number of specialist placements allocated to learners in the secondary PRU has enabled the local authority to redistribute an element of the PRU funding to support the existing Step 4 pilot. It is anticipated that continued investment in supporting secondary schools to establish school-based Step 4 provisions will enable the local authority to maintain the

reduction in the capacity of Ty Gwyn in the long term, thus ensuring that the PRU can meet the needs of its most highly complex learners with social, emotional, behavioural and wellbeing needs within the county borough without the need to seek very costly out of county placements.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 Section 316A of the Education Act 1996 specifies that children with SEN should normally be educated in mainstream schools so long as this is compatible with them receiving the special educational provision that their learning difficulty calls for; the efficient education of other children, and the efficient use of resources.
- 11.2 Section 315 of the Education Act 1996 also requires the local authority to ensure that SEN provision is kept under review. Sections 1:20 and 1:21 of the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002) also requires LAs to evaluate the effectiveness of school funding arrangements in supporting and raising the achievement of children with SEN.
- 11.3 The statutory ALN Code (Wales) 2021, places a statutory duty upon the local authority to keep under review the additional learning provision available in its area and its supporting arrangements to ensure provision is sufficient to meet the overall needs of its population of learners with additional learning needs.
- 11.4 The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 provides a legal framework to deliver a transformational curriculum, Curriculum for Wales 2022, that focuses upon developing strong and inclusive schools for all pupils.
- 11.5 The local authority must have regard to the Welsh Government statutory guidance '*Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing*' when carrying out their duties in promoting the welfare of learners, including meeting their mental and emotional wellbeing needs.

12. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 12.1 There are links to RCTCBC's Education and Inclusion Services Strategic Plan for 2022 to 2025 and its mission: '*To deliver equity and excellence in education and enhanced well-being for all*', most notably:
 - 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.

- 12.2 The implementation of the new Welsh Government ALN legislation and the processes and systems developed at a local council level will ensure that some of RCTCBC's most vulnerable learners will have the best chance of achieving positive outcomes.
- 12.3 The information in the report contributes to the priorities within RCTCBC's Corporate Plan, 'Making a Difference'.
- 12.4 Organising services so that they are focussed 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.

13. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

- 13.1 Given the requirement of the new ALNET Act (2018) and the ALN Code (2021) to provide high quality inclusive provision for pupils with a range of ALN within mainstream settings, including those with SEBD and the requirement for the local authority and schools to have regard for the statutory Welsh Government '*Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing*' the above proposal to secure additional resources will ensure that the Council successfully delivers on its statutory obligations, and as such is a strategic proposal relevant to all wards.

14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 In summary, there is clear evidence that Step 4 provisions are providing an effective, inclusive model for addressing the social, emotional, behavioural and wellbeing needs of their most challenging learners. This has resulted not only in improved outcomes in terms of wellbeing, behaviour and academic attainment for learners directly accessing the provisions, but also in whole-school improvements, such as whole-school behaviour management, the development of whole-school wellbeing approaches and curriculum development, that have benefited the wider school population.
- 14.2 The development of Step 4 provisions has built the capacity of schools to improve the robustness and quality of their graduated response to supporting the social, emotional, behavioural and wellbeing needs of learners, through the implementation of a broader range of bespoke interventions and alternative curriculum offer. This, in turn, has seen the demand for more costly specialist PRU placements in Ty Gwyn reduce over the duration of the Step 4 pilot.
- 14.3 Adopting an inclusive approach to meeting the needs of learners with significant social, emotional, behavioural and wellbeing needs ensures that Rhondda Cynon Taf embraces one of the underpinning principles of the new Additional Learning Needs legislation whereby most learners with

additional learning needs should have their needs met in their local mainstream setting within a whole-setting approach to meeting needs.

- 14.4 This approach also clearly reflects the ethos of the Welsh Government *'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing'* that values inclusion, effective collaboration for the collective good and the creation of a *'supporting environment where young people are encouraged to fulfil their personal and academic potential, where they thrive, learn and emotionally develop'* together with its core values of 'belonging, efficacy and having your voice heard'.
- 14.5 In light of the above, the Education Directorate recommends that Cabinet approves the proposal to use available resources to enhance provision for pupils with ALN within the county borough by enabling more secondary schools to establish or maintain school-based Step 4 provisions. The Access and Inclusion Service will continue to monitor the effectiveness of Step 4 provisions as part of the local authority's continuum of additional learning provision for learners with complex social, emotional, behavioural and wellbeing needs under its statutory duties as set out in new ALN legislation.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny

Contact Officer

Ceri Jones, Head of Inclusion Services

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

27th MARCH 2023

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN
DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH
PARTICIPATION AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE**

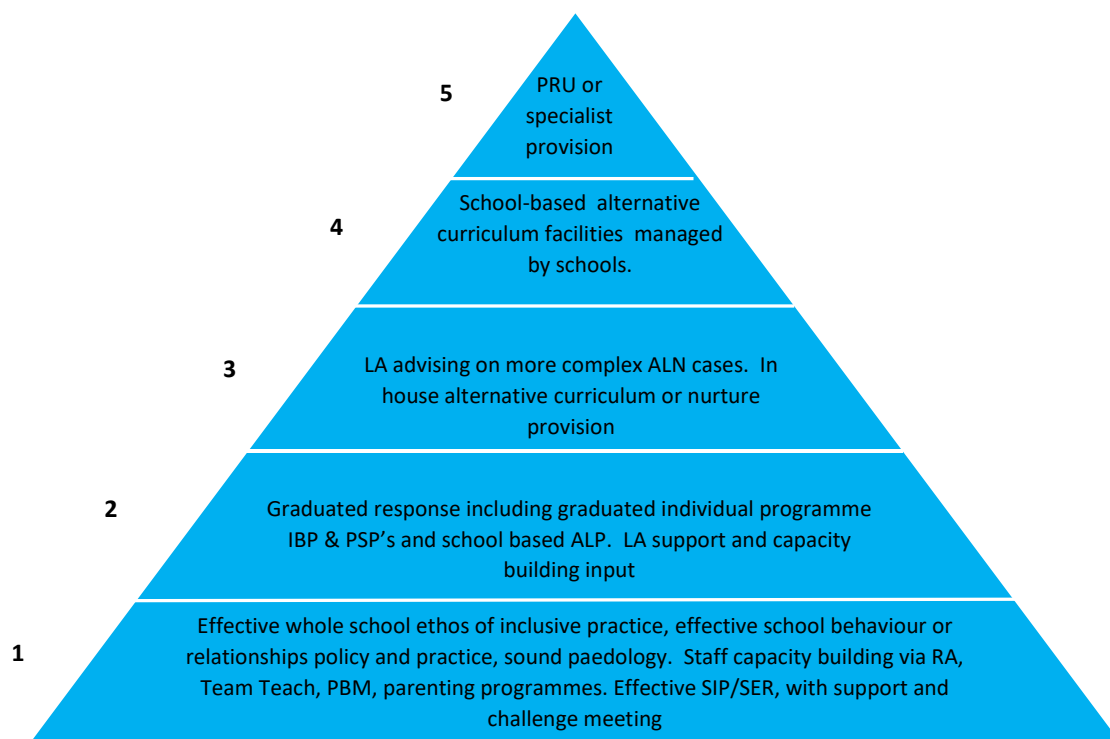
**Item: UPDATE ON PROPOSALS TO STRENGTHEN THE CONTINUUM OF
SCHOOL-BASED PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL
AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES (SEBD)**

Background Papers

[Cabinet Report March 2020: Proposals to Strengthen the Continuum of Provision for Pupils with Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties and Significant Additional Learning Needs](#)

Officer to contact: Ceri Jones, Head of Inclusion Services

Appendix 1



Step 1 is characterised by robust whole school approaches to positive behaviour management and the consistent implementation of the school behaviour/relationships policy due to robust whole school training and effective leadership. Good classroom practice will be in place and clear, consistently applied behaviour management routines and good teaching and learning will be evident in classrooms. To support this, schools will be challenged and supported (as they will be throughout the stages) through self-evaluation and school improvement planning processes. In some cases, where there is cause for concern due to high exclusion rates, additional support and challenge meetings will be provided. External support for the school, pupil and family will be essential at higher levels but should not be overlooked at this step.

Step 2 links most closely to what should be provided at School Action and School Action Plus of the SEN Code of Practice and for pupils requiring Additional Learning Provision (ALP) as outlined in their school-based Individual Development

Plan (IDP). The main characteristics of this stage will be support for capacity building so that schools can offer a personalised graduated response to individual pupils. This may take many forms for learners who should continue to access mainstream education and the provision of individual or small group interventions aimed at further improving social, emotional and behavioural skills. This could include ELSA, Thrive, and restorative or learning coach interventions to target the development of identified social, emotional and behavioural skills. Interventions at this stage could also include access to an in-house inclusion provision aimed at managing significant behavioural incidents in school and avoiding fixed term exclusions, with a focus placed on reflection and repairing harmed relationships.

Step 3 is characterised by in-house alternative curriculum support and/or 'revolving door' provision for pupils. At KS3 the aim should be that targeted pupils eventually return to mainstream provision but access short-term but intensive support, which could include nurture provision. At KS4 the in-house alternative curriculum arrangements may be exclusive to a particular group of dis-engaged pupils.

Step 4 is where the most significant change in provision is envisioned with strategically situated Key Stage 4 Alternative Curriculum Centres managed by school staff and potentially delivered in partnership with other providers. This provision should have a significant impact on school attendance and exclusions and reduce the demand for step 5 provisions.

Focus could be placed on providing learners with a bespoke core curriculum offer delivered by subject specialists and access to more vocational training opportunities with external providers if appropriate. Any externally commissioned provider should have their registration status checks and all placements risk assessed. Good quality information about pupils' learning and behavioural needs should be provided and measures taken to ensure curriculum continuity and progression, robust attendance recording and engagement.

Step 5 is the intensive specialist end of the spectrum, where pupils who cannot manage a mainstream school curriculum or the Key Stage 4 alternative curriculum arrangements are placed. These pupils will be attending a learning support class provision for young people with significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or the LA PRU.

A significant proportion of these pupils will have a statement of SEN under the outgoing SEN Code of Practice or will have a Local Authority maintained IDP due to their complex ALN that requires ALP that cannot reasonably be provided by a mainstream setting. Some pupils will have been permanently excluded. Some pupils will move into this category of provision early in their school lives. In exceptional circumstances some learners will have escalated through the stages and others may move up or down the steps depending on their presenting needs.

Appendix 2

Case Studies

Pupil A

Pupil A was referred to Step 4 provision due to having high behaviour points and exclusions rising. The pupil had previously attended the Tai Centre Primary Pupil Referral Unit but transitioned to mainstream secondary school. Before accessing the Step 4 provision the pupil had:

- 125 Negative behaviour points
- 2 exclusions
- Attendance 83%
- Underachieved in all subject areas

Following access to the provision until the pupil left school two years later, the pupil had:

- 0 Negative behaviour points
- 0 exclusions
- Attendance 87%
- Secured 9 GCSE qualifications at A*-G

Pupil B

Pupil B accessed the provision as a year 8 pupil who had struggled with transition to secondary education in Year 7. Access to existing school-based interventions and involvement from the Educational Psychology Service had had no discernible impact upon pupil B.

Since accessing the Step 4 nurture provision Pupil B's attendance has improved from 66% to 77%, with no exclusions and he has made accelerated academic progress (e.g. two sub-levels of progress in Science). His PERMA rating for Wellbeing has improved in four out of the six areas, with notable improvement in his rating for engagement increasing from 6/10 to 9/10.

Pupil B	April 2021	July 2021
Positive Emotions	8/10	9/10
Engagement	6/10	9/10

Relationships	7/10	6/10
Meaning	5/10	8/10
Accomplishment	3/10	6/10
Negative Emotions	5/10	6/10

Nurture provision staff have noted:

'When Pupil B first started accessing the Nurture Class, he was quite disruptive, loud in class, he would laugh when spoken to about his behaviour, he was easily distracted and he would often deny doing things, after staff had witnessed it.

Over the past few months, we have seen many changes in Pupil B's attitude and behaviour. He is enthusiastic to learn, he shows good manners, kindness and will often offer to help staff. He has also made close friendships in the Nurture Class. Pupil B has made excellent progress on his targets, and now meets them almost every lesson. Pupil B is very motivated by the rewards system.

Pupil B has completed work to help anxiety, communication skills, to help form friendships, behaviour, mindfulness and he really enjoys ELSA and Lego Therapy activities.'

Pupil B has reported:

'I like coming to Nurture because I like having hot chocolate and toast in the morning and talking to the staff. I likes having a card to show teachers when I am stressed. I think my behaviour has changed and I have enjoyed learning about respect and how to work together with others.'

Parent of Pupil B has reported:

'The nurture group has been fabulous for Pupil B. He is a like a different boy – calmer in the house, will sit and talk to us. He is eager to come to school and is much more interested in learning.'

Pupil C

Pupil C had a record of very challenging behaviour. Pupil C had experienced trauma and a number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). Pupil C had reached the maximum support on the graduated response package that the school could offer with no impact, including being placed in a Nurture provision. Pupil C displayed challenging and risk taking behaviour that would lead to Pupil C needing

to access Internal Exclusion provision on a daily basis, or a formal exclusion from school.

Since accessing the safe and consistent approach adopted by the Step 4 provision, Pupil C has made significant improvements in terms of both their engagement with learning and behaviour, demonstrating an ability to regulate their emotions and developing coping strategies with the support of Step 4 staff.

Pupil C has only received one full day exclusion since accessing the Step 4 provision, their attendance has improved together with what is described by school as an 'incredible improvement' in the number of positive reward points achieved on Class Charts.

Pupil C has had access to a broad curriculum including Maths, English, Equality and Diversity, BTEC ART, Duke of Edinburgh Award, BTEC Sweet, Lego Therapy and support from the YEPS team. This bespoke and differentiated learning programme has been both challenging and rewarding for Pupil C. In September, Pupil C will also receive Thrive and ELSA interventions tailored to their individual needs and will be supported with GCSE options within the Step 4 provision, with an ambition for them to access some mainstream lessons with support from Step 4 staff.

Pupil C's parents have reported to school that they are 'thrilled' with their child's progress and are very supportive of the provision.