



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023/2024**

**EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024**

**AN UPDATE ON ESTYN'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the progress made against the recommendations for improvement identified following Estyn's inspection of the education services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council in January 2023.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Consider the information provided.
- 2.2 Consider whether any further information is required on any aspect of the report or the work of the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To provide Members with information on the progress made in addressing the recommendations resulting from Estyn's inspection of the Education Directorate in January 2023.

**4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 4.1 Prior to the January 2023 inspection, [Rhondda Cynon Taf Education Services](#) had its last core inspection in March 2012 when Estyn judged Education to be 'adequate', with 'adequate prospects for improvement.'

4.2 In order to improve, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council was considered to require improvement in a number of key areas. Six key recommendations were made, including:

- R1 Raise standards in schools particularly in key stage 4
- R2 Improve attendance rates in all schools
- R3 Improve the evaluation and analyses of data across service areas and partnerships to drive improvements in outcomes for learners
- R4 Use the full powers available to the authority to improve leadership and management in schools
- R5 Reduce surplus places
- R6 Improve the rigour and the level of scrutiny and challenge across all services and partnerships.

4.3 As consequence of this inspection, the local authority was placed in a follow-up category of Estyn Monitoring. Following a series of follow-up visits from Estyn, the local authority was judged to have made sufficient progress. In August 2014, Estyn provided [formal confirmation](#) that the local authority no longer required further follow-up activity due to the progress made.

4.4 [Estyn's 2023 Inspection of Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf](#) was very positive and no follow-up was required. Three key recommendations for improvement were made:

- R1 Sharpen approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning
- R2 Strengthen approaches to Welsh-medium education, for example by improving access and support for learners with additional learning needs and providing opportunities for late immersion for learners
- R3 Work closely with schools, pupil referral units and the regional consortium to build on the local authority's work to further improve attendance and reduce exclusions.

4.5 Estyn's inspection of local authorities focuses on three inspection areas, namely:

**Inspection area 1 – Outcomes**

Standards and progress overall  
Standards and progress of specific groups  
Well-being and attitudes to learning

**Inspection area 2 – Education Services**

Support for school improvement  
Support for vulnerable learners  
Other education support services

**Inspection area 3 – Leadership and management**

Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers  
Self-evaluation and improvement planning

Professional learning  
Safeguarding arrangements  
Use of resources

- 4.6 Inspectors do not inspect or evaluate all education services during a core inspection and in the local authority inspection in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the following local inspection questions (LIQs) were highlighted for further exploration:

**LIQ1:** How effective is the challenge, support and intervention in improving the quality of teaching and leadership in schools and PRUs?

**LIQ2:** How effective is the local authority working with its communities to support the most vulnerable learners and what impact is this having, for example on improving attendance, well-being and engagement?

**LIQ3:** How well does the local authority meet the needs of pupils with ALN?

**LIQ4:** To what extent does the local authority consider appropriately the educational benefits and risks of its school organisation proposals?

## **5. SUMMARY OF ESTYN'S FINDINGS**

- 5.1 The Estyn report provides a comprehensive overview of inspection findings, including the Directorate's strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations.
- 5.2 A concise summary of Estyn's key findings is also detailed in the published report and is extracted in full below. Areas of strength are highlighted in **bold** and areas for development are underlined for ease of reference:

**'Leaders in Rhondda Cynon Taf education services provide clear and purposeful leadership. They are committed to ensuring that children and young people achieve their very best. The leader, chief executive, cabinet member for education, elected members and senior staff in the education directorate have set high expectations for their officers, schools and providers. All officers have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are empowered to take action to provide valuable services to improve outcomes for children and young people across the authority.**

**Leaders in the local authority make their decisions carefully, based on how best to serve their different communities and to meet individual needs. For example, the council makes effective use of a wide range of data and information when considering school reorganisation and planning. This means that school organisation proposals take good account of the needs of the school's community and promote equity of provision for pupils. However, improving provision for Welsh, for example through late immersion opportunities, specialist ALN provision and improving the outcomes for Welsh in English-medium schools, is at an early stage of development.**

Generally, inspection outcomes over time have been sound within the local authority. Since we resumed inspection in February 2022, we asked three primary schools to provide case studies of good practice, one primary school requires special measures, and another primary school was placed into Estyn review.

The director and her senior team work pro-actively in partnership with Central South Consortium (CSC), the school improvement service. The local authority shares explicitly its high expectations of the work of the regional consortium. For example, the local authority is clear about how CSC should support its strategic priorities and directs improvement partners to gather the first-hand evidence required by the local authority. Overall, the quality of support and the information provided by the CSC is too variable.

The local authority places a high priority on supporting its most vulnerable children and young people to improve their outcomes, well-being and life chances and provides helpful support for schools to improve these pupils' attendance and behaviour. Over time, the attendance of pupils in Rhondda Cynon Taf has been lower than national figures and the attendance of those pupils who are eligible for free school meals has remained low.

The local authority has provided particularly helpful support to its schools and settings to prepare for the additional learning needs (ALN) reforms. Staff have benefited from a broad range of professional learning to improve their understanding of how to identify individual needs. A particular strength has been the way in which staff have been supported to develop their understanding of person-centred planning and individual development plans. Overall, support for additional learning needs is strong.

Across the directorate, senior officers and their staff are committed to continuously improving the service they provide. They strive to identify and support future leaders and provide a very helpful leadership development professional learning programme.

A notable strength is the way in which this has supported succession planning and improvements in leadership across the local authority and its schools. The director and her senior team have developed a clear programme for evaluation and improvement, which supports all officers to have a suitable overview of their areas of responsibility. Despite this, self-evaluation and improvement planning processes often lack precision. In particular, officers do not always identify clear indicators of success, and this hinders their ability to evaluate their work precisely and to plan for future improvements.

**Leaders in the directorate support staff very well. A particular strength is the way they provide officers with the autonomy to make decisions about how best to support schools and settings. Staff feel valued and well-informed of the direction and vision for improvement in the local authority. Over time, this has supported the local authority effectively to incrementally improve the services they provide.**

- 5.3 Estyn identified two areas of innovative and effective practice and the local authority was requested to write two case studies. These included
- Use of data across the local authority to inform planning, decision making and support for schools
  - The development of future leaders in education through a strong professional learning offer and effective succession planning.

The impact of the work in these two areas of provision and standards was considered to be very effective. Both case studies can be found in Appendix 1 and 2 of the Estyn report.

- 5.4 The published report provides a comprehensive review of all findings, with multiple references to areas of strength and considerably fewer references to areas for improvement. Areas identified by Estyn for improvement had in the main been identified through prior self-evaluation and have continued to form an important part of our improvement plans during 2023/24.

## **6. PROGRESS AGAINST ESTYN'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 **Recommendation 1:** Improvement work to refine and further improve self-evaluation processes has been ongoing and processes are now more streamlined and simplified. The Directorate's Delivery Plan is now better informed by performance measures and success criteria and greater focus has been placed on aligning the service plans that sit below the Directorate's Delivery Plan. In summary,
- there is close alignment between the Council's Corporate Plan, Education's Strategy Plan for 2022-25 and Directorate Delivery Plans.
  - the Directorate Strategic Plan for 2022-25 provides a framework for all delivery planning and for ensures that we meet our well established vision, missions and over-arching strategic priorities. These include:
    - Strategic Priority 1: Developing a highly skilled educational workforce and excellent leadership at all levels which is essential is we are to create good schools.
    - 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.

- Strategic Priority 4: Enhancing the well-being of our learners and the workforce.
- Strategic Priority 5: Delivering 21st Century learning environments and innovative services for our learners and communities.
- Service Self Evaluation (SSE) processes have been strengthened and are well informed by qualitative and quantitative data, and extensive stakeholder feedback. Each service area has a data dashboard that provides extensive data for the purpose of service self-evaluation.
- Framework for SSE has been updated and the self-evaluation process and report has been considerably streamlined. The SSE report is now more condensed and more evaluative in nature.
- Self-evaluation in Education is cyclical and is the focus of ongoing discussions. This includes SMT meetings, workshops involving all staff, stakeholder feedback via surveys, and more planned evaluation. Focused monitoring, evaluation and review (MER) activities have been strengthened and includes: a frequent analysis of Estyn outcomes; school improvement processes and outcomes; data analysis; quarterly monitoring and review of delivery plans; and a review of Cabinet, Scrutiny and Audit Committee reports.
- Stakeholder feedback has been strengthened and an engagement plan developed. This now needs to be fully integrated into the MER cycle and a calendar of activities developed.
- Service Delivery Plan templates now adopt the same format as the Directorate Delivery Plan to ensure consistency. All plans require use of performance indicators and success criteria. Service Plans are now quality assured and approved by the Director of Education and Service Director for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Transformation.
- Quarterly review meetings now take place to monitor and challenge delivery plan progress and to collate supporting evidence as the year progresses.
- The Wellbeing Plan is now integrated into the Directorate Delivery Plan to avoid duplication and to ensure routine monitoring and evaluation.
- There is a culture of high support and challenge. Heads of Service and Service Director individually present to the wider SMT on their service's performance, identified areas of strength and priorities for improvement.
- Staff and managers are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are well supported to ensure that they have the required expertise, knowledge and skills to be effective in their roles. Good access to training and development opportunities are provided to help the workforce to improve. Performance Management is effective. The Annual Individual Performance Review contributes to a strong performance culture within the Directorate and high accountability and is successful in identifying development needs and supporting succession planning. Staff are held accountable for their performance and supported in challenging areas

through regular one to one and team meetings where progress against delivery plans is monitored.

6.2 **Recommendation 2:** Strengthen approaches to Welsh-medium education, for example by improving access and support for learners with additional learning needs and providing opportunities for late immersion for learners

Delivery planning and partnership approaches to the **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan** (WESP) are robust, with a member of the senior management team in Education leading on each of the seven strategic outcomes. Good feedback has been provided by Welsh Government on the WESP, and the approach adopted to data gathering for outcome 7 has been deemed as good practice and will be shared more widely with others.

**Sustainable Communities for Learning** investments have resulted in enhanced capacity in the Welsh medium sector. Works have been completed on the school site of YGG Aberdar to deliver a new sessional childcare facility providing an additional 30 registered places, and an extension to provide additional facilities and an additional 72 learner places at the school. Works have also been completed for YG Rhydywaun to deliver an extension to increase capacity at the school. The brand new block on the school site opened to learners from September 2022 and created an additional 187 learner places at the school. In the Rhondda Fach area, capital funding has been secured to provide a brand new school for YGG Llyn y Forwyn. Work is progressing on the new school site to provide additional capacity, childcare facilities, and community use facilities to encourage the use of the language in the community. In the Taff Ely area of the County, the construction of the new Welsh medium school in Rhydyfelin has progressed successfully. The new school will be named Ysgol Awel Taf and is on target to open to learners from September 2024 as planned. In addition to this development, a new Ti and Fi provision has been established in the recently constructed school, with 7 new starters and 5 children have registered for a nursery place in the new Welsh medium school

There are some exciting developments underway to extend Welsh medium learning support class provision for learners with **ALN**. The Access and Inclusion team has been working closely with Ysgol Garth Olwg to facilitate the opening of a new Welsh medium Learning Support Class (LSC) provision for Key Stage 3 and 4 learners at the school. Provision was due to open to learners from September 2022. However, due to recruitment difficulties it was not possible to open the provision prior to September 2023.

Proposals for the establishment of Welsh medium ALN provision in the new Welsh medium primary school in Rhydyfelin were previously listed as Year 2 to 3 actions in the 10 year WESP (2022-2032). However, to ensure swifter progression, the proposals were brought forward. The proposals were presented to Cabinet for approval in May 2023 and consultation was duly undertaken and completed. In December 2023, Cabinet agreed to a proposal to establish two Welsh medium primary phase LSCs at the new Welsh medium primary school in Rhydyfelin, YGG Awel Taf, for pupils with significant ALN

taking effect from September 2024. This will significantly enhance Welsh medium specialist ALN placement provision in RCT.

The Access and Inclusion team has been working with CSC to ensure effective ALN provision is available for learners in mainstream education and special schools and classes in RCT. Improvements have been made to the self-evaluation processes to ensure information regarding ALN forms part of each schools' monitoring, evaluation and review cycle. A new process has been agreed to implement a joint professional development opportunity and quality assurance process to ensure a shared understanding between Access and Inclusion services, CSC Improvement Partners, Headteachers, ALN Co-ordinators and Governors regarding effective self-evaluation of ALN. This will include:

- Guidance for mainstream schools on effective self-evaluation of ALN.
- Training on effective self-evaluation for CSC Improvement Partners, Headteachers, ALN Cos and Governors.
- Support and oversight by CSC Improvement Partners as part of their quality assurance processes – ongoing throughout academic year.
- Designated joint Access and Inclusion Services and CSC meetings to discuss good practice and concerns to inform support for individual schools.

A **Welsh language immersion team**, or the 'Taith Iaith' team, is now established and is proving to be very successful. There are currently, three members of staff, one teacher and two learning support assistants, delivering a peripatetic model of Welsh immersion support throughout the County Borough. The team offers one hour of face-to-face support, daily, to pupils in their Welsh medium school. Currently they provide support to pupils in years 2-6 and in year 1 when capacity allows. The Taith Iaith lead has held face to face meetings with all Welsh medium primary headteachers in RCT and distributed information booklets explaining the Taith Iaith process, eligibility criteria and referral system. There are currently 11 learners in 7 Welsh medium schools accessing the scheme. All learners wishing to transfer from English to Welsh medium schools in years 2-6 are eligible for support from the Taith Iaith team.

Learners are enabled to develop their Welsh language skills in a variety of ways, but learning through play and having fun are key to achieving effective teaching and progression. Progress is measured using a range of summative and formative assessments. Summative assessments includes learners completing an oracy baseline assessment at the start, mid-way and at the end of the programme. This ensures that progress is closely monitored and further developed. Once learners achieve a success rate of 80%, and both teachers and parents are in agreement, the daily support ceases. Formative assessments include self-evaluation activities, video recordings and oral feedback. Video recordings are a powerful tool for capturing the progress made by learners speaking the Welsh language.

Aspects of the scheme that have been particularly appreciated, include parental



communication through the Seesaw application, local fieldtrips and group work. In order to further develop the scheme, plans are afoot to further develop the reading scheme, literacy games and to visit further immersion centres across Wales.

- 6.3 **Recommendation 3:** Work closely with schools, pupil referral units and the regional consortium to build on the local authority’s work to further improve attendance and reduce exclusions.

The [Annual School Exclusion Performance Report for 2022-23](#) and [School Attendance Data 2022-23](#) were the focus of scrutiny by the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee in December 2023. Both reports provide a detailed overview of the Council’s performance in relation to attendance and exclusion data over the last academic year.

- 6.4 The report on **attendance** data in December 2023 detailed the overall school attendance rates broken down by phase for the last four academic years. These figures are for statutory school age only across mainstream and special schools (pupil referral units are not included). Primary data is for the full academic year and secondary data is shown up to the end of Summer 1 in line with Welsh Government data collection dates even though these did not take place in all of these years during the pandemic.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Primary Phase Attendance								
Academic Year	All Pupils	Non FSM	FSM	EAL	SEN	Persistent Absence	Gypsy, Roma and/or Traveller	Service Family
2019/20	93.0%	94.0%	90.1%	92.2%	90.1%	5.4%	86.8%	93.7%
2020/21	91.1%	93.1%	86.4%	92.1%	87.6%	11.7%	61.8%	93.3%
2021/22	89.8%	91.2%	85.4%	91.1%	85.6%	10.8%	69.0%	92.0%
2022/23	91.0%	92.3%	86.8%	91.2%	86.6%	9.3%	75.7%	92.8%

Rhondda Cynon Taf Secondary Phase Attendance								
Academic Year	All Pupils	Non FSM	FSM	EAL	SEN	Persistent Absence	Gypsy, Roma and/or Traveller	Service Family

2019/20	92.1%	93.4%	88.0%	95.1%	88.0%	7.9%	75.2%	95.3%
2020/21	85.5%	88.6%	76.7%	91.7%	81.8%	23.2%	53.3%	89.9%
2021/22	85.2%	87.6%	76.8%	91.5%	81.4%	22.3%	69.9%	88.1%
2022/23	85.8%	88.3%	77.0%	91.7%	82.4%	21.0%	67.1%	88.2%

*All data presented above is reflective of PLASC data taken during January of the academic year. Persistent Absence is the % of all learners who have below 80% attendance. SEN attendance does not currently include ALN.*

The data highlights the significant impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on attendance levels across RCT with a drop in primary attendance of 3.2 percentage points at primary phase between 2019/20 and 2021/22 and a 6.9 percentage point drop at secondary phase across the same timeframe. We have however seen encouraging signs at primary schools last year, with a 1.2 percentage point increase between 2021/22 and 2022/23 although still down 2 percentage points when compared to 2019/20; secondary schools with a 0.6 percentage point increase between 2021/22 and 2022/23 although still significantly below 2019/20 levels.

However, the data in the first table must be taken into a wider context around attendance coding at this time. As a result of the pandemic, for the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22 there were additional temporary attendance codes introduced by Welsh Government. These were for confirmed Covid cases and for those isolating/accessing remote learning. The confirmed case code was statistically an authorised absence and mapped back to illness coding. However, the code for isolation/remote learning was statistically a 'not required to attend' mark and therefore does not appear in attendance data collection figures presented above. Similarly, the existing Y code usually reserved for partial or full closures of schools was also utilised during these years when cohorts were forced to isolate and again, these are also 'not required to attend' marks and do not appear in attendance data percentages as a result. Physical absence for these academic years is therefore higher than percentage figures alone would suggest, which again provides some reassurance in the rising attendance marks in 2022/23 which is from a lower benchmark than the percentage figures alone may show.

From the data presented above, it is evident that improvements have been made across all but one group of learners in 2022/23 compared to the previous academic year. However, there remains considerable challenge particularly at secondary phase and for eligible Free School Meal learners. Secondary phase attendance was 1.7% below the Welsh average of 87.5% in 2022/23 (gap was 1.0% in 2018/19), 21<sup>st</sup> position across Wales and therefore is a central focus for continued improvement.

The Attendance and Wellbeing Service continues to be proactive in supporting schools to improve their rates of attendance.

During the academic year 2022/23 the Council's Attendance and Wellbeing Service performance includes the following:

- 978 Education Appraisals for families in receipt of support from the Resilient Families Service (942 in 2021/22).
- 773 new open case referrals received (841 in 2021/22).
- 7,135 Wellbeing Response Visits undertaken (6,802 in 2021/22) for 3,826 learners. 3,690 visits (51.7%) resulted in improved attendance when comparing the 40 days prior to visit, and 40 days afterwards.
- Prosecuted 30 parents for non-attendance of their children following open case work (28 in 2021/22).
- 18 schools received additional support for attendance via Progress Meetings, Team Around the School or single-agency response. 11 of the 18 (61.1%) have improved their attendance when comparing Autumn Term 1.
- Convening an attendance event for Headteachers and Attendance Leads was in Hawthorn Leisure Centre in July 2023 with over 80 school representatives.
- Continued support for Family Engagement Officers (FEOs). Additional support has also been provided to schools since early 2020 in the form of FEOs with funding provided via RCT Cabinet, and more recently through Welsh Government, with match-funding in 29 schools.
- Additional funding was received from Welsh Government for the 2022/23 financial year for Education Welfare Services. RCT has utilised this funding to employ three additional temporary Attendance and Wellbeing Officers, a Targeted Support Officer, and Educational Psychology support for the service for the most difficult and entrenched cases and/or those with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This will be coupled with a pilot this academic year for multi-agency EBSA forums in secondary schools to discuss learners facing these difficulties and the support that can offered by schools and partners

6.5 The Council's performance in relation to **exclusion** continues to be a source of concern and the report presented to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in December 2023 provided a detailed analysis of our performance over 2022-23. The table below shows the number of permanent and fixed term exclusions and the number of days lost for the academic years 2021/22 and 2022/23.

#### Summary of Exclusions within RCT in 2021/22 – 2022/23

	2021/22	2022/23	Percentage difference between 2021/22 & 2022/23
<b>Permanent Exclusions</b>	18	31	72.22%
<b>Reinstated from Permanent Exclusion</b>	3	9	200.00%
<b>Number of Fixed Term Exclusions</b>	2436	2927	20.16%
<b>Number of Days Lost</b>	4446.5	5516	24.05%
<b>Average length of exclusion (days)</b>	1.83	1.88	3.24%

## Breakdown of Exclusion Data According to Setting for 2022/23

	Primary Phase	Secondary Phase	PRU/Special School	Total
<b>Permanent Exclusions</b>	0	30	1	31
<b>Number of Fixed Term Exclusions</b>	369	2418	140	2927
<b>Number of Days Lost</b>	490	4775	251	5516

The above data demonstrates a significant increase in the number of permanent exclusions, fixed term exclusions and the number of days lost within RCT schools when comparing academic years 2021/22 and 2022/23.

- 6.6 The graphs below highlight the fluctuating trends evident within RCT for both permanent and fixed term exclusions over the past 5 academic years. However, these must be interpreted with considerable caution due to the impact of the pandemic years on access to school-based education.

### Exclusions within RCT over 5 years

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Permanent exclusions	23	20	9	18	31
Number of exclusions	2686	1490	1432	2439	2927
Number of days lost	5365.5	2695	2537.5	4446.5	5516

The number of pupils subject to an exclusion has also fluctuated over the past five academic years with a dip during the Covid period. However, it is concerning that the number of pupils incurring a fixed term exclusion in 2022/23 exceeded the number excluded in 2018/19 prior to the pandemic:

### Summary of Exclusions within RCT in Autumn Term (1<sup>st</sup> half-term)

An analysis of trends over the last 5 years Autumn term data (1<sup>st</sup> half-term) shows escalating trend data, although it should be noted that data over the pandemic years are likely to be unrepresentative due to school closures and high isolation rates during this period.

Autumn Term 1	Number of Exclusions
2020/21	455
2021/22	316
2022/23	542
2023/24	588

Access and Inclusion Services continue to implement a range of wellbeing and behaviour initiatives with the support of Welsh Government grant funding. These include

- Using grant funding to roll out training to schools by Nurture UK on diagnostic assessment of behaviour through Boxall Profiling and the implementation of nurture approaches in schools at both an accredited and non-accredited level.
- Utilising more consistent tools to assess children's wellbeing. The Boxall profile is an evidence-based assessment tool which is used to assess the social, emotional and mental development of pupils aged 4-18. By using a consistent tool across the authority, a common language for use across all schools and the Behaviour Support Service has been utilised and feedback suggests that staff felt more confident in administering the assessment, analysing outcomes and planning interventions for pupils.
- The offer to all secondary and through schools to participate in a two-year accredited National Nurturing Schools Programme together with those primary schools that host a Learning Support Class for Nurture or Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). To date, one primary school has successfully completed accreditation, reporting positive impact of the nurturing approach upon the whole-school approach to behaviour and wellbeing. In addition, six secondary schools, two through schools and two primary schools are on course to gain accreditation this academic year, with an additional secondary school awaiting the outcome of their formal assessment.
- 26 school-based delegates accessed non-accredited Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups training which has resulted in nine participants setting up a nurture group for pupils in their schools and a further eight implementing nurture approaches within the wider school provision.
- As part of the Education Directorate's Wellbeing strategy to support the implementation of the Welsh Government's statutory guidance '*Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health wellbeing*', a range of projects and training opportunities to address issues such as healthy relationships through theatre workshops and R-Time group work continue to be funded via the Whole School Approach Funding together with further training for school staff on Trauma Informed Approaches so that they develop a deeper understanding of pupil behaviour and the implementation of supportive, non-punitive approaches as alternatives to exclusion.

Schools are also supported

- By making referrals to wide ranging specialist support services (Behaviour Support and Educational Psychology Services) for intervention at individual, group or whole school level.
- With access to training from central services, including bespoke training.
- By accessing STEP 4 financial support to establish in-house provision for learners with significant social, emotional and behavioural needs. Based on the evaluation of Tranches 1-3 of the Step 4 Programme and following proposals received from schools in Summer Term 2023 additional funding of approximately £900k has been agreed to establish a further 8 school-based Step 4 SEBD provisions in secondary/through schools in Tranche 4 of the Step 4 programme between September 2023 and August 2025 to strengthen the continuum of SEBD provision in RCT. The Step 4 programme provides enhanced funding to mainstream schools to develop

their own school-based wellbeing and behaviour provisions to provide effective support and intervention for pupils with significant wellbeing needs and SEBD within their local school communities and without the need to access LA specialist provision. Overall, feedback from schools demonstrates positive outcomes for pupils accessing Step 4 provisions in relation to improved attendance, reduced exclusions and academic attainment.

- For a minority of schools, the Team Around the School (TAS) Protocol, a more collaborative framework for addressing school improvement concerns involving schools, Central South Consortium Improvement Partners and LA Inclusion Officers, was established last academic year with the aim of providing support and challenge to schools where significant concerns had been identified in relation to behaviour management and exclusions. Despite encouraging early indications of improved exclusion data for some schools engaged in the TAS process, overall impact of this approach to date is limited and will need further consideration. There is, however, an escalation process built in to the TAS Protocol where there has been limited progress made by schools in reducing their exclusions and addressing behavioural concerns over time. From Spring Term 2024, schools will be asked to set improvement targets to reduce exclusions in their settings.
- For schools causing concern and accessing enhanced support, progress in addressing any concerns in relation to exclusions are more formally monitored through progress meetings involving senior officers and CSC colleagues. Where there is significant concern, pre-warning notices are issued and more formal monitoring takes place, involving the Director of Education, the Cabinet Member for Education, Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Head of Achievement and Principal Improvement Partner.

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not currently required - the content of the report is for information purposes only.

## **8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The report highlights specific recommendations relating to the development of Welsh language provision and these will be addressed as part of ongoing improvement planning and delivery.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 There is no requirement to undertake any consultation

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 10.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 The inspection of local government education services (LGES) is carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 which specified that His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (HMCI) 'may, and, if requested to do so by the Secretary of State, shall, arrange for any local authority to be inspected'. Such an inspection 'shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing any function which relates to the provision of education for (a) persons of compulsory school age (whether at school or otherwise) or (b) for persons of any age above or below that age who are registered as pupils at schools maintained by the authority.'
- 11.2 Other aspects of local authority provision are subject to inspection under a range of legislation, including the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support services (within the meaning of section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000).
- 11.3 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Local Government (Wales) Act 2015 support the approach and arrangements for the inspection of local authorities either by individual inspectorates or jointly between Estyn, Audit Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales.
- 11.4 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

## **12. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP**

- 12.1 This is an information report presenting an overview of Estyn's inspection of the local authority's education services and the progress made in addressing the recommendations. There are clear links associated to the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and the Education Strategic Plan for 2022-25 which places a clear emphasis on improving schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf and realising our Mission of Achieving Equity and Excellence in Education and Enhanced Wellbeing for All.

## **13. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS**

- 13.1 This report relates to all electoral wards.

## **14. CONCLUSION**

- 14.1 The report aims to provide an overview of Estyn's inspection of Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf, its strengths and areas for improvement. An overview is provided of the progress made to date in addressing the key recommendations.
- 14.2 The Directorate has ensured that Estyn's recommendations for improvement have been a priority for further development in our annual delivery plans and a strong focus for our ongoing self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, and service delivery. Progress is being made in addressing all three recommendations. However, exclusion rates are a source of ongoing concern

and targeted intervention continues in this post pandemic phase. Improving rates of attendance and exclusion is a challenge both locally and nationally, and this will remain an important focus for 2024 and beyond.



**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**

**22<sup>nd</sup> JANUARY 2024**

**AN UPDATE ON ESTYN'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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

**Author: Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion**

**Background Papers**

[Inspection report Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council 2023 \(gov.wales\)](#)