



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales



## **A report on education services in**

**Newport City Council**

**Civic Centre  
Godfrey Road  
Newport  
NP20 4UR**

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**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education  
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**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Newport City Council

Newport has 27,647 pupils across 56 schools. There are 45 primary schools, nine secondary schools, and two special schools. Of these schools, five are Welsh-medium providers.

The local authority's last inspection was in November 2018.

In 2024-2025, the local authority's education budget is £198,736,000. The delegated school budget per pupil in 2024-2025 is £5,522, lower than the Wales average of £5,726.

Over a three-year average, 22.2% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are eligible for free school meals.

Inspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating outcomes and the quality of education services. They consider this information alongside information about the national population. Some of the most useful information about children and young people in Newport is noted below:

- 32.4% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 2.4% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have additional learning or special educational needs (School Action).
- 3.0% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have additional learning or special educational needs (School Action Plus).
- 2.7% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have additional learning or special educational needs (Statemented).
- 3.1% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have additional learning or special educational needs (Individual Development Plan).
- 16.0% of pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary and secondary schools have English as an additional language (A, B, or C).
- 3.1% of pupils aged 5 and above in primary and secondary schools are fluent in Welsh.
- A total of 375 children are in the care of the local authority.\*

\* Note: for children looked after the data has been rounded to the nearest 5 for disclosure reasons. Data is shown at 31 March for the year 2023

## Summary

Senior leaders in Newport have high aspirations for children and young people in the city. Education features as a central priority in the corporate plan. The increased funding per pupil for schools in recent years demonstrates the commitment to education from elected members and senior officers, who are considering carefully the challenges of a growing population.

The chief education officer leads the education service diligently and skilfully, exemplifying professional behaviours. She has strong working relationships with leaders in schools and other education settings and shows considerable care for their well-being. As a result of trusting relationships, supportive processes and effective information sharing, officers know their schools and other education settings well.

The chief executive and wider corporate leadership team work well to support the chief education officer and her team. They provide suitable challenge about the delivery of education services and the impact they have on children and young people. Overall, the local authority has made good progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection. Leaders within the education service are reflective and use the systems and processes in the service to evaluate their work appropriately. However, at times their evaluations are not precise enough in considering the impact that services have on outcomes for learners and their value for money.

We have carried out 35 inspections of schools and settings in Newport since the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these, seven providers were asked to provide case studies of effective practice following their inspection and only one provider required any follow-up. No school or setting is currently in a statutory category of follow-up, although two secondary schools that were previously in a statutory category took a long time to improve. This positive picture of school inspection outcomes reflects the strengths in the quality of teaching and leadership in most schools and settings.

Education service leaders have taken a clear, strategic and measured approach to improving the support and challenge to schools and early years settings. They collaborate effectively with the regionally commissioned Education Achievement Service (EAS) to identify and share effective practice in schools and address areas for improvement. The education service and the EAS provide helpful professional learning for staff at all levels in schools and settings.

The local authority has effectively implemented its responsibilities under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018, offering strong support to children with additional learning needs (ALN), their families, and educational providers. Collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders and ALN Coordinators have been instrumental in sharing best practices and addressing local and national ALN priorities. Through a strategic and supportive approach, senior leaders have established a skilled ALN and inclusion team that is responsive, providing bespoke support for staff in schools and other settings to meet specific learners' needs. An especially strong feature of the local authority's work is the way it facilitates highly skilled staff in a special school to build the capacity of staff in mainstream schools to better meet the needs of autistic pupils. The authority ensures

that learners' perspectives are integral to planning ALN provision, and its proactive engagement with parents has reduced tribunal cases.

Newport's schools serve a diverse population, with over a third of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and a quarter whose first language is neither English nor Welsh. Our inspections have highlighted that a few schools are especially effective in meeting the needs of ethnic minority pupils and those who are new speakers of English. The regional Gwent Education Multilingual Service (GEMS), hosted by Newport, provides valued bilingual support to schools, adapting over time to meet changing needs. GEMS monitors closely pupils' English language progress, with most pupils progressing as expected.

As part of its commitment to anti-racism, the education service has secured the commitment of every headteacher to incorporate action to address racism in their school development plan this year. In each term last year, a minority of schools reported that there were no bullying incidents in their school, and a few schools reported no bullying incidents for the whole year. The local authority recognises the need to further improve school leaders' understanding, recording and reporting of bullying and racist incidents.

The local authority has an ambitious vision for expanding Welsh-medium education, clearly articulated in its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Most pupils in Welsh-medium schools make strong progress. Officers engage well with families to promote Welsh-medium education and support parents effectively to make informed decisions about which school to apply for their child to attend. Across all education providers, the local authority promotes the Welsh language ethos and culture. However, a majority of English-medium schools do not develop well enough pupils' Welsh language skills.

The education service promotes a strong culture of safeguarding that supports learners' well-being in its schools, PRU and other providers. Through a range of helpful guidance, policies and procedures, along with relevant and up-to-date safeguarding and child protection training, officers support schools and other education providers to discharge their safeguarding responsibilities well.

The local authority manages education budgets well and addresses in-year financial pressures appropriately. Officers provide good advice and guidance to school leaders about their budgets. They challenge them robustly if they have a deficit, or forecast a deficit, and provide specialist support to help them.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Sharpen evaluation and improvement planning processes to consider the impact of services with greater precision, including value for money
- R2 Strengthen work to develop the Welsh language skills of pupils in English-medium schools

## What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of the publication of the inspection report.

## Main findings

### Education services and their impact

#### How effective are processes to improve teaching and leadership in schools and settings?

Education service leaders have established and maintained strong working relationships with leaders in schools and early years settings. They have taken a clear, strategic and measured approach to improving the support and challenge to their schools. Officers work pro-actively with headteachers, developing high levels of mutual respect and trust between the local authority and its schools. Headteachers feel that leaders and officers support them well, providing proportionate support and challenge with a particularly strong focus on their well-being and that of their staff.

The local authority has a strong understanding of most aspects of the work of schools and settings. Officers make suitable use of a range of evidence including, for example, data around school attendance and school exclusions, information about human resources and additional learning needs, and first-hand evidence gathered from schools and settings. This helps them to understand the strengths and any concerns and means that, usually, schools and settings get the support and challenge they need.

The local authority uses helpful approaches that enable officers to jointly consider all key aspects of schools' work and identify the need for, and plan support for, intervention. These approaches include targeted Team around the School processes, professional discussions that involve the chief education officer, headteacher and chair of governors, and wider group meetings. Officers' strong relationships with school leaders mean that schools usually engage purposefully in these processes. For example, a few schools have requested to be part of the Team around the School process to help accelerate their improvements, and highly effective schools in the authority seek out additional challenge to help maintain high standards.

Since inspections resumed in February 2022, we have inspected twenty-two primary schools, two secondary schools and one special school. We asked five primary schools to provide case studies of good practice. One primary school was placed into Estyn review. Although there are currently no schools in statutory level of follow up, over time, the authority has not always had a consistent impact on securing timely improvements in secondary schools that have caused them concern. None of the ten early years settings we have inspected since February 2022 have required follow-up, and two settings were asked to provide case studies of good practice.

The education service has a constructive relationship with the regionally commissioned Education Achievement Service (EAS). Both services work together purposefully in the best interests of schools. The chief education officer works proactively with senior leaders in the EAS to consider where schools may benefit from local authority intervention. She requires clear evidence from officers to support decision-making and takes a thoughtful and measured response. The approach to school improvement is well understood by officers in both the local authority and the EAS. Officers in both services share information well and, as a result, schools that may require additional support and challenge are identified quickly. Although swift action is taken when a school begins to cause concern, the authority does not always monitor the impact of activity sharply enough.

Overall, the EAS's School Improvement Partners (SIPs) provide beneficial support and challenge to schools. The clear guidance provided to SIPs, has helped to ensure that the quality of support and challenge to schools has improved well over that last two years, particularly in primary schools. Systems for SIPs to evaluate the impact of their work, and any additional support that schools receive, are helpful and support the local authority to have a good understanding of its schools. This includes outcomes from supported self-evaluation activity with SIPs and, when relevant, local authority officers work alongside school leaders to evaluate important aspects of their work. Officers from the local authority provide suitable challenge to the EAS, for example to ensure that schools are getting a consistent level of support from SIPs. Officers have worked closely with leaders in the EAS to improve the quality of information EAS provides about schools in Newport. The Principal SIP and local authority school improvement lead officer work closely to monitor the support provided by SIPs, which has helped to improve the effectiveness of their work.

In general, the EAS provides the local authority with a broad range of helpful information about their schools. This includes thematic reports on specific priorities identified by the local authority, such as support for disadvantaged pupils. These reports have recently been refined to reduce the workload of school leaders and to provide a clearer analysis of strengths and areas for improvement. Reports about progress in schools make suitable use of inspection outcomes, data and first-hand evidence gathered by SIPs and generally provide a helpful overview. However, officers do not always use all the information they hold about schools to inform their strategic thinking and planning precisely enough. For example, improvement priorities are not always sharp enough to identify the exact aspects that need improvement.

School staff have access to a wide range of relevant professional learning opportunities and the authority has ensured that these are tailored to the needs of individual schools where relevant. For example, through EAS, school staff, school governors and staff in non-maintained settings are offered a useful range of professional learning opportunities that promote evidence-based approaches that support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are helpful processes in place to identify and share effective practice and this has helped to create a strong sense of collaborative leadership across schools in Newport. For example, the authority has identified and shared effective approaches to protecting schools against cyber security issues. In response to feedback from school leaders, the local authority has established their 'New to Headship in Newport' programme. This programme involves current and experienced Newport headteachers providing

targeted mentoring for new headteachers. The programme provides useful additional professional learning for school leaders to improve their leadership skills and understand and make best use of processes within the local authority.

The local authority and the EAS work in partnership to provide valuable support for governors, including targeted professional learning for individual governing bodies to meet specific needs. Where necessary, the authority has also intervened to strengthen governing bodies, for example by adding additional members with particular skill sets.

### **How well is the local authority supporting the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018?**

The local authority's additional learning needs (ALN) service has responded successfully to implementing its statutory duties in response to the principles of the ALN and Education Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018. The local authority's senior leaders have taken a strategic, methodical and supportive approach throughout the transformation and implementation phases of ALN reform. They have developed a wide range of helpful services to support children and young people, their families and education providers.

Officers in the ALN and inclusion teams are highly skilled and knowledgeable. They provide valuable, systematic support to settings, schools and the PRU. This is a notable feature of the work of the local authority in implementing ALN reform. Team leaders understand their areas of responsibility well. They share a passion and commitment to promote inclusive practice and improve the provision and outcomes for pupils with ALN.

Officers have effective, strategic working relationships with a range of key partners. Through collaboration, they oversee the development and implementation of support for children and young people with ALN. Leaders set up strategic groups to support the implementation of ALN reform, such as an Inclusion Partnership Forum and an ALN funding formula group. There are well-established ALN Co-ordinator (ALNCo) fora and cluster meetings. These are used effectively to address national and local ALN priorities, to share successful practice, and to review and refine systems and processes.

The local authority ensures that the views, wishes and feelings of learners, parents and carers are integral to the planning and provision of support. Person-centred practice is well-established in schools and settings, and officers support practitioners to implement individual development plans suitably. Officers have established beneficial processes to resolve disagreements. They work proactively with parents and carers, including through commissioned mediation where relevant, ensuring the most appropriate placement or support to meet their child's needs. This is having a positive impact on reducing the number of cases proceeding to tribunal.

Leaders in the inclusion teams have developed and implemented useful electronic platforms which support the identification of, and provision for, children and young people with ALN. Valuable information about learners with ALN, and provision to support them, is available to relevant stakeholders through these secure platforms. These platforms are used, for example, to develop and review the provision for

children and young people with ALN and to support referral processes. These effective platforms support statutory processes well and enable providers to keep additional learning provision under review.

The local authority provides a wide range of beneficial advice, support and guidance about ALN to schools and settings. This support focuses well on areas such as developing purposeful one-page profiles, individual development plans and adapting teaching and learning approaches to support learners with ALN. Leaders have developed a useful set of valuable ALN principles, toolkits and digital platforms which support schools and settings to manage implementation of ALN reform well. As a result, leaders and ALN Cos in schools demonstrate a secure grasp of their responsibilities under the ALN Act and Code and have a clear understanding of additional learning provision.

Officers in the ALN and inclusion teams communicate regularly with schools and settings. They produce clear guidance and pathways, and provide helpful support and advice through purposeful newsletters, meetings and valuable helplines. As a result, senior leaders and staff within schools and settings feel well supported by local authority officers.

The early years' service provides helpful support, guidance and processes to support children and staff within early years and school settings. Officers assist inclusion leaders within all settings well, for example, by supporting referral processes and delivering a valuable programme of professional learning tailored to work with young children. This supports the local authority effectively in the early identification of additional learning needs.

The local authority has developed beneficial transition arrangements to support pupils with ALN in the next steps of their education. Officers have implemented a useful post-16 transition protocol to ensure that learners are identified and supported to make a successful transition to post-16 settings.

The local authority provides a range of valuable professional learning opportunities for schools and the PRU. This includes, for example, useful online 'bitesize' training, supporting stakeholder networks and facilitating the sharing of effective practice at 'showcase' events. Cluster working between primary and secondary schools is well-established and makes a significant contribution to the consistency of approach in implementing the local authority's agreed priorities for ALN. The ALN and inclusion teams are responsive to the needs of settings, schools and PRU and provide bespoke support and professional learning to meet their specific requirements.

The local authority ensures that its ALN and inclusion teams can deliver most of their advice, guidance and professional learning through the medium of Welsh. However, leaders have identified the need to extend the Welsh-medium provision and resources to support learners with ALN equitably.

Over time, leaders have developed a range of valuable services and specialist provisions to meet the needs of children and young people with more complex ALN. Officers in the ALN and inclusion teams promote collaboration among schools to support them to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs successfully. For example, the local authority makes effective use of special schools to develop



specialist strategies within mainstream schools and local authority specialist classes. Due to an increase in demand for specialist provision, leaders recognise the need to further expand the provision for children and young people whose identified needs are more complex.

### **Spotlight: Commissioning a special school to provide an outreach service to mainstream schools to support autistic pupils**

The local authority commissions the expert staff at Ysgol Bryn Derw to provide an extensive range of high-quality specialist support to mainstream schools, including learning resource bases (LRB). Leaders in schools are very positive about this valuable support in building the capacity of mainstream schools to support autistic pupils well. The extensive, high-quality range of outreach support makes an important contribution in improving the provision for autistic pupils across Newport. This support is also available through the medium of Welsh. This service has a positive impact in improving the provision for autistic pupils in mainstream schools and specialist classes across the city.

Officers quality assure provision well, using their first-hand knowledge and data to identify individual schools and settings in need of support and challenge regarding ALN and inclusion. They are reflective and skilled at identifying and addressing areas for improvement.

### **How well does the local authority support the learning and well-being of ethnic minority learners and learners whose first spoken language is not English or Welsh?**

Just over a third of pupils in Newport's schools are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and a quarter of pupils do not have either English or Welsh as a first language.

The Gwent Education Multilingual Service (GEMS) is a long-standing regional service hosted by Newport that is well-regarded by schools. Bilingual teachers and support staff are deployed sensitively to schools. The service has generally adapted well to the changing population and therefore the needs of pupils and schools over the years. GEMS offers helpful universal and bespoke support to build the capacity of school staff. Where appropriate, GEMS staff have supported schools that have developed their own English as an additional language (EAL) provision including appointments of bilingual staff. In addition, two of Newport's primary schools are commissioned by the regional school improvement service to provide much-valued professional learning and advice to schools within the authority and region.

Children's English language acquisition skills are appropriately assessed, and their progress is closely monitored by GEMS and shared with schools. The local authority has a broad overview of the progress that pupils with EAL make and identifies that most pupils make progress in line with expectations and a very few pupils make progress above expectations.

Of the schools we have inspected since February 2022, a few had their work in relation to ethnic minority pupils, or pupils with EAL, highlighted as being particularly effective. The strengths we noted covered leadership, the curriculum, professional learning and developing pupils as young translators.

The local authority continues to develop inclusive policies and promote practices in schools that embrace the needs of all pupils. For example, the local authority jointly commissioned a regional report on racism with other local authorities and the Police and Crime Commissioner. This report highlighted that “racism is prevalent...and under reported in schools”. The local authority has developed a suitable action plan to address the recommendations of the report. The local authority has secured the commitment of all headteachers that their school development plans will include appropriate priorities related to anti-racism, although it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work. The local authority has recently provided its schools with a very useful toolkit to evaluate its provision for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The local authority has clear arrangements in place to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This includes making appropriate educational experiences available to them.

Local authority officers provide worthwhile support and challenge to schools about pupils’ attendance and exclusions. Based on the information provided by the local authority, the attendance rates of ethnic minority pupils have improved over the last three years. Their attendance rates are broadly in line with the attendance of all pupils in primary schools and slightly better than attendance for all pupils in secondary schools. This is within the context of attendance rates for all pupils that have not fully recovered since the pandemic. The local authority’s data shows that ethnic minority pupils are not disproportionately represented in exclusions. The local authority has been particularly successful in working with headteachers to minimise the use of exclusions of over five days for any pupil, and the rate for these exclusions in Newport is the lowest in Wales.

The local authority’s most recent monitoring and evaluation report on bullying in schools provides a useful overview of the support offered to schools. In addition, the report notes that the majority of bullying incidents reported by schools may include aspects of race, religion or belief. Just over a third of schools report that there have been no bullying incidents in the last school year, and officers have challenged the leaders of these schools about their recording and reporting of bullying. The local authority recognises the need to work further with schools to improve their understanding, recording and reporting of bullying and racist incidents.

Elected members have not recently scrutinised the impact of services for ethnic minority learners or pupils with EAL. As a result, they are not as aware as they need to be in determining educational priorities in this important aspect of both the work of the local authority, its schools and partners.

### **How well is the local authority developing Welsh-medium education and improving standards of teaching of Welsh?**

The local authority’s senior leaders and officers have an ambitious vision for the development of Welsh-medium education in Newport. They communicate the vision proactively with all stakeholders and partners, including scrutiny members. The local authority has a strategic direction for the future that is presented clearly in its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). Officers identify areas of the city to further promote and establish Welsh-medium education for children and their families within their locality. The local authority is using the Sustainable Communities for Learning

Capital Programme well to help them realise their vision. In line with the ambitious WESP targets, Welsh-medium provision from the early years to secondary schools has been developed effectively.

The Welsh Education Forum (WEF), which is chaired by the Chief Education Officer, oversees the local authority's processes for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of its WESP. The WEF provides a forum that is promoting a strong culture of ownership and accountability for realising the outcomes of the WESP amongst stakeholders. There are appropriate short-term and medium-term targets to achieve the ambitious vision of the WESP.

The local authority, through its school admissions processes, shares helpful information to support parents to make an informed decision regarding the language medium of their child's education. Officers engage with families across the city to promote Welsh-medium education, for example through a representative from the local authority attending numerous community events to actively promote the benefits of being bilingual and multi-lingual, such as through the 'Becoming Bilingual' campaign.

The recently established Welsh immersion provision is celebrated through a helpful digital clip that informs parents of the opportunity of moving their child to Welsh-medium education at a later entry point in their statutory school life. In general, transition processes are strong, and support pupils to follow their education entirely through the medium of Welsh. However, the local authority and its partners are not always successful in encouraging children to transition from Welsh-medium early years settings to Welsh-medium statutory education.

The local authority commissions the EAS to offer a range of professional learning opportunities to support leaders and staff in Welsh-medium and English-medium schools and settings. In Welsh-medium schools, staff benefit from this support to further develop their pedagogy and methodology which ensures that most pupils make strong progress in developing their Welsh language skills. In the best practice in a minority of English-medium schools, leaders advocate the importance and benefits of the Welsh language and culture in their schools, nurturing a strong sense of belonging, which in turn encourages staff and pupils to engage and make progress in developing their Welsh language skills. These schools take advantage of, and benefit from, the support from the EAS to strengthen their work further. However, in a majority of English-medium schools, there is less emphasis on developing pupils' Welsh language skills. The authority recognises this as an area for improvement and plans to address this are at an early stage.

Generally, schools participate effectively in the Siarter Iaith and Cymraeg Campus initiatives to promote the Welsh language ethos and culture. This supports staff and pupils to engage in opportunities and activities to use and celebrate the Welsh language. The local authority promotes and ensures effective partnerships with a range of organisations and local and national initiatives, for example Yr Urdd and Menter Iaith Casnewydd. Through these valuable activities in the city, such as Bwyd a Hwyl and Gŵyl Newydd, children and young people are provided with beneficial opportunities to speak and use the Welsh language in an informal context. This actively supports the ambitious vision to normalise the Welsh language in all multi-cultural and multilingual communities across the city.

## Leading and improving

Elected members and corporate leaders in Newport have high aspirations for children and young people in the city. Their ambition to offer the best start in life through the opportunities the local authority provides is at the heart of their improvement agenda. As a result, education features as a central priority in the corporate plan. The corporate plan and strategic equality plan take good account of national priorities including the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Mitigating the impact of poverty is also a cross-cutting priority for education services.

In order to better support schools and settings to realise the council's ambition, the recently appointed leader and his cabinet colleagues have made a strong commitment to prioritise education. They are balancing carefully demands from across other portfolios, the challenges of a growing population and the financial pressures on the local authority's budget.

Elected members on the 'Performance People' overview and scrutiny committee have suitable opportunities to consider high-level reports of the work of the education service. This committee oversees two significant and important service areas, so the forward work programme covers social care services as well as education services. As a result, education matters have limited agenda opportunities across the forward work plan. Members of the committee show interest in the reports presented, ask relevant questions and often make requests for more information. The cabinet member for education and early years, who is also the deputy leader of the cabinet, has a standing invitation to attend the committee's meetings. Her strong grasp of education services is evident when she presents reports or responds to queries raised by members.

The chief executive and strategic director support beneficially improvement in the education service including through six-monthly 'challenge and review sessions'. In these sessions, they, along with other members of the corporate management team, debate progress against identified education priorities, consider risks and work with education leaders to refine actions.

The chief education officer leads the education service diligently and skilfully. Members of the education team, headteachers and other stakeholders value highly the personal commitment and support she offers. The chief education officer models well professional behaviours and person-centred approaches. Consequently, relationships within the education service and with key partners such as headteachers and chairs of governing bodies are highly positive, as they are with other stakeholders. As a result of these strong and trusting relationships, officers in the local authority know their school leaders and the challenges they face very well. A notable strength is how well officers, and the chief education officer, in particular, consider and support headteachers' well-being.

Elected members, senior leaders and team leaders understand the range of challenges that disadvantaged learners face and the impact that poverty can have on education outcomes. The current anti-poverty strategy focuses on a wide range of useful provisions at universal, targeted and bespoke levels, although actions are not often accompanied by specific success criteria, targets and timescales. Officers have reflected on the current strategy and are updating it to sharpen the focus on

important areas to support greater impact. For example, they have changed their approach to Community Focused Schools and recognise that the curriculum offer in secondary schools is a key factor that requires development.

Partnerships with regional services such as the EAS and GEMS are constructive and have the best interests of children and young people at the heart of their work. Through these partnerships, the local authority has access to helpful evidence that offers a more in-depth knowledge of its schools through, for example, the thematic reports that the EAS provides. Senior officers challenge regional services suitably to ensure that these reports address specific aspects of work in Newport's schools and settings.

The local authority planned carefully to address the recommendations from the last inspection in 2018. As a result, work on all areas covered by these recommendations has been strengthened since that time. Aspects of these appropriately remain as ongoing priorities for the service. As a result of their focused work on their own priorities in recent years, the local authority is making progress in important areas, such as improving school attendance and reducing the use of exclusions.

Senior leaders have continued to refine beneficially processes to evaluate the education service and plan for improvement. They have developed a useful toolkit of evaluation activities. For example, leaders use the 'rapid review' approach for emerging issues and gather helpful feedback from strategic groups, such as the sector-specific Newport headteacher forums, to inform their analysis. The toolkit activities support officers to collate information about specific aspects of teams' work and to identify broad strengths and areas for improvement to inform their overall team evaluations. In addition, there are regular calendared opportunities for team leaders to present monitoring and evaluation reports to the senior team to keep them appraised well of team activity and support them in prioritising resources and actions.

Beneficial service guidance offers a helpful framework for 'team plans on a page'. Officers plan appropriately for improvement, outlining their key priorities and including broad success criteria. There are outline timelines, and clear links are made to the well-being objectives in the corporate plan. The consistent format enables senior leaders and team leaders to monitor progress against planned actions easily. In a few cases, officers evaluate precisely the impact of their teams' work against specific success criteria. In general, however, success criteria are too broad or relate to the completion of actions rather than relevant indicators of impact. Overall, officers' evaluation of impact is too variable.

The authority's monitoring, evaluation and review reports include a focus on value for money. The authority has provided clear guidance to officers who draft those reports. However, reports do not always demonstrate an understanding of the guidance around the value for money section and officers recognise the need to strengthen the quality of this section of reports.

The local authority uses various approaches to listen to the voice of children and young people and ensuring that their views are considered when making strategic decisions. For example, the local authority captured the views of over 1,000 young people through an online survey they had to complete to access the free WiFi on Newport buses. The Youth Council, pupil participation groups, and the Grand Council

provide learners with suitable opportunities to be heard. The Youth Council were involved in developing useful guidance for schools on LGBTQ+ issues, which young people presented to headteachers. The Grand Council for primary age children is newly developed and officers are working to further the representation of different groups of children as part of this work.

Overall, officers across the service benefit from the support and challenge they receive through performance management and line management arrangements. The education service has amended the corporate performance management processes to better fit with the academic year and to link with school processes. Education leaders prioritise professional learning for their staff, giving them access to a carefully considered range of helpful opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. These opportunities include leadership development programmes that support succession planning, activities to develop officers' Welsh language skills and regular briefings on national priorities.

The education service promotes a strong culture of safeguarding that supports learners' well-being in its schools, PRU and other providers. Through a range of helpful guidance, policies and procedures, along with relevant and up-to-date safeguarding and child protection training, officers support schools and other education providers to discharge their safeguarding responsibilities well.

The education safeguarding team provides useful advice and support to schools and other education settings across Newport, working closely with their Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSPs). The local authority organises regular opportunities for DSPs to meet to discuss safeguarding concerns and to receive beneficial updates and training on important matters. School safeguarding self-evaluations provide helpful information to support dialogue between the education safeguarding team and school senior leaders on the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures. In addition, the education safeguarding team carries out regular quality assurance visits and random sampling visits to schools to ensure that they are suitably reflective about their practice and identify next steps for action. This work is having a positive impact on strengthening the culture of safeguarding across Newport schools and settings.

A strong feature of the education safeguarding team's work relates to 'contextual safeguarding', which involves the early identification of, and multi-agency support for, children and young people who are at risk of exploitation. The team coordinates and participates in a range of purposeful multi-agency meetings, each with a specific area of focus, which are used effectively by officers to share information and co-ordinate timely actions to support to children, young people and their families.

The local authority has appropriate processes in place to ensure safe recruitment within the education service and checks that school leaders and governors carry out their responsibilities when recruiting staff too. The local authority maintains an appropriate record for checking the suitability of staff and others who are in contact with children.

At a corporate level, the local authority has developed the role of 'safeguarding champions' for each service, with the aim of ensuring that the basic principles of safeguarding remain a regular focus in their service meetings. The 'safeguarding

champions' provide helpful support and guidance to staff about safeguarding issues and are a point of contact for staff who have any concern. On an operational level, the authority leads a multi-agency safeguarding hub, with the aim of improving closer partnership working and clear accountability within key agencies. This hub provides fast, co-ordinated and consistent responses to safeguarding concerns. This is the 'front door' of safeguarding for children's services, with committed resources from, for example, Gwent Police, the authority's children's services, specialist education staff, preventions service, probation and the domestic violence team.

Whilst the safeguarding procedures within the education service are robust, a recent report by Audit Wales highlighted a number of recommendations in relation to corporate safeguarding issues. These include strengthening the safer recruitment policy, aspects of safeguarding training, record keeping of training and reporting of corporate safeguarding to elected members. In addition, our recent youth work services inspection highlighted a gap in training for youth workers. The authority is already addressing the issues raised. A new Corporate Safeguarding Board, with representation across the authority's services, has been set up to oversee the authority's safeguarding work and support improvement.

In line with its corporate priority, the authority has provided, in recent budgets, funding for both central education services and schools bringing its funding levels closer to the Welsh average. Since 2022-2023, the authority has increased its delegation rate to schools, although the authority's schools' budgeted expenditure per pupil funding remains below the Welsh mean. Cabinet members receive budget monitoring reports that highlight budget pressures across education and schools throughout the year but, despite its terms of reference, the relevant scrutiny committee does not receive budget monitoring reports.

The local authority has committed £110m funding, 65% of which is a Welsh Government contribution, for the next phase of its Sustainable Communities for Learning programme which it will deliver over the next decade. This demonstrates the significant priority of education within the capital programme and focusses heavily on securing enough places in both English and Welsh medium schools and settings.

In the past year, the local authority has restarted undertaking school condition surveys to update its understanding of the level of backlog maintenance across its school estate. The local authority recognises the risk associated with the scale of backlog maintenance.

The local authority effectively identifies its key budget pressures within education. In many cases, these reflect the implementation of its strategic approaches, such as developing local provision to reduce expensive out-of-county placements. In the current financial year, the local authority identified an unanticipated overspend relating to transport for children and young people with ALN and transport to special schools which it has taken suitable action to address.

### **Spotlight: Supporting schools to manage budgets effectively**

The education finance team works in a structured way with all primary and some secondary schools to support the development and management of their budgets as part of a service level agreement. The work of this team is strong, and school leaders

value the effective and ongoing challenge and support offered to them around both high surpluses and potential deficits. The team uses comparative data in its work with schools to help them manage their financial positions and, where relevant, draws on valuable knowledge and experience across the education service and more widely across the authority, including human resources colleagues.

The education finance team works intensively with schools to address potential deficit budgets. Where schools apply for a licenced deficit, this is only authorised if officers assess that the associated deficit recovery plan is both appropriate and achievable. For these schools, the local authority requires full governing body attendance at a training session with officers to set out the implications of being in deficit. Officers meet regularly with schools to monitor progress against deficit recovery plans. Five schools ended the last financial year with a deficit and only one school was unable to set a balanced budget for the current financial year. The investment in the capacity of the education finance team and the diligent work of officers means that this is a more positive picture than was the case a few years ago.

The local authority offers a range of service level agreements to provide helpful services to schools, which it regularly reviews in conjunction with school leaders. Officers have made changes to these agreements considering feedback, and there is a high take-up across schools.

Through the budget forum, officers and school leaders collaborate effectively around key finance issues, including the development and impact of the education service budget, which helps schools plan their budgets. Although the local authority has not undertaken a full review of its funding formula in recent years, it has a rolling review programme of aspects of the formula through the budget forum, including recent reviews relating to examination fees and the ALN formula. School leaders feel that their views are valued in budget discussions.



## Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- consulted the local authority on the local inspection questions to be used during the inspection, based on the authority's self-evaluation, strategic plans and relevant data held by Estyn
- analysed the outcomes from open questionnaires, including the views of learners, parents, school staff and governors, local authority staff, regional consortium staff, elected members and general public
- carried out a preliminary visit to the local authority to meet with a range of relevant partners to education services, such as learner representatives, headteachers and governors, and leaders from statutory and third sector agencies working with children and young people

During the inspection, inspectors:

- met with the leader of the council, elected members responsible for education services, elected members responsible for the scrutiny of education services, the chief executive, the director of education, other leaders and managers in education services, other relevant staff in the local authority, the managing director of the regional consortium for school improvement and other relevant staff from the regional consortium
- looked closely at the local authority's self-evaluation processes
- considered the local authority's strategic and operational plans for improvement
- scrutinised a variety of documents, including information on learner outcomes, information on the performance of schools and other education settings, including information from the regional consortium for school improvement, minutes from a range of meetings, reports presented to council or scrutiny, information relating to the safeguarding of learners and other information relevant to the local authority's education services held by Estyn

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- reviewed the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, standardise and ensure the quality of the inspection
- provided a draft copy of the report for the local authority to note any concerns with factual accuracy, and made amendments where necessary

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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**This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).**