Dros ddysgwyr, dros Gymru
For learners, for Wales

This letter is also available in Welsh

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Dear Joanne Sims

Enhanced LALI visit: October 2026

Between the 20 to 22 October 2026, LALI Hayley Smith HMI and a team of HMI carried out an enhanced local authority link inspector visit which focussed on the local authority's approaches to supporting vulnerable children and young people, including those with ALN and who are EOTAS or EHE and the strategic planning for Welsh medium education

During our visit, we had the opportunity to:

- Meet with you and the Joint Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families and other executive and senior leaders
- Meet with the senior leaders who lead on the two focus areas
- Meet with a range of officers who lead on aspects of the two focus areas
- Meet with a range of headteachers and other leaders from schools and settings
- Consider a range of documentation provided by you and your teams

We hope that you and your education services team found this visit to be helpful. Below is a summary of our findings.

During our visit, it was particularly encouraging to hear about the strong commitment demonstrated by you, the Joint Chief Executive Officer and your senior corporate leaders to improving outcomes for children and young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability. We found it useful to discuss how the council's five corporate missions and 'The Deal', underpinned by the Marmot principles, provide a clear focus on reducing inequalities through early intervention and targeted support. It was also positive to hear how strengthened corporate ownership of education, alongside joint leadership and scrutiny arrangements with Torfaen, is helping to improve strategic capacity, accountability and shared responsibility for vulnerable learners.

Area of focus 1

The local authority's approaches to supporting vulnerable children and young people, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and who are educated other than at school (EOTAS) or elective home educated (EHE)

Additional Learning Needs

During our visit, it was useful to hear about the steps you have taken to strengthen the strategic leadership of provision for children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) and inclusion. Leaders have established an increasingly coherent approach, underpinned by the inclusion strategy, ALN policy and education improvement plan. This has helped to provide clearer direction for schools and services and strengthen shared expectations for identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people. It was clear from our discussions that senior leaders have a sound understanding of the strengths and challenges within ALN provision and are working closely with schools and settings, and specialist officers to develop more inclusive practice.

It was particularly positive to hear about the priority you have given to early identification and intervention, especially in the early years. Officers described well-established ALN referral pathways and effective multi-agency working that help children and families access appropriate support at an early stage. The timely completion of statutory processes, including early years ALN notifications and individual development plan (IDP) reviews, is a beneficial feature of this work.

School leaders spoke positively about the accessibility and expertise of ALN officers, the inclusive practice service and educational psychology team. They value the support, professional learning and guidance provided, including through ALNCo fora and opportunities to share effective practice. This work is helping to strengthen practitioners' confidence and improve the quality of individual development plans (IDPs). It was also encouraging to hear how officers' knowledge of individual schools and settings enables them to identify where additional support is needed and signpost leaders to effective practice.

We found it helpful to discuss how you are responding to the increasing complexity of pupils' needs through the development of specialist ALN provision. The reconfiguration of the learning resource bases and increased capacity at Pen-y-Cwm Special School are important developments in strengthening local provision and reducing reliance on out-of-county placements. Leaders have also established purposeful multi-agency panels to support decisions about statutory provision, specialist placements and transitions.

Areas for consideration:

- How will the local authority strengthen its evaluation of the impact of its ALN and inclusion strategy, policy and practice on the consistency and quality of provision and outcomes for children and young people?
- How will leaders continue to develop sufficient specialist capacity and more consistent inclusive practice and transition across schools and settings?
- How will leaders support the recruitment, retention and development of staff working with children and young people with complex ALN needs?

Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)

During our visit, it was useful to hear about the work you have undertaken to develop a broader range of educational pathways for pupils who experience significant barriers to mainstream education. Leaders have established a range of approaches, including online learning, the use of external providers and suitable interventions, to respond to the increasingly complex needs of vulnerable learners. These arrangements are helping a few pupils to re-engage with learning and, in some cases, return successfully to mainstream education.

It was particularly interesting to hear about the Youth Service intervention pilot, which combines beneficial learning experiences with continued links to pupils' mainstream schools. This provides beneficial opportunities for a few targeted pupils with social and emotional needs to improve their well-being, confidence and engagement with education. We also discussed the role of the vulnerable learners panel in bringing professionals together to consider the circumstances of pupils at risk of exclusion or disengagement. This provides a useful structure for identifying appropriate support and suitable educational pathways.

Areas for consideration:

- How will the local authority strengthen the coordination, curriculum offer and quality assurance of EOTAS provision to ensure that all pupils receive consistently appropriate and relevant educational experiences?
- How will leaders develop the systematic evaluation of the attendance, progress and outcomes of pupils who are EOTAS, and ensure clearer expectations for collaborative working and reintegration planning?

Elective Home Education (EHE)

During our visit, it was positive to hear about the steps you have taken to strengthen the oversight of children and young people receiving elective home education. Officers described more systematic monitoring arrangements and closer partnership working, which are helping them to develop a clearer understanding of the educational experiences of children educated at home. Beneficial monitoring arrangements provide the local authority with useful information about the circumstances of most children receiving EHE.

It was interesting to hear about the productive collaboration you have developed with Torfaen to strengthen monitoring and tracking arrangements. This partnership is helping to improve information sharing and provide more coordinated oversight of children and young people educated at home. Officers also described positive relationships with families and the support available to pupils returning to school. The reported return of pupils to mainstream education is an encouraging feature of this work.

We also found it helpful to discuss the arrangements for supporting children receiving EHE who have ALN. All identified pupils have local authority-maintained IDPs, and joint working between education welfare and ALN officers is helping to ensure that their individual needs are considered appropriately. The involvement of specialist officers in home visits and person-centred reviews also strengthens the authority's understanding of the provision available to these children and young people and supports informed discussions with families.

Area for consideration:

- How will the local authority build on its developing EHE monitoring arrangements to understand more fully the reasons families choose home education, particularly for children with ALN, and use this information to strengthen inclusive provision?

Area of focus 2

The local authority's strategic planning for Welsh medium education

In our discussions, it was evident that the local authority maintains a clear strategic focus on developing Welsh-medium education and embedding Welsh language priorities within wider corporate and educational planning. Strategic leadership and governance arrangements ensure that the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) is integrated into established partnership structures, supporting oversight and accountability for delivery. Access to Welsh language provision is appropriately viewed as an entitlement to all and this is underlined in the local authority's five missions.

The local authority has made progress in expanding Welsh-medium provision. The continued growth of Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar and increased capacity at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg have strengthened local access to Welsh-medium education. Participation rates show positive improvement from a low baseline, with increases in Welsh-medium early years participation and Year 1 enrolment. Transition arrangements between Welsh-medium primary and secondary education remain strong, with progression rates continuing to be high. Officers described a range of approaches to support learners through Welsh-medium pathways. The development of Y Noddfa has enhanced specialist Welsh-medium provision for pupils with additional learning needs, with monitoring information indicating positive engagement and progress towards individual targets.

The authority has also established a range of beneficial professional learning arrangements that provide access to Welsh language training, sabbatical opportunities, bilingualism reviews and cluster-based support. Schools are increasingly incorporating Welsh language priorities into self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, underpinning a clear and growing ownership of Welsh language development.

Officers outlined how collaborative working with schools, settings and partners contributes purposefully to advancing Welsh-medium education across the authority. They work effectively with partners to promote Welsh language and culture across education settings. All schools have achieved at least bronze status through Siarter Iaith/Cymraeg Campus, supported by a broad range of enrichment activities that strengthen learners' awareness of Welsh language, culture and cynefin. Annual monitoring reports indicate that a large majority of WESP actions are progressing in line with agreed milestones.

Areas for consideration:

- To what extent can workforce capacity support planned growth and sustainability in Welsh-medium provision?
- How effectively is expansion in Welsh-medium provision and capacity translating into increased participation across all age groups?
- To what degree do monitoring and evaluation arrangements demonstrate measurable impact on participation, progression and learner outcomes?

Many thanks for facilitating the visit and I look forward to discussing the developments in the two focus areas with you and your colleagues in my future link visits.

Yours sincerely



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HMI
Estyn

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

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Mae Estyn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Bydd gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn y naill iaith neu'r llall yn cael yr un flaenoriaeth.

Estyn welcomes correspondence in both English and Welsh. Correspondence received in either language will be given equal priority.