

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 19 th November 2024
Report Subject	Self-Evaluation Report Education Services 2023-24
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Education and Youth Portfolio undertakes a rigorous annual self-evaluation of its performance and services to provide assurance to the Council on the quality of education services in Flintshire. The report identifies strengths and areas for further improvement, and those areas for improvement are then reflected in the Council Improvement Plan and the Portfolio's own Business Plan.

The Portfolio's evaluation report this year is structured against the previous Estyn framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES) which was in place until the end of the academic year 2023-24. The report is delivered in three main sections to provide assurance to the Council across the three inspection areas of:

- Outcomes
- Quality of Education Services
- Leadership and Management

The new LGES framework has started from September 2024 so next year's report will be structured to reflect the changes to the model.

Each inspection area is evaluated in detail for the period 2023-2024 and concludes with a summary of further areas identified for improvement to ensure the continued provision of quality education services to the residents of Flintshire. The report also contains a summary of progress against the four recommendations from the Estyn inspection of Flintshire's Education Services in 2019.

The overall conclusion of the self-evaluation report is that education services in Flintshire are strong, effectively support children and young people and continue to provide good value for money particularly in the context of the financial challenges facing the Council's budget and the schools' delegated budgets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To review the outcome of the Education Portfolio's annual self-evaluation report on the quality of education services for the period 2023-2024.
2	To provide any observations to the Portfolio Team on the report.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE SELF EVALUATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES
1.01	<p>The prime purpose of self-evaluation is to lead service improvements within the Education and Youth Portfolio to secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Only by robustly evaluating the strengths of the current provision and identifying areas for further improvement can the Portfolio continue to refine the way it delivers services to secure better outcomes.</p> <p>At the heart of self-evaluation are three questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How well are we doing and what impact are our services having?• How do we know?• How can we improve things further?
1.02	<p>The previous Estyn Framework for the inspection of Local Authority Education Services was in place from 2018 to the end of the academic year 2024. As this report is a reflection of the Portfolio's performance for the 2023-2024 period, it has been written against that framework which focuses on three inspection areas:</p> <p>1. Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">1.1 Standards and progress overall1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning <p>2. Quality of Education Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">2.1 Support for School Improvement2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners2.3 Other education support services <p>3. Leadership & Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning3.3 Professional learning3.4 Safeguarding arrangements3.5 Use of resources

	<p>Next year's self-evaluation report will be structured against the new Estyn Framework for the inspection of Local Government Education Services which now include a separate inspection of Youth Services.</p>
1.03	<p>Education Services in Flintshire were last inspected in June 2019. The report was positive and there was no requirement for any Estyn follow up. The report identified four recommendations for improvement which the Service has continued to focus on since 2019, despite the interruptions and impacts caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. These recommendations are embedded in the Council Plan and the Portfolio Business Plan.</p> <p>The recommendations were:</p> <p>R1 Improve outcomes for learners in key stage 4</p> <p>R2 Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools</p> <p>R3 Improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the few front line education services identified in the report in order to provide more accurate information about the impact of the local authority's work</p> <p>R4 Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively</p> <p>There have been ongoing discussions with Estyn Inspectors about how progress against these recommendations will be assessed when the Education Portfolio is next inspected because of the impact of the pandemic and the severe financial challenges facing local authorities, which have significantly changed the local context, particularly in relation to recommendations 2 and 4. The Chief Officer has been assured by Estyn that the changed context will be understood.</p>
1.04	<p>The suspension of learner assessments, public examinations as well as other data collections by Welsh Government and its decision not to collect and report on pupil assessment data below the national level has resulted in many of the key performance indicators by which the Portfolio traditionally measured its progress, and referenced in its annual self-evaluation report, now not being available.</p> <p>The focus is now on schools using their own performance data to drive improvements for their learners. The role of the Local Authority's Education Service and the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) is to rigorously challenge schools and provide targeted support where needed, to ensure that schools are using their own evaluation processes effectively to continuously improve and secure improved outcomes for all.</p> <p>Where the portfolio does have relevant data in relation to some of its services, this has been included in the report.</p>
1.05	<p>Section 1 of this self-evaluation report describes the Portfolio's current view of 'outcomes' within this context. It uses evidence from Estyn reports on its schools. It is also based on first-hand evidence of working closely with school leaders and reviewing every individual school in Flintshire with the school improvement advisers from the regional school improvement service, GwE.</p>

	<p>Section 2 provides a detailed overview of the range of education services within Flintshire and how they contribute to securing positive pupil outcomes in terms of academic achievement and learner wellbeing.</p> <p>Section 3 provides an evaluation of the quality of the leadership and management of education services at a whole council level as well as specifically within the Education and Youth portfolio.</p>
1.06	<p>Inspection Area 1 Headlines – Outcomes</p> <p><u>Inspections</u></p> <p>Since Inspections in the school sector resumed in the summer of 2022 to the end of the summer term 2024, 33 Flintshire primary schools, 6 Flintshire secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU) have been inspected. All Flintshire schools have now been inspected under the last schools’ inspection framework. The new six-year cycle of school inspections begins in September 2024.</p> <p>Inspection performance across the school sectors overall is generally strong. Most schools have no level of follow up. Two secondary schools are currently in the statutory category of ‘In Need of Significant Improvement’ and one secondary school and one primary school are in the non-statutory category of Estyn Review. In most cases, there is a strong record of close correlation between the Council’s pre-inspection reports and Estyn findings. The Council has a very good track record in effectively supporting schools to be removed from Estyn categories quickly.</p> <p>The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the five inspection areas but 32 of the 33 schools inspected required no follow up by Estyn and 6 schools were invited to submit a case study/cameo for Estyn which is an indicator of highly effective practice. One of those schools was invited to submit 2 case studies. One primary school was placed in the statutory category of ‘In Need of Significant Improvement’ in September 2022 and successfully removed from follow up in February 2024. This means there are currently no primary schools in any form of statutory follow up and only one primary school in the minor category of Estyn Review.</p> <p>The inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is currently judged to be satisfactory. Of the 11 secondary schools in the Local Authority, two are in the statutory category of ‘In Need of Significant Improvement. One school was inspected during the 2022 -2023 academic year and one in 2023- 2024 One other secondary school was placed in the non-statutory category of Estyn Review during 2022 -2023. No secondary school is in the statutory category of Special Measures.</p> <p>The inspection profile for Flintshire funded non-maintained settings is very strong. 5 settings were inspected during the 2023-24 academic year. No settings were placed into follow up and there are currently no non-maintained EE providers in a follow up inspection category.</p>

1.07	<p><u>Wellbeing & Attitudes to Learning (including Attendance and Exclusions)</u></p> <p>Of the schools inspected between April 2022 and July 2024, 92% had no area relating to ‘wellbeing and attitude to learning’ identified as a recommendation for improvement. Estyn identified many strengths across Flintshire schools in this aspect of their provision, with three schools invited to prepare case studies for Estyn’s website which indicates highly effective practice worthy of being shared across Wales.</p> <p>It is recognised that improving attendance to pre-pandemic levels remains a challenge, not only for Flintshire but on a national basis. Primary attendance shows a slight reduction (0.3%) with secondary overall attendance improving by 1.2%. While overall levels of attendance remain comparatively low to those prior to the pandemic, they currently show more of a favourable comparison on a national basis, with primary attendance in Flintshire ranking as the 5th highest nationally and secondary ranking as 3rd highest; this compares with 16th place and 20th respectively for 2018/19, the period prior to the pandemic. Illness remains the primary cause for absence across both sectors. Holidays account for the second highest level of absence within the primary sector.</p> <p>Whilst a reduction in the levels of exclusion across Flintshire schools remained a priority for the year, this was not achieved with the levels of both permanent and fixed term increasing, particularly within the secondary sector. The main reasons for exclusion remain physical assault against a pupil, verbal/threatening behaviour against an adult, and persistent disruptive behaviour. The data suggests there is an increasing level of verbal/threatening behaviour against adults with a higher percentage of exclusions attributed to this. There is also a notable increase in the percentage of permanent exclusion attributed to substance misuse within the secondary sector. The increase in pupil exclusions is not unique to Flintshire – it is a national issue across all authorities in Wales and is a reflection of the ongoing challenges being faced by young people, particularly as a result of the pandemic.</p>
1.08	<p>Areas identified for ongoing improvement in standards and progress for 2024-25 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain focus on strategies to improve attendance rates • Maintain focus on strategies to reduce the number of fixed and permanent exclusions • Maintain positive inspection outcomes across all sectors - early years, primary, secondary and specialist provision • Support the very few of schools in follow up or statutory category to make rapid and sustained progress against their recommendations
1.09	<p>Inspection Area 2 Headlines – Quality of Education Services</p> <p><u>School Improvement</u></p> <p>The quality of education services delivered by the Portfolio is strong. The provision for school improvement services is effective and the partnership with GwE delivers positive outcomes for schools, as evidenced by our</p>

	<p>Estyn profile. Senior leaders within the service use a range of data and intelligence effectively to ensure areas of improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. Data and information are scrutinised to monitor progress against agreed actions. As a result, the Council is effective in challenging schools where needed and allocating specific support for those schools to improve.</p> <p>Schools in Flintshire are continuing to engage positively with the National Reform Journey and in developing themselves as Learning Organisations. All primary schools in Flintshire implemented the new curriculum from September 2022 and all secondary schools from September 2023. There is a comprehensive and well embedded professional learning offer for all schools in Flintshire and this is enhanced by what is being offered at local level by schools and between schools. There are high levels of engagement by Flintshire schools in professional learning.</p> <p><u>Support for Vulnerable Learners</u></p> <p>Flintshire provides a suitable range of services to promote social inclusion and support for learners with ALN through a combination of internal and externally commissioned services and provision. The Council meets its statutory duties well as demonstrated by the low levels of appeal to the Education Tribunal and the low levels of young people becoming NEET. Council expenditure remains higher for those pupils presenting with a range of behavioural, social and emotional needs as this continues to be the most significant area of presenting need.</p> <p>The challenges of recent years continue to impact on learners and the Council's and schools' ability to respond. Schools continue to be as creative as possible in their offer to engage learners, but the financial climate is starting to impact on the sustainability of the range of the support and provision available.</p> <p><u>Range of Other Education Services</u></p> <p>The Portfolio delivers a very wide range of services to support the array of needs presented by children and young people within schools, early years settings and also via its Youth and Youth Justice services. A detailed overview of each of these service areas is included in Inspection Area 2 of the annual report, with evidence of their impact as well as the ongoing challenges being faced. Despite the ongoing budgetary challenges, the Education Portfolio is proud of the range and quality of its offer which deliver demonstrably positive outcomes for children and young people in Flintshire.</p>
1.10	<p>Areas for ongoing improvement for the quality of education services includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop options for in-house provision to support the increasing number of pupils struggling to engage with education due to mental health difficulties and neurodiversity • Develop new strategic plan for specialist provision

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to education, employment and training for young people in the Youth Justice Service • Embed a skills and employment pathway into the Youth Service to ensure a sustainable model for high quality play and youth work delivery • Continue to strengthen links between the Portfolio and its secondary schools with the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership Board • Implement year 3 of the 5 year action plan from the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan • Continue to work collectively across schools and council services to mitigate the impacts of poverty and reduce inequality. • Continue to embed the Anti Racist Wales Plan in schools • Continue to embed the Young Flintshire Model
1.11	<p>Inspection Area 3 Headlines – Leadership and Management</p> <p><u>Quality and Effectiveness of Leaders and Managers</u></p> <p>There is strong corporate and political support for Education and Youth Services across the Council. Political and officer leadership of Education is innovative and pragmatic. Education priorities are exemplified in corporate and portfolio level plans and are regularly scrutinised through the quarterly monitoring reports presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. The annual performance report for the period 2023-24 showed 85% of actions on track (RAG – Green) with 15% subject to ongoing monitoring (RAG Amber) but none rated as RAG Red. In terms of performance monitoring, of the 17 measures identified for the Portfolio in the Council Plan for 2023-24, 10 were RAG rated as Green, 3 as Amber and 4 as Red.</p> <p>Elected members effectively undertake their statutory duties and make a worthwhile contribution to the development and progress of statutory plans. They also show real commitment to safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable learners. Reports presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee are thoroughly reviewed by members and officers are appropriately challenged. Members are also positive in their acknowledgement of the work of officers and the impact of their services on children and young people. There is strong member engagement in the following areas relevant to children and young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Welsh in Education Forum • The Corporate Parenting Forum • The Corporate Safeguarding Panel • The Schools Standards Quality Board • The Youth Justice Executive Board • The Education Consultative Committee • SACRE • School Budget Forum • Regional School Improvement (GwE) Joint Committee <p>Senior leaders and managers communicate high expectations for securing improvement and challenge schools to good effect through a range of forums. For school improvement these include regular meetings with the head teacher community, working through nominated representatives on</p>

the primary and secondary Head Teacher Federations, School Performance Monitoring Group and other specific groups e.g. Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator Forum, County Curriculum Steering Group and Emotional Health and Well-Being Strategy Group, Digital Advisory Group and Welsh in Education Strategic Forum. There is also effective monitoring and challenge for other areas of provision through the Youth Justice Executive Board, Children's Services Forum and the Corporate Safeguarding Panel. The key objectives of the Public Service Board are clearly aligned with the Council's and Portfolio's strategic improvement plans.

Whilst a lean team in terms of personnel, senior leaders in the Education Portfolio work in a collegiate way with a range of strategic partners across public services to set high level priorities together for the young people of Flintshire. They are well respected by elected members, external partners, regional colleagues and school leaders. There are effective performance management arrangements which bring about improvements. Managers ensure that objectives for individual officers link well to operational and strategic priorities.

Self-Evaluation Processes and Improvement Planning

The Council has a well-established process of evaluation, review and challenge. Leaders, managers and elected members have an accurate understanding of the Council's strengths and weaknesses. They routinely make good use of a range of rigorous monitoring activities.

The Education Portfolio undertakes a wide range of self-evaluation activities, first at a service level analysing any available data and first-hand evidence to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of individual services. The arrangements also identify clearly the areas for improvement and help ensure that progress against strategic plans is reviewed effectively and timely interventions made. This is then fed into the Portfolio's overall evaluation of its annual Business Plan and into the Portfolio Annual Self Evaluation Report. This then links to the Council Plan which is regularly reviewed by Chief Officers and senior managers and reported on regularly to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a corporate priority set out in the annual Council Plan and the Council has robust arrangements in place across all areas. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy provides a framework for all council services to safeguard and protect children and adults, ensuring that all are fully aware of their responsibilities.

The Education and Youth Portfolio has appropriate arrangements for the strategic planning for safeguarding within both the core education service and schools, which includes monitoring. The safeguarding model policy for schools is updated annually in line with revised national guidance (Keeping Learners Safe and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures).

Use of Resources

Education reform and investment has remained a priority for the Council despite the challenging financial climate. The high strategic priority given to the education service is reflected in the Council's allocation of both revenue and capital resources but this has become increasingly challenging in recent years where cuts have been applied to schools' delegated budgets to enable the Council to set a legal and balanced budget. Risks related to the impact of poor funding on the quality of education services have been clearly set out and are understood by elected members and head teachers. The Council reviews the outcomes of its financial plans to make sure that funding is spent wisely and has a positive impact on standards.

The Council is committed to an ambitious school modernisation investment programme by maximising Welsh Government's Sustainable Learning Communities funding (previously 21st Century Schools) and its own capital funding. Flintshire is also a Pathfinder Council for the new Mutual Investment Model created by Welsh Government to deliver a new 3-16 learning campus in Mynydd Isa which will be the Council's first net zero carbon school in operation.

In response to a recommendation in its Estyn inspection of 2019, the Council had made significant progress in reducing the number of schools in deficit. It refreshed its policy for the management and monitoring of schools' deficits which is robustly applied. There are effective working relationships between senior council officers and school leaders to ensure an appropriate level of both challenge and support to control spending and reduce deficits in schools.

With the level of inflationary pressures experienced again over the 23-24 financial year and a further 3% cut to school budgets, the number of schools declaring a deficit position has increased as expected. This was also exacerbated by the Council decision to remove the additional funding of £0.750m it had set aside in the budget to support secondary schools in financial difficulty as it was unaffordable for 2024-25. The overall level of reserves held by Flintshire schools at March 31st 2024 was £4.125m, a decrease of £3.117m from the previous year – a reduction of 43.04%. The number of schools forecasting a deficit position by March 2025 has increased to 27, from 8 schools who ended the 2022-23 financial year in deficit. Looking forward to future years, it appears that setting a balanced budget is becoming increasingly difficult across all sectors and that there is a risk around deficit balances becoming greater in the short to medium term.

1.12

Areas for ongoing improvement – Leadership and Management

- Maintain rigorous budgetary monitoring and management processes to protect the delivery of quality education services in times of extreme budget challenge to mitigate adverse impacts on school performance and learner outcomes.
- Embed the new model of school improvement services in line with the requirements of the WG Middle Tier Review.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop and embed the Belonging Strategy as the Portfolio's strategic approach to its delivery of education services • Continue to improve the school estate through the School Modernisation Strategy and the maximisation of Welsh Government funding streams.
1.13	The full self-evaluation report is included at Appendix 1.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no revenue or capital resource implications as a result of this report.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	The Education Portfolio has a detailed risk assessment document which outlines the key risks related to the delivery of education services. It is regularly reviewed by the Portfolio's Senior Management Team and is regularly reported to the appropriate Council committee.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	N/A for this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Self Evaluation Report Education Services 2023-24

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Estyn Report Flintshire Education Services 2019 https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-08/Inspection%20report%20Flintshire%20County%20Council%202019.pdf</p> <p>Estyn Framework for the Inspection of Local Government Education Services 2021 https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-11/What%20we%20inspect%20-%20Local%20government%20education%20services%20for%20inspections%20from%202021.pdf</p>

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Claire Homard, Chief Officer Education & Youth

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8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
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8.01	Estyn – the Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales.
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	GwE – Regional School Improvement Services for the 6 Education Authorities of the North Wales region.
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