

FORMAL CABINET MEETING

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 21 st September 2021
Report Subject	Estyn Thematic Review Update
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the autumn term of 2020, the Welsh Government asked Estyn to undertake a thematic review of the work undertaken by the education departments of each council in Wales to support their learning communities in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) during the period from March to October 2020. Estyn made five key recommendations for the Welsh Government and councils to address.

Flintshire's first review letter, received in January 2021, was very positive and was included as part of the documentation relating to the Education Portfolio's annual self-evaluation process. This was reviewed by Cabinet and the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee earlier in the year.

During the summer term of 2021, Estyn conducted follow up reviews with all councils in Wales to consider the progress being made against their initial recommendations in the national thematic review. The evidence was gathered through meetings with senior managers of the portfolio and GwE core lead officers and triangulated with schools through Estyn's regular engagement meetings with Headteachers.

That review has now culminated in a second letter to the Chief Executive which provides a high degree of assurance that the Portfolio has continued to work effectively through its own resources, and through its support for schools in partnership with GwE, to ensure quality educational provision for learners, particularly those who are considered to be the most vulnerable. The letter contains feedback on the Council's response to the five recommendations.

This feedback from Estyn does not need an official response from the Council as the work undertaken was a thematic review, not an inspection under the normal regulatory frameworks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Cabinet acknowledges the effective work of the Education Portfolio, in conjunction with the regional school improvement service GwE, in ensuring Flintshire learners continued to receive effective educational provision through the Covid-19 pandemic.
2	Cabinet notes the positive progress made against each of the five Estyn recommendations in the national thematic review by the Education Portfolio and schools.
3.	Cabinet requests that the assurance letter is considered by the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW LETTER
1.01	<p>During the autumn term 2020, the Welsh Government asked Estyn to undertake a review of local authorities' work in supporting their learning communities, and particularly vulnerable learners in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs), during the period from March to October 2020.</p> <p>The evidence for this review was based on virtual meetings with officers, the Cabinet Member for Education, the Chair of the Education, Youth and Culture Committee and a sample of schools and PRUs. Estyn also considered the supporting documentation provided by the local authority and the feedback from surveys of school/PRU leaders, governors, teachers and support staff, parents and pupils. The feedback from the 22 local authorities culminated in a national report back to Welsh Government.</p> <p>The report focused specifically on two aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting learning – the quality of the learning offer and how has this been supported through further guidance and professional learning?• Supporting vulnerable pupils – how did the local authority targeted services and support to vulnerable pupils to support them to engage in learning? What barriers still exist? <p>The national report was published in January 2021 and a link to it is included within the list of accessible documents at Section 6 of this report.</p> <p>Each Council also received an individual letter outlining Estyn's view of its response to those two key aspects in the early stage of the pandemic. This letter was previously shared with Cabinet as part of the Portfolio's annual self-evaluation report.</p>

1.02	<p>Within the national report, Estyn made five recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities and other partners and providers. These recommendations were:</p> <p>R1 Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity</p> <p>R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs</p> <p>R3 Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals</p> <p>R4 Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils</p> <p>R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design</p>
1.03	<p>During the summer term of 2021, Estyn conducted follow up reviews with all councils in Wales to consider the progress being made against their recommendations in the thematic review. The evidence was gathered through meetings with senior managers of the portfolio and GwE core lead officers and triangulated with schools through Estyn’s regular engagement meetings with Headteachers.</p> <p>That review has now culminated in a second letter to the Chief Executive which provides a high degree of assurance that the Portfolio has continued to work effectively in providing support for schools and vulnerable learners, to ensure quality educational provision was delivered through the second stage of the pandemic.</p> <p>The letter sets out the Council’s progress against each of the five recommendations and can be viewed at Appendix 1. The letter is a positive endorsement of the work of the Education Portfolio within areas for which it has strategic responsibility and also in its partnership approach to supporting schools with the regional school improvement service, GwE.</p>
1.04	<p>This feedback from Estyn does not need an official response from the Council as the work undertaken was a thematic review, not an inspection under the normal regulatory frameworks. There is no need for the production of any follow up action plan. The priorities outlined in the five recommendations will be absorbed now into the ‘business as usual’ for the Portfolio and schools when they reopen in September.</p> <p>The normal regulatory framework for the inspection of Local Government Education Services will restart from September 2021. Flintshire has already been inspected on this framework (June 2019) and the recommendations from that full inspection are embedded in the Council Plan and the Portfolio Business Plan.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	N/A

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	N/A

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Estyn Letter.pdf

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	LA consortia support for schools and PRU.pdf

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Claire Homard Chief Officer Education & Youth Telephone: 01352 704190 E-mail: claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	Estyn – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales