

Education & Youth Portfolio

Self-Evaluation Report of Education Services



2023-2024

Introduction & Local Context - Flintshire County Council

Formed in 1996 following local government reorganisation, Flintshire is a well governed and high performing unitary local authority in the northeast corner of Wales bordering Cheshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire. Flintshire has a strong track record of being a direct provider of local services from Education, Social Care, Streetscene and Housing. Whilst direct provision is at the core of its model, Flintshire is also a creative and flexible council and operates both as a provider and a commissioner of services. It has been instrumental in developing collaborative arrangements such as a regional school improvement service, an employee-owned mutual in leisure, libraries and cultural services, catering and cleaning services and a local social housing trading company. Over the last few years, the Council has also developed its own residential care for children in order to provide high quality, local provision to meet growing demand in a more cost effective way. Continuing to develop sustainable models of delivery and maintaining high quality services continues to be a priority for the Council, particularly in challenging financial times, to secure the best outcomes for its residents and value for money for the public purse.

Flintshire provides local public services for 155,100 people who live in 66,973 households. It has the largest population of the North Wales authorities and is the seventh largest in Wales. The population is expected to rise by 2.1% by 2028 but this reflects more of an increase in the number of people over the age of 65 as the numbers of children, young people and the working population are predicted to decrease. In the 2021 census the number of children aged under 15 years decreased by 4.2% and the proportion of people aged 65+ increased to 21.4% (33,200 people) compared to 17.6% (26,836 people) in 2011. This will obviously impact on future demands for services in different ways.

With just over 6,000 staff, the Council is one of the two largest employers in the county, alongside Airbus, and provides direct services including, education, housing, planning, refuse collection, environmental health, recycling, roads, social services, trading standards, transport and tourism. It provides leisure, library and catering/cleaning services via 'arms' length' trading companies. Flintshire has seven libraries, ten sports and leisure centres, two country parks and maintains 733 miles of roads.

Flintshire has 78 schools (64 Primary, 11 Secondary, 2 Specialist & 1 PRU) providing education for 22,861 pupils, including those educated other than at school.

Manufacturing, retail trade and human health and social work are the sectors which currently employ the most people in Flintshire. The availability of employment is rising and unemployment in Flintshire in February 2023 stood at 3.0%, better than the Welsh average of 3.8%. The North Wales Economic Framework, supported by UK, Welsh Government and Local Government funding streams provides a clear strategy for future economic growth and clearly articulates the skills and knowledge that will be needed within the local and regional population to deliver on emerging economic, social, digital, and wellbeing priorities.

The County has a mix of affluent and deprived areas. Due to the interconnections of factors, there are particular communities that are more vulnerable than others in Flintshire. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 highlights that coastal communities in Flintshire experience high levels of deprivation (3.3% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in 10% most deprived; 10.9% in 20% most deprived in Wales), particularly when it comes to the employment, income, education, and community safety dimensions.

The number of school aged pupils entitled to Free School Meals (e-FSM) has decreased from 17.8% in 2023 (Wales 2023 average 20.3%) to 14.1% in 2024.

This figure is a significant shift away from current Welsh averages and is linked to the Council being an early implementer of Universal Credit (UC). Families below the income threshold for Universal Credit are entitled to a free school meal but when earnings rise and exceed the UC threshold, the child continues to receive a free meal under Transitional Protection until that phase of the child's education ends. The Council does not receive any funding for pupils on Transitional Protection but is still required to make the provision of a meal. The reduction in the overall percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals will have a significant impact on funding streams to the Council and to schools as this is the measure of deprivation used in many budget formulae. Since 2019 the percentage of Flintshire children on Transitional Protection increased from 0% to 23.7% so represents a growing risk to funding for education. However, from December 2023 Transitional Protection is being phased out, reducing this financial pressure over time.

Based on the 2021 Annual Population Survey, the Welsh language is spoken by 23.9% of the population in Flintshire compared to 29.5% across Wales. This is a significant increase from the 2011 national census which reported 13.2% of the county's population having some Welsh language skills.

The county has 5 Welsh medium primary schools and 1 Welsh medium secondary school. There are no dual stream or bilingual schools in Flintshire. Currently 6.47% of children in Flintshire are educated through the medium of Welsh. There are ambitious targets in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to more than double this number over the next ten years.

The county also has a mixed provision of faith-based education with 9 Church in Wales Voluntary Aided primary schools, 5 Roman Catholic primary schools and 1 Roman Catholic secondary school. 10.70% of children in Flintshire currently receive their education in a faith-based setting.

Flintshire has a strong tradition of supporting a local infrastructure of non-maintained early years' provision through both English and Welsh, which supports the Council in its delivery of childcare and early years' education. Flintshire was an early adopter of the Welsh Government's flagship childcare policy of 30 hours free provision for working parents and there is a strong network of childminders, playgroups and private day nurseries delivering this combination of childcare and early education prior to children transitioning into schools. Flintshire Council also supports neighbouring local authorities with the administration of their Childcare Offer.

Overall, 10.78% of school aged pupils in Flintshire in 2024 are designated as having a Special Educational Need. Of this number 1.80% have a Statement of Special Educational Need, higher than the Welsh average of 1%. 3.05% of pupils are designated as School Action which is lower than the Welsh average of 3.20% and 1.54% are at School Action Plus, lower than the Welsh average of 2.5%. Under the new legislation in Wales for Additional Learning Needs, there are also Individual Development Plans (IDP) in place which can be school maintained or Local Authority maintained. In Flintshire 4.38% of learners have an IDP which is lower than the Welsh average of 4.50%.

The current Chief Executive, Neal Cockerton, was appointed in November 2021 and was previously a member of the Council's Chief Officer Team. The Chief Officer for Education and Youth, Claire Homard, was appointed in June 2017, initially as Interim Chief Officer and then permanently in 2018. She also fulfils the role as Statutory Director of Education for the Council. The Leader of the Council is Cllr David Hughes. Since May 2023, Cllr Mared Eastwood has been the Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language and Culture. The Chair of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee is Cllr Teresa Carberry.

Structure of the Council

Flintshire County Council has 67 Councillors that are normally democratically elected at least every four years. After the elections of May 2022 there is a minority Labour administration with informal support from some members of the Liberal Democrat group and some independent councillors.

The political make up of Flintshire County Council elected members from August 2024 is as follows: Labour: 29; Independent: 22; Liberal Democrats: 3; Eagle Group: 6; Flintshire People's Voice: 5; Conservative: 1; Non-Aligned: 1.

The Council has a Cabinet and a Scrutiny function. Decisions are usually made by the Cabinet for all issues including major policy matters. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold the Cabinet to account and to assist in the improvement and development of the Council's policies and services. Flintshire has 5 Overview and Scrutiny Committees:

- Education, Youth & Culture*
- Corporate Resources
- Community & Housing
- Environment & Economy
- Social and Health Care*

*Education Youth & Culture and Social and Health Care Committees hold a joint meeting once a year.

There are several other Committees that are appointed by Council at its Annual Meeting to ensure that all other functions are discharged, including: Appeals; Climate Change; Clwyd Pension Fund; Constitution and Democratic Services; Governance and Audit; Grievance; Grievance Appeals; Investigation and Disciplinary; Joint Governance (for pensions); and Licensing. There is a detailed Constitution that describes the various parts that make up the Council, their functions, membership and procedural rules.

Cllr Mared Eastwood



Cabinet Member
for Education,
Welsh Language & Culture

Neal Cockerton



Chief Executive

Claire Homard



Chief Officer
Education & Youth

Working in Partnership

Flintshire County Council has a longstanding and proud track record of partnership working. The communities it serves rightly expect statutory and third sector partners to work together to manage shared priorities through collaboration. Flintshire and Wrexham Public Services Boards (PSBs) worked closely and effectively during the COVID pandemic, and so came together as a single Public Services Board in January 2023.

The evidence and insight in both the Flintshire and Wrexham well-being assessments (published in 2022) was used to develop and publish a Well-being Plan for the two areas in 2023, as a statutory requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). Informed by the four pillars of sustainable development: social, economic, environment and culture, the plan seeks to address the key areas which pose the greatest need or challenge for our communities and describe where the PSB can make the greatest contribution, adding value to existing partnerships and core services.

The well-being plan is shaped around two well-being objectives

- Build flourishing communities by reducing inequalities across environment, education, employment, income and housing.
- Improve community well-being by enabling people of all ages to live safe, healthy and independent lives.

The focused outcomes of the PSB Plan relate to Children and Young People, Our Communities and Where we work.

Public Services Board partners include: Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, North Wales Police, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council, Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham University, and the Department for Work & Pensions.

<https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/PDFFiles/Policy-and-Performance/PSB/Flintshire-and-Wrexham-Public-Services-Board-Well-being-Plan-2023-2028.pdf>

Flintshire's Corporate Plan April 2023-2024

The Council Improvement Plan is reviewed and refreshed each year and approved by full Council. In the reporting period April 2023- March 2024, the following core improvement themes drove the business plans of each portfolio and were reported on via quarterly monitoring reports, culminating in an Annual Performance Report.

Theme / Wellbeing Objective	In-year Priority
Poverty Protecting people from poverty by supporting them to meet their basic needs	Income Poverty
	Child Poverty
	Food Poverty
	Fuel Poverty
	Digital Poverty
Affordable and Accessible Housing Housing in Flintshire meeting the needs of our residents and supporting safer communities	Housing support and homeless prevention
	Housing Needs and Housing Options
	Social Housing
	Private Rented Sector
	Empty Properties
Green Society and Environment Limiting the impact of the Council's services on the natural environment and supporting the wider communities of Flintshire to reduce their own carbon footprint	Carbon Neutrality
	Climate Change and Adaption
	Fleet Strategy
	Green Access
	Green Environment
	Renewable Energy
	Active and Sustainable Travel Options
Circular Economy	
Economy Enabling a sustainable economic recovery	Town Centre Regeneration
	Business
	Transport Connectivity
	Digital Infrastructure
	Local Development Plan (LDP) Targets
	Spending Money for the benefit of Flintshire
	Reducing worklessness
Personal and Community Well-Being Supporting people in need to live as well as they can	Independent Living
	Safeguarding
	Direct Provision to support people closer to home
	Local Dementia Strategy
	A well-connected safe and clean local environment
Education and Skills Enabling and supporting learning communities	Educational Engagement and Achievement
	Digital Learning Opportunities
	Learning Environments
	Learning Community Networks
	Specialist Educational Provision
	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
	Wellbeing

Review of Estyn Recommendations from Local Government of Education Services Inspection (June 2019)

The Council's Education Services were last inspected by Estyn in June 2019 under the Local Government Education Services Framework. The outcome was a positive report and no requirement for any kind of follow up. The recommendations from the report were as follows and are embedded in business plans for the Council and the Education & Youth Portfolio:

- R1** Improve outcomes for learners in key stage 4
- R2** Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools
- 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
- R4** Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively

Post Inspection Action Plan - Estyn LGES Recommendations Evaluation 2023-2024

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	R1: Improve outcomes for learners in KS4	
VB	<p>Liaise effectively with GwE and Update level 2 Business Plan with GwE for 2023-24</p> <p>The level 2 Business Plan was completed for primary, special and secondary schools during summer term 2023. Progress was monitored through regular meetings with GwE officers. The plan included identified regional priorities, a comprehensive support plan for schools and a wide range of professional development opportunities.</p> <p>Evaluation of the plan fed into the new GwE Regional Business Plan. This spans a three-year period between 2023-2026 which also contained a detailed 12-month Business Plan for 2023-2024. The priorities continue to be focused on a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales.</p>	
VB	<p>Ensure all secondary school support plans are updated and include a focus on KS4 provision and outcomes</p> <p>All secondary school support plans were completed by Supporting Improvement Advisers in discussion with schools. These plans are live documents and kept under review. One secondary school plan was revised to meet the statutory requirements of a post inspection action plan following the school being placed in Significant Improvement in January 2023. This plan was approved by Estyn.</p>	
VB	<p>Review the 14-19 curriculum offer for KS4 learners and update 14-16 and post-16 strategies</p> <p>New terms of reference have been developed for the Curriculum Deputies Group and they have continued to meet on a termly basis. Schools have shared their curriculum models and continue to share expertise when looking at future requirements in light of the new curriculum and also the review of KS4 qualifications.</p>	

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	<p>Focused discussion and research has taken place with post-16 schools and their learners in light of the forthcoming major changes from the introduction of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) now renamed MEDR. The priority is ensuring continued excellent partnership working and strategic planning for Flintshire's post-16 sector.</p> <p>The Flintshire Post-16 Network was re-established following the pandemic to ensure all post-16 learners have the very best opportunities and outcomes. The network consists of headteachers from schools with sixth forms and a senior representative from Coleg Cambria. The Network exists to provide strategic direction and local support and monitoring for Post-16 provision in Flintshire.</p> <p>The Post 16 Learning Adviser has met with headteachers with sixth forms to evaluate current provision and assess future need. Work is currently underway on refreshing the Post-16 strategy. The focus remains on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring sufficient access to high quality and relevant education for all, including ALN students • Providing an offer that meets all needs including the needs of students and wider economic and employment needs • Building on strong reputations and specialisms within school sixth form provision • Ensuring Post-16 provision is sustainable, resilient, and efficient and delivers maximum value 	
VB	<p>Review the pre SEREN and SEREN activity offer for learners in Flintshire</p> <p>The Seren Academy is a fully funded Welsh Government initiative dedicated to supporting the most able state educated learners in Wales to achieve their full academic potential into leading universities and succeed on highly selective degree programmes. It is a fully funded programme available to years 8 to 13 learners from state schools and further education colleges across Wales, regardless of their economic background, personal situation, or location. The Seren Academy now operates as one continuous programme supporting learners through three stages of progression. Across all stages, learners are provided with opportunities to further their super-curricular exploration and push the boundaries of their academic development and engagement.</p>	
	<p>Stage 01 - Years 8-9</p> <p>This stage provides a taste for learners and whether the Seren Academy is the right fit for them to formally become members in Stage 02 (Year 10). Flintshire has the freedom to create the Seren cohort to include the most able learners, but also learners who we feel have the potential to excel if exposed to the programme. This phase will motivate and inspire learners and provide them with the opportunity to achieve selection in Stage 02. Opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An introduction to university including a visit • Communication workshop • Debating Club • Online Masterclasses (Psychology, Engineering, Philosophy, Maths etc) • GCSE options advice from University of Cambridge 	
	<p>Stage 02 - Years 10-11</p> <p>Stage 02 will empower learners to take ownership and responsibility for their future educational choices and provide further super-curricular opportunities. Alongside developing learners' insight into life at university and how they can start to prepare</p>	

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	<p>for this step-up, learners will also be challenged to develop their academic literacy, oracy and research skills. This stage provides more tailored and specific advice in relation to a learner's future educational goals, setting them up for success in Stage 03. Opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ University visit ■ Communication workshop ■ Debating Club ■ Online Masterclasses (Psychology, Engineering, Philosophy, Maths etc) ■ A level options advice from University of Cambridge ■ Summer School opportunities at Cardiff, Swansea and Aberystwyth Universities. ■ STEM workshops 	
	<p>Stage 03 (Years 12 to 13)</p> <p>Specific support is provided to learners for entry into leading universities with unique opportunities for learners to receive direct advice from university admissions tutors, on how to apply, develop competitive personal statements, prepare for admissions tests and how to approach interviews. By providing extra-curricular study experiences and super-curricular enrichment activities that enhance and go beyond the curriculum, the Seren Academy supports the aspirations and ambitions of the most able learners, helping to widen their horizons, develop a passion for their chosen field of study, and reach their academic potential. Working in collaboration with leading universities and education partners, support includes subject-specific masterclasses to stretch and challenge, workshops, tutorials, study guides, higher education advice and guidance, and mentoring. Opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential opportunities to visit London, Cambridge and Oxford Universities • University visits e.g. Birmingham, Liverpool and Lancaster • Medics Programme • Dentistry Programme • Personal statement workshop from Cambridge and Bangor Universities • Personal statement advice • Advice and guidance on applying for scholarship programmes • Advice on future careers • North Wales University and Career fair including access to local businesses to promote future opportunities to learners who may want to come back to their local area after university. • Communication workshops • Interview preparation and practice <p>Medics Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In partnership with Wrexham Maelor Hospital for year 12 and 13 students who want to pursue a career in medicine. • The programme is delivered over 8 weeks in year 12 and a week of work experience is offered to students who complete. • Year 13 follows a 5 week programme focused on making applications and preparing for interviews. • The programme includes admission test preparation, mentoring from a team of junior doctors, interview preparation, focused debates and presentations on a range of relevant topics, personal statement advice and work experience. 	

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	<p>Professional Development sessions for teachers are offered by University of Cambridge.</p> <p>In September 2023, there were 1625 Flintshire and Wrexham learners enrolled in the Seren Academy. 196 of whom were pupils from Welsh medium provision and 134 Learners who are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).</p> <p>In 2023, 58% of Flintshire learners enrolled in the Academy gained a place at a Russell Group University. In 2022, it was 67% of students and 60% in 2021. WG did not collect the data for SEREN for 2020 due to the pandemic. Nearly all other students took up a place at other universities or on specialist courses. It may be that some students also achieved places at Russell Group Universities but didn't register for SEREN. Some students will also have accessed SEREN provision through the Deeside Sixth provision provided by Coleg Cambria.</p>	
<p>VB</p>	<p>Work effectively across the service to ensure high standards of school performance and learner outcomes through support and challenge</p> <p>As a result of changes to the assessment and accountability framework for schools, schools are no longer required to undertake or record final assessments at foundation phase and key stage 2. There was no comparative data for school performance measures at key stage 4 for 2022 examinations. In 2023, Welsh Government restarted the reporting of key stage 4 outcomes at a school level using the approach adopted prior to the pandemic in 2018/2019. This approach saw the introduction of transitional interim measures for secondary schools that looked to ensure a greater focus on raising aspirations for all learners.</p> <p>For key stage 5, the 2021/22 and 2022/23 examination periods were also transitional. In 2022/23, Qualifications Wales set the results at a national level at a midway between 2018/19 and 2021/22.</p> <p>Welsh Government determined in 2019 that performance data traditionally aggregated for comparison at local, regional and national level be removed. All benchmarking, comparisons with other establishments, and the placing of schools and local authorities in rank order is no longer acceptable or possible. The only comparative data available to local authorities in these key stages are the national averages. There is now a greater focus on the use of data by schools in their self-evaluation processes rather than for public comparison. In this context, data should be analysed on a local level and as a starting point to inform local priorities.</p> <p>Estyn resumed inspections for schools from April 2022. Inspections in the school sector began again in summer term 2022, with 33 Flintshire primary schools, 6 Flintshire secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU), inspected to date.</p> <p>Inspection performance across the school sectors overall is generally strong. Two secondary schools are in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' and one secondary school and one primary school are in Estyn Review. In nearly all 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 swiftly removed from Estyn categories. Powers of intervention, including the use of Warning Notices are used effectively where schools cause concern, to ensure challenge and support is timely and effective. Interim Executive Boards have provided successful challenge and intervention to schools in serious categories of concern. This has helped to increase the pace of change and ensure robust accountability for standards and progress.</p> <p>The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong.</p>	

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	<p>Between April 2022 and July 2024, 33 primary schools in Flintshire were inspected. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the five inspection areas but 31 of those 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. Case studies were linked to effective pupil leadership, strategic development of support staff skills, health and wellbeing provision for vulnerable learners, family engagement, developing a Welsh ethos and culture, outdoor learning and ensuring rapid progress for pupils following the pandemic.</p> <p>One primary school was placed in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' in September 2022. A comprehensive package of support provided by the LA and GwE was put in place for the school, and it was successfully removed from this category in February 2024. At the end of this current inspection cycle therefore, there are no primary schools in the statutory categories of Special Measures or Significant Improvement and only one placed recently in Estyn Review.</p> <p>During the last academic year, the local authority, in partnership with the regional school improvement service has guided seven primary schools through a 360-degree plan with four of these schools subject to the school performance monitoring process. These schools have made considerable progress over the course of the academic year. Three have been inspected during the year and deemed as not requiring follow up and one has been successfully removed from significant improvement. All seven schools have made timely progress in the areas identified as needing improvement.</p> <p>Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is 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. All secondary schools have bespoke support plans in place to ensure continued improvement. Schools causing concern are subject to robust monitoring. There are 360° action plans in place for two schools with focused support provided by both the Regional School Improvement Service, GwE and the Local Authority. One school is currently subject to the school performance monitoring process.</p> <p>The inspection profile for Flintshire non maintained settings is strong. Seven settings were inspected during the 2022-23 academic year and a further 5 in 2023 -2024. There are currently no registered non-maintained EE providers in a follow up inspection category.</p>	RAYG
VB	<p>Support the ongoing development of schools as learning organisations through the Alliance model</p> <p>The Secondary Alliance model is embedded and has led to improved levels of collaboration between schools in sharing practice at senior and middle leadership level and in standards of teaching and learning. The Middle Leadership professional development programmes have been successful in improving the quality of leaders in core subjects, literacy and numeracy and in the foundation learning phase through development of skills and knowledge. Bespoke approaches have been tailored to meet the requirements of individual schools; coaching programmes for groups and individuals have been delivered in several schools and had a clear impact on the work of leaders. Shortages in key personnel have also been supported through the deployment of expertise from neighbouring schools.</p>	RAYG

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
VB	<p>Hold schools effectively to account for their performance through SPMG meetings where required</p> <p>As a result of national changes, there was a need to review how schools are identified as requiring monitoring by the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG). This was part of the national and regional discussions on evolving regional processes to support schools on their self-improvement journey. Engagement with schools should facilitate the early identification of schools that are in need of support, to prevent them becoming a school causing concern.</p> <p>Through the work of the SPMG, elected members and officers have reflected that the process continues to be effective in contributing to an improvement in primary and secondary school outcomes over time, particularly in schools where there are significant and long-term challenges.</p> <p>When Estyn inspected the local authority in the summer of 2019, they recognised that the portfolio’s arrangements for identifying schools causing concern work well, and in most cases lead to effective actions. The inspection identified that “Officers and elected members in Flintshire know their schools and settings well and can outline clearly the relative strengths and areas for improvement. They recognise specific issues facing individual schools causing concern and act in a timely way to put in place the most appropriate support in collaboration with GwE”.</p> <p>In the summer term of 2022, the Welsh Government published a new school improvement framework, ensuring that learner progression and well-being is at the heart of all efforts to deliver high standards and aspirations.</p> <p>Since 2019, 6 primary schools and 3 secondary schools have been subject to monitoring by the SPMG. The challenges of the pandemic have resulted in understandable delays to the process as schools focused on firstly providing emergency childcare in the first period of lockdown and then subsequent periods of remote learning. At the end of the summer term 2024, there were 5 schools under monitoring by the SPMG. The small number of schools reflects the very positive Estyn profile for schools in Flintshire.</p>	<p>RAYG</p>
<p>R2: Reduce exclusions and increase attendance in both primary and secondary schools</p>		
JW/ CS	<p>Amendments to the Exclusions Policy / Substance misuse policy to promote the use of diversionary options for young people at risk of exclusion</p> <p>Work has been underway to update the draft policy following consultation with Flintshire Sorted (Drug and Alcohol Team). A revised policy has been drafted, consulted upon with the secondary Head Teachers Federation and will be launched in September 2024.</p>	<p>RAYG</p>
JW	<p>Development of diversionary activities for young people at risk of exclusion through substance misuse or anti-social behaviour</p> <p>A draft 5 day programme has been devised and has been tested in 2021 with a small cohort of young people who were at risk of exclusion. The pilot has resulted to the programme. However, the programme has not been extended further due to delays in agreeing an overarching policy linked to Substance Misuse with Secondary Headteachers and due to capacity within the Sorted Education Practitioner team. The revised Substance Misuse Policy will be rolled out from September 2024 and further discussions held with the Secondary Headteacher Federation in relation to the diversionary programme in the Autumn Term 2024.</p>	<p>RAYG</p>

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
JW	<p>Application through the Youth Endowment Fund for a Regional Youth Violence and Exploitation Prevention Officers and secure pathways for support for young people at risk of exploitation.</p> <p>A regional YJS bid was submitted in 2021 to enable all 4 YJS areas to recruit Youth Violence and Exploitation Prevention Officers utilising resilience interventions developed as part of a PhD study completed within Gwynedd & Ynys Mon. Whilst we were successful in the early stages of our bid, we did not proceed to the final round and did not receive funding for the project. Whilst we have been unable to secure individual practitioners, in 2023-24 we secured funding through the Shared Prosperity Fund to commission Sidestep through Action for Children which aims to support children and young people at risk of exploitation. However, funding is only secured until December 2024. In addition we have accessed funding through the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner to develop serious violence interventions with an organisation called Little BlackBird in 2024-25. We are developing these interventions with colleagues from Education and Youth Services in order for these resources to be delivered in a number of different settings and will be informed by feedback from organisations and current statistical data linked to youth violence. The interventions will have a specific focus on promoting and improving emotional health and wellbeing.</p>	RAYG
JW	<p>Implement any actions resulting from Extended Learning Reviews</p> <p>The YJS continues to operate a local Community Safeguarding and Public Protection Framework in addition to the mandated framework from the Youth Justice Board. All actions form part of an ongoing Action Plan which is monitored through the YJS Delivery Group and Executive Management Board.</p>	RAYG
JR	<p>Embedding the revised processes and procedures in relation to attendance and exclusion, using data to better inform and target interventions at both a pupil and school level</p> <p>The structure of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) was reorganised from September 2022 to differentiate the roles between the Education Support Officers (ESO) and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) with regards to attendance matters. ESOs have been allocated all of the primary school referrals leaving more operational time for the EWO staff, based in the secondary schools, to respond to more complex issues. The service has been further enhanced by the allocation of temporary Attendance Support Officers (ASO), funded by a WG grant. These officers have been targeted at particular schools with low overall levels of attendance and high levels of eFSM. The addition of the ASO role has been positive in supporting an improvement in attendance as demonstrated by an initial performance review with one of the schools outlined below:</p> <p><i>“ASOs have completed over 300 home visits, to over 140 students. Just over half (52.5%) of these students have improved their attendance since the first ASO visit. On average, 13% of students return to school on the same day as an ASO visit, and 65% of students are back in school the following day”.</i></p> <p>A revised model policy for attendance was issued to schools in September 2023 to support a more consistent approach across the county. A focus was placed at the start of the year on 3 primary school geographical areas with officers contacting schools to offer regular attendance review meetings and advice on implementation of the policy; post-intervention review indicated a positive impact of the activity undertaken with the majority of schools showing an overall improvement of at least 0.5% in levels of attendance.</p>	RAYG

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	<p>A RAG rating of all schools' procedures in relation to attendance and their engagement with the EWS was also undertaken by the service to further inform the identification process of those in need of support and challenge. Actions were identified in relation to the rating, with officers following up with schools. This activity has provided the service with a further mechanism for monitoring and identifying areas for improvement in terms of process, along with the other activities such as attendance data profiling and regular meetings with staff and parents.</p> <p>The service has continued with the implementation of fixed penalty notices (FPN) and court proceedings as appropriate, following the Welsh Government guidance. A designated ESO has been allocated to administer the FPN process to ensure compliance; any unpaid fines were referred for legal action and resulted in fines ranging from £170 to £660. Schools are increasingly seeing this process as an integral part of their graduated response to education (99 issued in 2022/23), which can be utilised as a last resort where other actions have not been successful. The impact of this action on attendance remains variable but the improving overall trend of attendance suggests that it is supporting a greater awareness and understanding of parental responsibilities in terms of attendance.</p> <p>The use of data and information to target and inform intervention has continued over the year at an individual, cohort and school level. This has however been hampered by the move to a new Portfolio database and changes in the schools' information management systems which temporarily prevented access to data. This practice will be resumed once the issues with the new system are resolved.</p>	
JR	<p>Implement the Community Focused Schools initiative in the designated schools</p> <p>Flintshire has continued to receive WG funding to support the implementation of the Community Focused Schools initiative. The centralised service targeted 3 communities initially, selected on the basis of levels of eFSM, attendance data, index of deprivation and exclusion rates; this has now been expanded to 5. The service delivery model has evolved to a commissioning approach which allows for planning and agreement on delivery expectations between the service and school management and there has been a positive response from the schools where this has been established so far.</p> <p>Key pieces of work this year have been to support the Food and Fun programmes over the summer holidays in the designated areas which provided key opportunities to not only deliver the programme objectives, but to provide additional transition support for some of the county's more vulnerable learners. Working alongside designated school staff, children accessed a range of important skills through the activities and also started to experience and build their knowledge of the new school building and importantly, build relationships with staff they would encounter in the new school year. A positive outcome of this, alongside engagement is that some participants have the confidence to return to support the project as year 7 buddies. Other community activities have included community lunches based in the schools where participants' comments were positive, indicating that they were feeling part of the school community again, something which had been lost during Covid. The team have also been instrumental in delivering food wellbeing boxes as part of the Children's University / Dylan's Restaurant initiative, engaged in Community Conference Meetings and facilitated delivery of the Safer Streets 5 projects. The beginnings of a Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) type group has also been established at a school along with delivery of a number of parental engagement sessions in partnership with the Health Improvement Team.</p> <p>Alongside the wider community work, the team has delivered interventions to individuals and small groups. This has included support for transition for pupil who</p>	

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	<p>were identified as having persistent levels of absenteeism in year 6. Through this process it became clear that parents were not always contacting the school as required, and that some pupils had inaccurate views in relation to attendance, e.g. believing that 65% was an acceptable attendance level. Other pupils have engaged with support offered during lunch times to support them to maintain their presence in school for the full day and others have accessed courses to develop self-esteem, confidence and practical skills; one pupil accessing the support has gone on to be the first person in his family to attend college. Mechanisms for further evaluating service impact are under development, utilising the Outcome Star programme.</p>	
JR	<p>Promote and develop Trauma Informed Practice across services and schools</p> <p>Officers across the portfolio have been supported to access a range of awareness raising sessions to improve knowledge and understanding of Trauma Informed practice. Additional training for schools and officers was commissioned by the Council with 24 participants completing the 11-day Trauma Informed diploma. A secondary Trauma Champions group has been established and met regularly over the year to review and share effective practice across schools. A Trauma Informed support group has been established for practitioners, led by the Council to provide peer support and guidance for those delivering interventions. The role of the Nurture Outreach Service is under review to ensure consistency of message and approach.</p>	
JR	<p>Engage with health regarding suitable review processes for pupils on long term home tuition packages</p> <p>Initial conversations have taken place with local health colleagues with regards to medical authorisation for access to Home Tuition. This remains a challenge due to variety of health professionals involved. The policy has reverted back to require consent from more senior/specialist medical staff (this was relaxed during the pandemic given the pressure on the Health Service) to ensure the correct decision is made for the pupil. The process of review will be an ongoing action.</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>JW Improved monitoring for Youth Justice Service (YJS) Cohort excluded from education or not accessing education provision</p> <p>All children and young people referred to the Youth Justice Service (YJS) are subject to a Triage Assessment by our Education Officer. Any young person not receiving their full entitlement of Education/Training/Employment (ETE) is discussed as part of our monthly ETE Panel and plans to address exclusion and attendance are discussed between YJS and Inclusion Service. The YJS is a standing member on the Education Other than at School (EOTAS) Panel which helps to escalate cases of concern or persistent non-engagement. The introduction of new Key Performance Indicators will require additional oversight of our cohort through our Management Board. Following our statutory inspection in March 2024 by His Majesty's Inspectors of Probation (HMIP), we will review our processes to reduce the administration function of our Education Officers to allow them more time to engage with children and young people who are in unsuitable education.</p>	

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
DMT	<p>Identify datasets for use as Portfolio/services within evaluation processes</p> <p>A protocol has been developed between the Workforce Sub-group of the Welsh Education Strategic Forum and the School Management Information Team (SMIT) to review the data generated by the School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC) data related to number of staff with Welsh language skills and their level of fluency. This information is used to develop the forward work programme for this group each year, linked to the 10 year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The focus is to effectively target professional development for the Welsh language with staff in schools to improve the quality of teaching of Welsh in schools and increase the numbers of staff who are competent and confident in their use of Welsh.</p> <p>Core attendance and exclusion data is now generated on a half-termly basis and shared across all managers in the Education Portfolio to support targeted intervention in schools.</p>	Yellow
JR	<p>Ensure appropriate monitoring systems and tools are in place to support evaluation and intervention in identified services</p> <p>Services have been supported to review the data available to them and the relevance of this in monitoring and evaluating service impact. The importance of this has been promoted through management meetings and there is evidence of improvement in this area through service self-evaluation documentation. The shift away from producing nationally published data has impacted on this process and required managers to really consider their purpose and the information which will demonstrate the impact of their services. This is an evolving process with managers and teams being at different stages in their development of embedding processes and continues to be a priority.</p>	Yellow
VB	<p>Review of local authority quality board meetings with GwE - new model for implementation from September 2021</p> <p>The Review was completed by the required deadline for implementation. An additional series of meetings was added to discuss all phase items with a particular focus on 360° support plans. The revised model is well embedded.</p>	Green
<p>R4: Manage the reduction in school budget deficits more effectively</p>		
	<p>Ensure there is close monitoring of primary schools where budgets place them at risk of financial deficit without prior action</p> <p>This is a now regular agenda item at Portfolio Finance Meetings. Detailed analysis has been completed by the schools' Finance Team to RAG schools' risk level over the medium term. The significant number of grant streams for schools over time has added to the complexity of budget forecasting and so, as appropriate when supporting individual schools, analysis has been completed with and without grant funding expenditure to highlight over reliance on temporary funding sources to individual schools. The Senior Primary Learning Adviser has been working closely with those schools identified at increased risk to support them e.g. in the review of planning for class sizes and curriculum provision. Headteachers have been supported where required, including with specialist HR advice, to make appropriate and timely decisions to avoid financial deficit.</p> <p>The financial landscape continues to deteriorate generally for the Council, and this resulted in a 3% reduction to schools' delegated budgets for both the 23-24 and the 24-25 financial year. The impact of this is that many more schools will face significant</p>	Yellow

Officer	Evaluation of Key Actions	RAYG
	<p>challenges in setting a balanced budget in the year ahead and school balances, which have previously provided a level of protection, are rapidly reducing.</p> <p>At the closedown of accounts 16 schools finished the 23-24 year in a deficit position; 2 secondary and 14 primary (1 of the 14 had a small negative balance - that is under £5,000 or 1% of budget) and therefore is not classed as requiring a licensed deficit. The remaining 13 were above that threshold, however licensed deficit applications were either not received, as required under the Protocol for Schools in Financial Difficulty, or the agreed limit was breached, in all but one of these cases. The Council has written to all of the governing bodies concerned to remind them of the requirements of the Protocol. This compares with prior year information as follows - 15 schools were in deficit at the end of the 19-20 financial year (9 primary, 6 secondary), 5 schools were in deficit in 20-21 (4 secondary, 1 primary), 2 schools in 21-22 (both secondary) and 8 were in deficit in 22-23 (2 secondary, 6 primary).</p>	
VB	<p>Continue to robustly scrutinise any recruitment requests for schools in deficit</p> <p>The Portfolio's policy with schools for managing budget deficits is robustly managed. Any requests are discussed with Finance, HR and Inclusion colleagues as relevant and taken to DMT/ Portfolio Finance meetings for review and for final decision. In the main, requests over the year 23-24 have come from 2 secondary schools who are in a licensed deficit position.</p>	

Self-Evaluation of Education Services 23-24

Inspection area 1: Outcomes

1:1 Standards and progress overall

Estyn suspended inspections of education providers maintained by local authorities in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and no further inspections were carried out in 2019-2020 or 2020-2021. Inspections in the non-maintained settings began again in spring 2022 as well as pilot inspections for schools. Inspections in the school sector resumed in summer 2022, with 33 Flintshire primary schools, 6 Flintshire secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU), inspected to date. All schools have now been inspected in this current Estyn inspection cycle. Estyn's new 6-year cycle begins in September 2024.

Inspection performance across the school sectors overall is generally strong. Most schools have no level of follow up. Two secondary schools are in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' and one secondary school and one primary school are in 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 being removed from Estyn categories. Powers of intervention, including the use of Warning Notices are used effectively where schools cause concern, to ensure challenge and support is timely and effective. Interim Executive Boards have provided successful challenge and intervention to schools in serious categories of concern. This has helped to increase the pace of change and ensure robust accountability for standards and progress.

The primary school inspection profile for Flintshire has been continuously strong. Between April 2022 and July 2024, 33 primary schools in Flintshire were inspected. Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for the five inspection areas but 32 of those 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. Case studies were linked to effective pupil leadership, strategic development of support staff skills, health and wellbeing provision for vulnerable learners, family engagement, developing a Welsh ethos and culture, outdoor learning and ensuring rapid progress for pupils following the pandemic.

One primary school was placed in the statutory category of 'In Need of Significant Improvement' in September 2022. A comprehensive package of support provided by the LA and GwE was put in place for the school, and it was successfully removed from this category in February 2024. At the end of this current inspection cycle therefore, there are no primary schools in the statutory categories of Special Measures or Significant Improvement and only one placed recently in Estyn Review.

Overall, the inspection profile for Flintshire secondary schools is 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. All secondary schools have bespoke support plans in place to ensure continued improvement. Schools causing concern are subject to robust monitoring. There are 360° action plans in place when needed and highly focused support provided by both the Regional School Improvement Service, GwE and the Local Authority.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups

Early Education Funded Provision for 3-year-olds (Early Entitlement)

Over the last three years Flintshire has averaged 635 three-year-olds per month accessing early education, known locally as Early Entitlement (EE) through a mixed provision of mostly playgroups, private day nurseries and schools. There were 447 children funded in playgroups or private day nurseries and 169 funded in schools during the last academic year.

Pupil level data on standards achieved by three-year-olds is not collected by the Local Authority. The quality of provision in the non-maintained sector is monitored regularly by the Early Entitlement Advisory Team (EET) and is quality assured by Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

The inspection profile for Flintshire 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. The Local Authority has demonstrated a positive track record in supporting the very few settings in follow up over the last 5 years to be removed quickly.

Post-16 Learners

In September 2023, there were 1625 Flintshire and Wrexham learners enrolled in the Seren Academy. 196 of whom were pupils from Welsh medium provision and 134 Learners who are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

In 2023, 58% of Flintshire learners enrolled in the Academy gained a place at a Russell Group University. In 2022, it was 67% of students and 60% in 2021. WG did not collect the data for SEREN for 2020 due to the pandemic. Nearly all other students took up a place at other universities or on specialist courses. It may be that some students also achieved places at Russell Group Universities but didn't register for SEREN. Some students will also have accessed SEREN provision through the Deeside Sixth provision provided by Coleg Cambria.

1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Judgements are no longer given by Estyn for inspection areas. Between April 2022 and July 2024, 33 primary schools and 6 secondary schools in Flintshire were inspected. 92% of those had no area relating to 'wellbeing and attitude to learning' identified as a recommendation for improvement and Estyn identified many strengths. One primary school had a recommendation around identified safeguarding issues. One secondary school had a recommendation to improve strategies to address the poor behaviour of a few pupils and its impact on other pupils. One secondary school had a recommendation to strengthen processes to track and monitor pupils' well-being and the quality of provision for ALN. Two secondary schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit had recommendations around improving pupil attendance. This is a reflection on the challenges still being experienced by learners in the secondary sector engaging with education following the Covid-19 pandemic and this is not an issue exclusive to Flintshire - it is a national issue.

Three schools were invited to prepare case studies for Estyn's website which indicates highly effective practice worthy of being shared across Wales. One case study focused on how the school addresses the needs of the school community by engaging families through provision of enriching activities that support parents to develop their children's learning and wellbeing, another was on the school's health and wellbeing provision that has a highly positive effect, especially on the most vulnerable pupils and a third on the strategic development of support staff skills and its impact on pupils' learning and wellbeing.

Attendance

It is recognised that improving attendance to pre-pandemic levels remains a challenge, not only for Flintshire but on a national basis. The table below shows attendance levels for both primary and secondary schools. Primary attendance shows a slight reduction (0.3%) with secondary overall attendance improving by 1.2%. The figures remain comparatively low however, they show more of a favourable comparison on a national basis, with primary attendance 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 pre 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, 16.9% although this has decreased from 19.6% in the previous year; this accounts for 4% of absence in the secondary sector. A further 4% is lost to exclusion in the secondary sector, this accounts for 0.25% in primary schools.

Table 1: Flintshire Schools' Attendance

	Attendance (%)				Unauthorised Absence (%)			
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20*	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20*
FCC Primary Schools	92.1	92.4	91.2	93.2	0.94	0.95	0.89	0.85
FCC Secondary Schools	89.0	87.8	88.5	91.6	3.05	3.19	2.56	1.87

The levels of unauthorised absence have remained steady over the last 2 years with primary schools seeing a slight reduction of 0.01% leading to 0.94% this year and a reduction of 0.04% for secondary schools which had levels of 3.05%. Schools have been reminded of the need to consider the reason presented for the child's absence and that they have a choice as to whether to accept this or not: unauthorised absence is coded where a reason has either not been provided or one that has not been accepted. The Council has re-instated the use of other tools such as Fixed Penalty Notices to improve attendance and this is referenced in section 2 of the report.

Table 2: Spread of attendance figures

Attendance (%)	Primary				Secondary			
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20*	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20*
<90	16	10	6	4	7	9	7	0
90.0-90.9	7	6	6	0	4	0	1	0
91.0-91.9	4	7	5	4	0	2	1	1
92.0-92.9	8	10	9	5	0	0	1	3
93.0-93.9	11	12	10	12	0	0	1	3
94.0-94.9	9	16	15	19	0	0	0	3
95.0-95.9	6	3	6	15	0	0	0	1
96.0-96.9	3	0	7	4	0	0	0	0
97.0-97.9	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
98.0-98.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
99.0-100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3: Reasons for authorised absence

Reason for Absence	Primary (%)				Secondary (%)			
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20*	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20*
C	10.35	10.73	39.72	11.8	19.60	20.8	28.43	17.05
F	0	0	0	0.03	0	0	0	0.02
H	16.86	19.61	11.02	15.75	3.99	3.52	1.95	4.81
I	64.73	61.99	42.69	62.02	64.33	52.39	48.07	66.29
M	4.76	4.5	3.77	5.23	6.26	5.89	4.45	7.92
S	0.01	0	0	0	1.08	13.36	13.66	0.01
E	0.25	0.31	0.25	0.41	4.33	3.39	2.68	3.21
R	0.10	0.05	0.09	0.02	0.06	0.04	0.06	0
T	2.97	2.81	2.47	4.73	0.34	0.61	0.7	0.68

*Figures for 1/09/19 to 20/03/20 when lock down commenced

C	Other authorised circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/ description)	M	Medical or dental appointment
F	Agreed extended family holiday	S	Study leave
H	Agreed family holiday	E	Excluded but no alternative provision made
I	Illness	R	Day set aside exclusively for religious observance
		T	Traveller absence

The improvement in secondary attendance is positive but the overall low levels remain a concern. Data is shared with secondary school pastoral representatives as at termly forum to facilitate comparison and discussion in relation to effective practice. Data is also shared with service managers to support awareness and pupil targeting and also discussed at Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings to facilitate wider portfolio discussion in relation to strategic approach. The transition to a new school data system in the reporting period has impacted on the availability of data and as a result, the activity that could be undertaken in response.

Exclusions - Permanent and Fixed Term

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.

Table 4: Number of Permanent Exclusions from Flintshire Schools

	No of permanent Exclusions			
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Primary	1	0	0	1
Secondary Schools	30	27	10	19

The main reasons for exclusion remain physical assault against a pupil, verbal/threatening behaviour against an adult, persistent disruptive behaviour and 'other'. 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 Council's Substance Misuse Policy has been reviewed in response and has undergone consultation with schools, with the updated policy due for publication in September 2024. Officers were using individual pupil data to support the profiling and identification of those at risk

of permanent exclusion with the aim of intervening at an earlier stage. The transfer to a new education database has resulted in significant data access issues which has impacted on the ability of officers to maintain this activity and it will be reinstated once the system issues have been resolved.

The Council was successful in its bid for UK Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) securing additional funding to support engagement. The project 'LEAP' was implemented in September 2023 and has provided access to a range of additional group and 1:1 support for individuals at risk of disengagement with the aim of reducing barriers to education and employment. The project is due to run until December 2024 when the overall impact will be determined.

Table 5: Fixed-Term Exclusions

	Fixed Term Exclusions			
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)	Number of incidents (Number of Pupils)
Primary 5 Days or Less	123 (58)	158 (18)	99 (55)	144 (70)
Primary Over 5 days	8 (6)	7 (7)	13 (12)	1 (1)
Secondary 5 Days or Less	1885 (807)	1446 (716)	902 (490)	879 (405)
Secondary Over 5 days	80 (70)	66 (53)	22 (20)	19 (18)
Rate of exclusion per 1000 pupils (Primary & Secondary Combined)	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
5 days or Less	86.5	73.4	54.5	43.4
Over 5 days	7.6	6	3.2	0.8

The number of managed moves across Flintshire, a strategy to give learners a fresh start in a different school, has remained relatively low with 37 being undertaken in 2022/23. The vast majority occurred within the secondary sector and success rates of these remains low, with 38% proving to be successful; the challenging and often complex needs of pupils identified for Managed Moves impacts on the success of this process, along with the availability of additional resources to wrap around the individual in the new setting. Work has been focused on developing a Fair Access process to support timely admission across the secondary school network and this is due to be implemented in September 2024. The Managed Moves Policy and associated processes will be further reviewed in line with that development in the coming year.

Outcome 1: Standards and Progress Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- 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

Inspection area 2: Quality of Education Services

2.1 Support for School Improvement

School Improvement Processes

The Council knows its schools very well. There are clear strategies, policies and processes that are understood by those involved and give a clear shape and direction to the Education Service.

The relationship and collaboration between Flintshire and the Regional School Improvement Service (GwE) is very good and similarly, relationships between GwE and schools in Flintshire are positive. Through this relationship, the Council has quality information about its schools and provides them with robust and appropriate challenge but also support and intervention. As a result, schools benefit from a diverse regional professional learning offer and bespoke support at individual school and cluster level. This can be evidenced by the improvement dialogue with schools and the strong inspection profile.

Improving performance in Key Stage 4 continues to be a priority following the last inspection. As a result, each secondary school has an agreed programme of support that helps deliver the identified priorities within a school's improvement plan. The school support plan clearly defines how school improvement resources ensure targeted improvements in key priority areas. Where required, schools are also supported by a 360° support plan which identifies enhanced support needs through LA services and GwE. These plans are monitored through the Council's Quality Board.

The Council, in partnership with GwE, has effective procedures to support schools in their self-evaluation and improvement planning. Schools are robustly challenged on the quality of their self-evaluation processes.

Schools have made effective use of the milestones provided by GwE for the reform of the Curriculum for Wales. This allows schools to reflect on their current position with regards to the reform journey and provides clear next steps for their consideration. Cluster work is enhanced through collaborative work and the sharing of priorities and dialogue helps capture the level of support required by schools and collaborations of schools.

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 robustly 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.

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. The offer supports school leadership at all levels across the county and has been strengthened by a range of strategies including access to regional and national development programmes. The local authority has supported the development of leadership in Flintshire schools at various levels. Subscription to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and Aspiring Heads course has been strong while existing and recently appointed headteachers are very well supported through the New and Acting headteacher programme. The impact of this has been demonstrated in the good recruitment levels at senior leadership level across Flintshire schools, even within the overall context of national challenges to recruitment and retention.

There has been a clear focus on improving teaching in Flintshire schools. The impact of this focus can be evidenced in the evaluation of practice at school and regional level and through the continued improvement

in Inspection Area 3 of the Flintshire Estyn profile (Teaching). All schools have been involved in the ongoing professional development and support programme for the implementation of the new curriculum.

Primary and Secondary networks and peer-to-peer work has strengthened collaboration and led to a stronger shared understanding of effective practice. The Secondary Alliance model is embedded and has led to improved levels of collaboration between schools in sharing practice at senior and middle leadership level and in standards of teaching and learning. The Middle Leadership professional development programmes have been successful in improving the quality of leaders in core subjects, literacy and numeracy and in the foundation learning phase through development of skills and knowledge. Bespoke approaches have been tailored to meet the requirements of individual schools; coaching programmes for groups and individuals have been delivered in several schools and had a clear impact on the work of leaders. Shortages in key personnel have also been supported through the deployment of expertise from neighbouring schools.

Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. The Council supports strong and effective communication and a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges. Good practice is shared and local expertise nurtured.

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.

Post-16 Education

There are six high schools in Flintshire with sixth forms and a Council partnership with one Further Education (FE) college with a dedicated A level centre. Two high schools merged their sixth forms to create Flint 6th. In 2023 - 2024, there were 1,005 learners in Years 12 and 13, compared to 1,041 in 2022 - 2023 and 1,152 in 2021-2022. This included 72 post-16 learners studying through the medium of Welsh at Ysgol Maes Garmon in 2023- 2024, 62 in 2022-2023 and 62 in 2021-2022. All school sixth forms offer the Welsh Baccalaureate, however, the number completing the full qualification differs between schools and years.

The Council continues to work closely with its six post-16 providers and in partnership with Coleg Cambria to shape post-16 provision for students and to ensure clear pathways to professional and technical routes to employment, alongside robust academic routes. The appointment of a Post-16 Learning Adviser has added additional capacity to the portfolio's work. Regular meetings of the post-16 network of schools are held to agree and review curriculum planning and local delivery. Annual plans are submitted to Welsh Government for scrutiny. The portfolio engages with the Regional Skills Partnership Board who are keen to work with schools, particularly around developing apprenticeships.

Welsh Language Advisory Service Updated VB June 2024

The portfolio's Welsh Language Advisory Service works in English and Welsh medium primary schools. Under the Welsh Government's new language categorisation policy, all 59 English medium schools are defined as Category 1 schools and all 5 Welsh schools are defined as Category 3 Welsh-medium primary schools.

The Team's main objective is to contribute to Flintshire's Welsh in Education Strategy by ensuring progress in Welsh in Category 1 and Category 3 primary schools. They work in partnership with schools to improve the quality of teaching and develop the language and methodology skills of the education workforce.

School Workforce Annual (SWAC) data for 2023 shows that 13% of the primary workforce (teachers and teaching assistants) have no Welsh language skills. This is a 2% improvement from 2022.

Through a range of strategies, a targeted approach is used that includes the direct training of teachers and teaching assistants through intensive language and methodology courses and by working collaboratively with other key partners e.g. GwE, Canolfan Bedwyr (providers of the Sabbatical courses), Urdd and Menter Iaith.

The informal use of Welsh in all schools is a strategic priority. It is delivered by an appointed coordinator for Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter) in Welsh medium primary and a designated person leading and co-ordinating Cymraeg Campus in English medium primary schools. All five Welsh medium primary schools in Flintshire have achieved their Gold Siarter Iaith award. All English medium primary schools in Flintshire have embarked on their journey with Cymraeg Campus. During the last academic year, 15 schools have been verified for the Efydd (bronze), 2 for the Arian (silver) and 3 for the Aur (gold). In total 42 schools have now achieved the Efydd (bronze) award, eight schools achieved the Arian (silver) Award, and 4 have achieved the Aur (gold) Award. Six secondary schools are now working towards Cymraeg Campus Efydd (bronze).

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 8 English medium primary schools were inspected and 4 (50%) received a recommendation to improve pupils' Welsh language skills. Following the re-introduction of inspections in April 2022, 13 schools were inspected and 7 (54%) received a recommendation to improve pupils' Welsh language skills, reflecting to some degree the impact of the pandemic, particularly on learners in English speaking homes who were not being exposed to the Welsh language in school during the periods of closedown. The team adjusted their programme of professional development for schools and their targeted bespoke provision to address the concerns identified. Since April 2023, 21 English medium primary schools have been inspected and only 5 (24%) have received a recommendation in relation to Welsh language, demonstrating the positive impact of the advisory team.

In the summer term of 2024, the Welsh service again organised a jamboree for foundation learners. 53 primary schools, including the primary special school, attended the singing festival over three days with 1,479 pupils attending.

Flintshire schools are encouraged to provide opportunities for staff to further their language training through the Welsh Government funded sabbatical courses. Numbers attending from Flintshire have been consistently high on courses across the North Wales region. Between 2020 and 2024, 27 teachers have accessed the sabbatical programme: Cymraeg Mewn Blwyddyn (Welsh in a year) – 9 teachers; Sylfaen (Foundation) – 5 teachers; Canolradd / Uwch (Intermediate/ Advanced) – 6 teachers. They continue to receive post-course support from the Welsh Advisory Service to embed their practice within their school. For September 2024, a further 4 Flintshire teachers have been allocated places on the Cymraeg Mewn Blwyddyn course; 15 applied but course places are limited. 11 teaching assistants attended Cwrs Mynediad in the summer term of 2024 and will receive post-course support from September 2024. The Welsh Advisory Service works closely with the course providers, delivering methodology sessions during the courses and provides focused support to staff on their return to school, with a particular aim of supporting embedding of practice across the whole school e.g. delivering training sessions to teaching assistants within their schools, becoming Flintshire verifiers for Cymraeg Campus and in some instances, becoming the cluster lead for Welsh.

One member of the Welsh Advisory Team works with Welsh medium primary schools for any newcomers who arrive in the 8-11 age group. An accelerated programme of language intervention has been developed in conjunction with the Welsh medium schools. A representative from each school has been trained

to deliver the programme effectively. In 2022-2023, 15 newcomers completed this programme and in 2023-2024 5 newcomers completed. A member of the team also works closely with the Welsh secondary school supporting the 'Trochi' (Immersion) programme for Year 6 learners who transfer from English medium primary school into Welsh medium secondary, including delivering language and methodology sessions during the 4-week period in the summer term before transfer to secondary school. 18 pupils joined the 'Trochi' programme in September 2023. In September 2024, 16 pupils are due to join the programme (13 in Flintshire and 3 in a neighbouring authority). The service has made effective use of the additional funding stream for Latecomers to Welsh medium education. This included a range of projects for Foundation Learning, 8–11-year-olds and Key Stage 3. Plans are well underway to provide learning facilities for the Trochi programme to operate out of the new build for Ysgol Croes Atti in Flint.

Members of the team continually evaluate their work to ensure schools receive a high-quality service, refining methods accordingly and using evidence-based practices to inform improvements, e.g., by identifying language support required as a result of the Welsh language skills section of the School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC), creating working parties of teachers refining curriculum planning for schools, identifying schools to share good practice. The team produces a monthly bulletin that provides information on professional development opportunities, celebrates success and expectations for Welsh as well as including relevant external stakeholder input. Through the highly effective cluster work for Welsh, the service can facilitate and support schools in striving to build capacity within their own settings. 1 Welsh medium and 2 English medium schools were invited by the regional school improvement service, GwE, to showcase their effective practice to teachers from across North Wales. The focus was on how Welsh language is developed within the Curriculum for Wales. These schools offered an insight into their vision for developing the Welsh language and exemplified their provision. Flintshire schools engage positively with the support offered and provide regular feedback, which informs the ongoing work of the Service.

Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Forum

The 10-year Flintshire Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2032 was approved by Welsh Government following a period of public consultation and endorsement by the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny process. Subsequently, a 5-year action plan was also approved by Welsh Government. The implementation of the WESP is driven and monitored by the Flintshire Welsh Strategic Forum made up of officers, elected members, school representatives and other organisations linked to the development of the Welsh language and Welsh medium education. A representative from Welsh Government regularly attends meetings of the Forum. The Forum is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language and Culture.

The Forum works very effectively as a multi-agency platform for delivering and monitoring the WESP. All members bring high levels of knowledge and expertise to the Forum which are freely shared to achieve the common vision of promoting Welsh-medium education and the Welsh language through all formal and non-formal education settings such as schools and youth settings. Most members of the Forum sit on one or more of the three sub-committees – Provision, Standards and Workforce. These meet regularly during the year to work on their specific actions within the 5-year plan and provide feedback on their progress in the following termly Forum meeting.

The Forum is robust in holding the Council to account in its delivery of the Plan and achieving the targets contained within it. The Forum's terms of reference and membership are regularly reviewed. Reports on the progress of the WESP are routinely presented to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Flintshire remains committed to build additional capacity in the Welsh Medium school network to support the WESP. Significant capital investment has been made through the Council's capital

programme and through the Sustainable Learning Communities funding to improve facilities and increase the number of Welsh medium places available.

Advanced planning is underway to review further opportunities for growth in Welsh medium schools including a new build for an existing Welsh medium school in Flint and a new start up Welsh medium school in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area. This would deliver on the Council's key objective of having Welsh medium early years and primary school provision in every major town across the county.

School Governance Support

The governor support role within the Education Portfolio (0.2fte) sits with the role of Senior Manager for Business Support. The part time provision and support provided to governing bodies is enhanced by access to the dedicated web subscription resource and helpline provided by Governors Cymru. Exemplars of good practice/case studies from governing bodies in Flintshire can be referenced on the website.

The key functions of the service relate to supporting governing bodies, as necessary, in the following areas - Schools Causing Concern procedures; School Federations; Accelerated Improvement Boards; Interim Executive Boards; training and development, either through commissioning or direct delivery; administration of the Flintshire Governors Association; appointment of Local Authority governors to governing bodies, and securing governor nominations to the Schools Budget Forum and Education, Youth & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Council continues to remain compliant with the statutory duty to offer the regulatory school governor training programme. The Welsh Government statutory governor training modules are available online with a commissioned external provider. This online training portal during 2023/24 registered 230 new log-ons during the year suggesting a good level of engagement with statutory training is being maintained. Governing Bodies can monitor virtual attendance of their governors through the portal and are responsible for monitoring the impact of training on the discharge of their duties.

There continues to be commissioning of virtual training from external partners on the role of governors in safeguarding and in data protection.

The network of North Wales Governor Support Officers continues to meet virtually each term with the GWE lead for Governor Support. The network continues to share approaches and resources to support governor development. GWE offers support to individual governing bodies, when requested, through their professional learning offer. Similarly, there continues to be representation at the ADEW National network of Governor Support Officers who meet termly with representatives of Welsh Government. The Governor Development Manager (Senior Manager for Business Support) is currently the Chair of the ADEW GSO (Association Directors Education Wales, Governor Support Officers) national network, and contributor to a Welsh Government working group on the refresh of a self-evaluation resource for governing bodies.

Meetings of the Schools Budget Forum, Education and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Welsh in Education Strategic Form are held virtually and there remains consistent representation by governors.

Although there are approximately 1250 governor positions within the Authority, the Council only has responsibility for administering the nomination of Local Authority governors (circa 200) to school governing bodies. There have been no concerns raised by schools arising from governor vacancies.

2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners

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.

Services across the Portfolio continue to work in collaboration to meet the needs of these individuals and this has supported the improvement in overall attendance noted in section 1, with the overall attendance across Flintshire schools being within the upper quartile nationally. The Portfolio proactively looks for additional opportunities to support vulnerable learners and families and successfully bid for Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) with projects supporting an improvement in engagement, improvement in numeracy skills and additional support for those within the criminal justice system.

Flintshire has operated a model of delegated funding for pupils with special educational needs/additional learning needs for several years now. The models differ for delegation to Primary and Secondary schools and are under review following the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). The greater autonomy brought about by the models is welcomed in the main, however, the overall level of funding available to schools to meet the presenting needs has been identified as a challenge and work has been identified to gain a better understanding of the level of need.

The challenges of recent years continue to impact on learners and the Council's and schools' ability to respond to these. 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. The number of children who still require individual home-based tuition as directed by medical professionals remains relatively high. Capacity within the specialist provision, both internally and externally, has been a challenge this year, with this being the first year that a waiting list for provision had to be established. Additional funding has been allocated to mainstream schools to support the maintenance of placements for children with increased levels of need and to also increase the capacity within the specialist Resources where necessary; the Resources inspected during the year and were deemed to be effective in meeting the needs of the designated cohorts. Short, medium and long term proposals for increasing the capacity of Flintshire's specialist provision, including Welsh Medium are being developed and a Strategic Outline Plan for capital investment for ALN provision has been submitted to WG in relation to this.

Plas Derwen Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) transitioned into its new purpose-built facility in September 2021. A new headteacher took up post in September 2022 following the retirement of the previous post holder. The provision was inspected in October 2022 and was placed into Estyn Review. The Council worked closely with GwE and the headteacher over the year and the revisit in February 2024 indicated that pleasing progress had been made in all the recommendations. Destination data for year 11 pupils leaving Plas Derwen in 2023 indicated that 98% went on to further education, employment or training, an increase on the 94% of the previous year. The wider role of Plas Derwen in relation to supporting children with behaviour, social and emotional needs across the county is being considered and reviewed along with the remit of the Nurture Outreach service which operates out of Plas Derwen to ensure alignment in relation to need and other service areas.

The focus on trauma-informed practice to support greater understanding of presenting needs and how to support individuals remains a priority for the Council and training on the 11-day diploma was provided from

September 2023. The secondary Trauma Informed Forum has continued to meet and is developing as a useful forum to discuss and share strategies for implementation across the schools. This is feeding into the work on the Belonging Strategy which is in its early stages of development.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Additional capacity was allocated to the ALN team in response to the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). The team comprises of six Learning Advisers, including the Early Years ALN Lead Officer (EYALNLO) and dedicated ALN officers for Post 16 and for children who are looked after (CLA). The team is further supported by a seconded school Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo). The service also has a fluent Welsh speaker as part of the team. The Senior Learning Adviser for ALN manages the team and leads on the implementation of ALNET.

The Learning Advisors meet the statutory obligations in respect of children and young people with special educational and additional learning needs (SEN/ALN). Each of the core officers has a cluster group of schools and follows the pupils from entry into primary school and transition to secondary school. The change in the Council's duties in relation to Post-16 learners under ALNET led to the development of a designated officer role to lead on the development of policy and process. The post holder is also the designated officer for all Post-16 individuals with ALN. The department works within clear protocols and decision-making processes to assess and make decisions regarding placement and provision for learners with ALN to ensure an equitable approach. The team works in close collaboration with other internal service areas and are active with outside professional partners to ensure a multi-agency collaborative approach is in place.

Under ALNET, health professionals have a duty to notify the LA of children who are likely to have ALN. The relationship with the local health board Designated Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) continues to strengthen and has resulted in an ongoing review of processes to ensure that children are accurately and appropriately identified. A total of 82 referrals were received during the reporting period, compared with 73 (2022-23) and 97 (2021-22). Of these, 29 transitioned into school with Individual Development Plans (IDPs) in September 2023, 10 of which went into specialist provision. Enhanced transition from pre-school settings into school remained a focus during the year to give the children the best possible start to their formal education. Parents of early years children continue to report that the ALN system is a parent/child friendly process, and the use of Vanguard principles are guiding and improving practice in this area.

The decision to create a designated Post-16 role within the service has been beneficial in ensuring a focus on the development of systems and processes along with improved collaboration and understanding in terms of the ALNET requirements both within the Council and with external partners. The Post-16 Steering Group, comprising of membership from Education and Social Services has continued to meet on a monthly basis and has agreed changes to the Council's Transition Protocol in readiness for publication as part of the strategy for post-16 learners, one of recommendations from the Estyn thematic report - The new Additional Learning Needs system.

Over the year, meetings were held with high school ALNCOs to discuss Year 11 learners that might require additional support with transition to college. Coleg Cambria have appointed an IDP Transition and Review Specialist and monthly meetings are now held with the college to discuss learners with IDPs who have made college applications and who have consented to information being shared. The college reports that they have good links with secondary colleagues and that information is being shared in a timely manner, with college representatives being invited to reviews where appropriate which is supporting a more effective transition into further education.

The Post 16 officer is also a member of the Transition Panel coordinated by Social Services. This supports the identification of young people who will potentially require high level of support from Child to Adult Team and may need specialist education provision post 16. This is very effective multi-agency approach to monitor and track potential pathways ensuring the holistic needs of learners are known and understood at the earliest point. The Council's duties for Post 16 under ALNET commenced September 2023, with current Year 12s being the first cohort that the local authority may remain responsible for. Careers Wales advisors continue to attend reviews and provide advice and support. In September 2023, 9 learners with a local authority IDPs transitioned into FEIs, 7 of which maintained their placements, with the IDPs being ceased for 2 students. The remaining 2 individuals withdrew from the courses with 1 moving onto the Jobs Growth Wales programme. Two additional learners accessed specialist provision.

Officers have continued to be involved in the work as part of the regional response to the Welsh Government (WG) proposal to passport financial responsibility for the funding of specialist Post-16 provision to Councils. Concern had been expressed by 4 authorities within the North Wales region in relation to the suitability of the formula for funding allocation, which modelling suggested would result in a significant deficit. The processes outlined above have supported the early identification of potential need and the data shows that around 50% of the cohort leaving Ysgol Maes Hyfryd specialist school in the next 3 years, may not be able to access suitable courses within local further education institutes, resulting in a significant financial challenge for the Council if the proposed WG financial model is adopted.

Table 6: Number of pupils leaving specialist school potentially requiring specialist post-16 placements

Flintshire	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Total leaving specialist school	14	15	20
Potentially requiring specialist provision	7	8	9

The Council commenced the conversion process for Statements of Special Educational Needs to Individual Development Plans (IDPs) as per the WG timetable in September 2022. WG amended their orders for September 2023, only mandating years 6 and 10 for conversion in the academic year 2023/24, with schools and Councils being free to determine their own year groups for conversion in 2024/25. At the start of the implementation process, the Council had 830 Statements to convert, with 200 being converted within the reporting period. A further 93 are in process to be completed by the end of the 2023/24 academic year, leaving 174 for completion in 2024/25. This has been a significant achievement by the team who committed to attending as many meetings as possible to support consistency of approach and person-centred practice. This effort has supported schools and parents as evidenced by the very low level of appeals to the Education Tribunal during this period; there were no cases of formal disagreement resolution and the 1 case lodged with the Tribunal was closed through a consent order prior to the hearing. A meeting involving the Chief Officer, Senior Manager and Senior Learning Adviser was also undertaken with the parental support group STAND which served to build relationships, provide accurate information in relation to ALNET and the Council's services and processes and to share the ongoing challenges from a parental perspective. One of the actions agreed following the meeting was to review the format and content of the Council's website in relation to ALN which will be undertaken in the coming year. Feedback to officers in relation to parental contact with the ALN team is very positive, with parents feeling listened to and indicating a high level of satisfaction with regard to officer professionalism and the quality of communication.

Support for schools remains a priority during the implementation period and this is delivered via the half-termly ALNCo Forums, cluster work and individual school monitoring visits. The feedback on these has been positive with ALNCo reporting feeling supported in their roles, with access to advice and support in relation to processes and resources. Schools are benefitting from the support; all Estyn reports during the reporting period have captured positive comments about ALN, including comments in relation to implementation, child progress and provision. Through these, the team is also working to address the issues of inconsistency in relation to process and the variation in terms of IDP content.

In the absence of full pupil outcome datasets, the service has worked on a mechanism for monitoring the progress of pupils with ALN and the use of a RAG rating system is being piloted based on Annual review meetings/documentation. This has enabled officers to consider whether progress is in line with expectations and those that are deemed not to be, are identified for further monitoring; discussions with school in such instances have taken place to ensure the best strategies and interventions are being utilised, factors such as changes in family circumstances or the health of the child were also noted as reasons impacting progress.

As of 31st March 2024, the Council has 265 local authority IDPs in place, the majority of which relate to the following areas of need: Autism (66), Behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (77) and speech, language and communication difficulties (62). These have consistently been the areas of need and the data is informing the development of a revised specialist provision strategy. Access to specialist provision is a significant ongoing challenge for the Council with internal provision at capacity in the main areas of need and external provider having limited availability for placements to be made. Plans are being drawn up for both short term and longer-term solutions, including the provision for Welsh medium ALN and reorganisation of secondary school resource provision. Additional challenges are managing parental and pupil expectations in terms of individual needs as opposed to wants and wishes and a perceived lack of sufficient funding available in schools to meet the level of demand; an exercise is underway with schools to capture further detail in relation to this to better inform the Council's financial decision making.

Education Psychology Service (EPS)

The Principle Educational Psychologist (PEP) has continued to focus on recruitment and development of the Education Psychology Service. The Education Psychologist (EP):pupil ratio for Flintshire remains less favourable as compared to other parts of the country however, the investment in trainees and Assistant Educational Psychologists (AEPs) appears to be having an impact with Flintshire being seen as a desirable authority to work for; two trainee EPs have been appointed to commence roles as fully qualified EPs in September 2024 with other trainees who had accessed placements within the authority, enquiring about the availability of future posts.

The Group Consultation model continues to be implemented in the Primary sector and facilitates a half-termly link with every primary school in Flintshire. This forum serves to allocate the time for individual and direct work, and also serves as an adult solution circle that allows for the merging of 'expert' EP and teacher advice to generate workable and creative person-centered plans for identified children. A total of 72 meetings were held over the year, with 248 pupil consultations taking place during the group sessions. The sessions also provide an important forum for staff development and training/support has been offered across a wide range of topics including – social communication, emotional literacy, sensory support, sleep, literacy & numeracy, trauma informed practice, Emotionally-Based School Avoidance (EBSA), measuring progress for children not following the Curriculum for Wales and transition. The feedback from schools (45 respondents) is that the consultation meetings are generally viewed as positive and productive as indicated by the key findings below:

- 100% agreed that attending Group Consultation had increased their knowledge and understanding of strategies to address and support ALN
- 100% agreed that attending Group Consultation had helped the attendee to support colleagues in school and/or families
- 96% agreed that over time, the meetings had helped pupil progress in their school
- 93% agreed that the sessions had helped the attendee to draw up an action plan to address the needs of targeted pupils

When asked to comment on which aspects of the Group Consultation were found to be most useful a number of comments were received including the following:

“Having the opportunity to talk to EPs and other schools about strategies and support. There have been useful strategies and programmes recommended and usually staff from other school have similar experiences that they share.”

“Being able to share good practice from other schools”.

“The follow up actions are effective, from EP and assistant EP, whether it’s resources emailed, observations and parent /school meetings arranged or reports sent to further cases. What a team! Thank you!”

“The support network from other ALN Cos. Advise from EPs and Assistants. Opportunity to talk about complex children.”

Comments to support an improvement in the process included being able to discuss more than one pupil per school and encouraging wider participation where meetings are not well attended. In addition to Group Consultation, schools were offered structured conversation sessions with the AEPs. A total of 26 ‘conversations’ took place providing advice and support to classroom staff on a range of less complex matters. The Welsh language skills of the AEPs allowed for this offer to be fully accessed through the medium of Welsh by our Welsh medium settings.

Training remains a key strand of the service model which has enhancing the knowledge and skills of adults closest to children and young people to enhance relationships and organisational capacity and bring about lasting positive change as one of their main objectives. As Chair of the Portfolio’s Emotional Health & Wellbeing Steering Group, the PEP is well-placed to understand the needs of children and young people and the challenges this places on educational establishments. Flintshire has continued to see an increase in the number of pupils presenting with anxiety and emotional reasons that prevent them from attending schools and this has guided the decisions about the nature of the training to be offered. The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme has continued to be supported both through access to the ELSA training and ongoing supervision for trained ELSAs. A total of 120 ELSAs were trained with supervision being offered on a half termly basis. ELSA line manager sessions were also offered to help secure an understanding of the role and the support required to ensure smooth and effective delivery in school. ELSAs who have participated in the supervision sessions were asked to comment on the impact of their intervention and the following was noted by 50 participants:

- 78% strongly agreed that delivering the ELSA programme had a positive impact on pupil wellbeing, with 22% agreeing
- 55% strongly agreed that ELSA had a positive impact towards whole school wellbeing, with 37% agreeing and 8% neutral

A number of challenges were identified in the ability of schools to continue with the delivery of the ELSA programme and these included the ability to build up the required resources due to time and funding constraints, difficulties attending supervision as it took staff away from their other duties and schools were struggling with supply cover in terms of cost and availability. Supervision sessions have now been moved to the end of the day in an attempt to resolve the staff cover issues.

Other examples of training offered by the EPS have been EBSA, Emotion Coaching, Developing Relational Practice, Circle Solutions, Intensive interaction/'May I Join You?', Precision Teaching and Moving Up Transition Training. Where suitable, these have been developed as E-learning modules which provide a high-quality professional development opportunity for anyone who missed the live training. This training serves as a first stage intervention, bringing consultees up to speed on a topic in an accessible way. Subsequent consultation can then be more focused and directed towards using the knowledge from the E-learning course to address individual needs freeing up EPs/AEPs for other activities.

The increase in EBSA led to the piloting of a 6-week intervention devised and led by the EPS to support pupils back into a setting. EPs/AEPs worked directly with 36 pupils as part of the pilot, alongside staff from the educational setting, the family and other relevant services. The pupils involved were able to re-engage with an appropriate form of education following the intervention.

The EPS is an integral part of the Council's response to duties under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018 (ALNET). Whilst the legislation doesn't place a time expectation on the completion of EP reports (previous legislation allowed for 42 days), there are timescales for the Council to work to - 7 weeks for a reconsideration of a school decision or 12 weeks for a decision on whether a child has additional learning needs (ALN). The average completion time for EP reports in this reporting period was 40 days. Whilst the timescales allocated for the Council processes do allow for exceptions, they are proving challenging to meet given the complex nature of the children and young people who would be referred for this process; this has been raised with Welsh Government as a concern. Additional capacity would be required to secure an improvement in EP response time through the appointment of EPs to dedicate time solely to requests for assessments that come from the Council's ALN Panels. This would prove difficult to recruit to and/or expensive. It would be better to provide additional EP time to schools and settings to enable them to:

- a) meet the need of learners in a timely manner and without recourse to LA ALN consideration,
- b) support settings in building capacity to meet the increasingly complex challenges faced

Support for the wellbeing of portfolio and school-based staff was a priority identified via the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Steering Group. The EPS has provided supervision to Plas Derwen PRU and teams within the Inclusion & Progression Service. This intervention and support has been well received and resulted in staff feeling supported, valued and better able to complete their role.

Young Person's Counselling Service

The Young Person's Counselling Service is an integral part of the Council's support mechanism in relation to emotional health and wellbeing. All secondary schools, including the specialist school Ysgol Maes Hyfryd and Plas Derwen (PRU) are allocated designated counsellor time. Referrals are also taken for pupils in years 5 and 6 in primary schools and there has been increase in focus on supporting children not accessing education. The broader therapeutic offer including dog therapy, creative therapies and play therapy has been welcomed and been successful where talking therapy has not been the most suitable form of engagement. The ability to offer counselling across a number of digital formats has enabled the service to work more proactively, particularly through the holidays with more children than usual taking up the offer of continuing to engage with counselling through the holidays.

The service offer has been further expanded this year in response to the presenting need. One of the counsellors has an area of specialism relating to girls with Autism having written articles and recorded podcasts in relation to this. She has used this knowledge and expertise to deliver training and support to school in this area alongside offering counselling to individuals. Support has also been offered to families in relation to the neurodevelopmental (ND) assessment through the health service and also providing advice to the parents on understanding Autism and how to manage demand avoidance and maintain social boundaries as examples. This has proved to be very successful in supporting parents to manage and support their children as their knowledge in the condition and confidence grows.

The table below outlines the level of engagement of the service over the year. The level of engagement can be seen to have increased significantly. This is mainly due to the change in recording methodology which now includes any form of contact including the initial triage meeting which serves as a form of support in itself; previously, pupils were only included if they went on to receive the full complement of therapy sessions. The service also supports placement for counselling students which increases the capacity somewhat; this is deemed to be an important role for the service in supporting the profession and developing the local supply of trained counsellors. Family issues has moved to the main area impacting on those engaging with the service and is thought to reflect a number of factors, e.g. impact of the cost of living, smart phone and technology usage and the changes in discipline regimes at home following the pandemic. Interestingly, academic issues featured in the top 3 of issues and appears to reflect the reducing levels of support available in schools as the financial challenges are starting to impact. It was also noted that pupils in Year 10 constituted the largest number of any of the year groups engaging with the YPCS, totally 192, followed by 177 in year 9 (the year group which tended to dominate the referrals) and 151 in both years 8 and 11. Online safety, bullying and friendships are areas in which the service is providing additional support to schools.

Table 7: Number of clients and presenting issues

	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Number of Clients	963	547	308
Presenting issues on referral (3 most common in rank order high to low)	Family Anxiety Academic Issues	Anxiety Family Anger	Anxiety Family Bereavement

All young people engaging with the Counselling service undertake an initial assessment (YP-Core) and this is repeated at the end of the intervention to measure impact. The information below shows that on average, the young people acknowledge a positive outcome following engagement with the sessions.

Table 8: Impact of the Young Person’s Counselling Service

	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Changes in the average result of the Young People’s Core Score - Start of Episode	18.48	20.84	18.57
Changes in the average result of the Young People’s Core Score - End of Episode	10.80	11.81	9.57

Additional funding was secured to continue to provide extra support to educational staff; this was identified as a particular area of ongoing need via the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Steering Group. The offer included direct 1:1 counselling check ins and coaching; the coaching is commissioned and delivered via a qualified coach who had previously been a headteacher within the authority and as a result, brings a wealth of background knowledge and expertise to the experience. A total of 18 individuals have been supported over the year. The feedback from these individuals supports the ongoing need for such a service, in some cases enabling individuals to deal with past and present issues to enable them to address these and continue in their roles more effectively. With others it has served to boost self-esteem and reaffirm their leadership skills and for some, helped to prevent them from undertaking catastrophic actions in response to the challenges they are experiencing.

Autism and Social Communication Support Service

A budget pressure was submitted as part of the Council's financial processes to secure additional capacity within the Education & Youth Portfolio, specifically within the Inclusion & Progression Service to increase the capacity to respond to needs of individuals presenting with a social communication/Autistic profile. This was in response to the increasing level of support requested from schools and families around this particular area of need. A Learning Adviser for Autism was appointed in February 2023 and took over responsibility for the Inclusion Outreach team from the Education Psychology Service creating a dedicated service. The Learning Adviser provides advice, support and intervention for children and young people across the county. Pupil observations are an integral part of the work which leads to a report outlining suitable strategies which are modelled as part of the observation process; guidance is also provided in relation to the learning environment. On average, 10-12 schools are visited per week to provide initial visits/observations or follow up work. Training is an important part of the service offer and 10 schools have taken up training around Autism awareness, the SPELL framework and Inclusive Classrooms. Additional support and guidance has been requested by 20 schools in relation to setting up their own small group provision for children who require more specialist intervention; in some cases this is in direct response to the lack of availability of specialist provision, for others it will be about developing a more efficient way to educate the children on roll. The monitoring of specialist Resource Bases is also an integral part of the role and the Learning Adviser has had a key remit in reviewing and supporting improvement across the specialist provision.

The Inclusion Outreach team comprises of 2 Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) who provide direct interventions to children as well as advice on strategies for adults working with children to employ. Over the academic year, 24 schools have engaged with the service with up to 42 children accessing support at any one time. The team offer support in relation to emotional regulation, neuro-positive engagement strategies, Lego therapy, modelling of support strategies for teaching assistants alongside working with parents and other professionals.

The capacity of the service was further increased through a successful bid to the regional Neurodivergent Improvement Project (NDIP), which secured additional funding to second a teacher to the service. This was initially for a term, from January to March 2024 but has now been extended until April 2025. The focus for the postholder is to work in collaboration with health colleagues in the Neurodevelopmental service, in particular, working with children on the ND diagnosis waiting list. This work has been well received by health colleagues along with schools and families and is supporting changes in the ND assessment process to help reduce the waiting times; work to date has supported with reducing replication of reports and also worked to bring documentation in line with ALNET.

Qualitative reports from schools indicate that the service is valued, with all primary schools having engaged with the service and an increasing number of secondary schools; a notable proportion of the work has been with children in nursery and reception. Schools value the speed at which the intervention and support can be accessed, the quality of the reports in terms of clear recommendations and modelling of these, and also the availability of staff for individual pupil discussion outside of visits and revisits to monitor progress.

Sensory Service

The North East Wales Sensory Support Service (NEWSSS) is hosted by Flintshire but offers a service to Conwy, Denbighshire, Wrexham alongside Flintshire. The service has continued to support schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of Flintshire's sensory impaired pupils, working with 47 different schools to meet the needs of 119 children and young people with hearing impairments (HI) and 32 schools in support of 67 individuals with a visual impairment (VI). Whilst the number of children with HI reduced in comparison with last year (125 pupils), the number of visits required to support the learners increased significantly to 1069 over the year; this was due in part to the level of individual need and also the number of children who were at a point of transition. Support for families of pre-school children remained a key priority for the service during the year. There were 5 pre-school children with HI and 2 with VI provided for by the team. The service has continued to use national eligibility criteria (NATSIP) to determine the level of involvement.

A target for improvement following the last year's self-evaluation had been to improve the response times for contact to be made with parents of new referrals. This has now been significantly reduced with the average time for a response in relation to HI being less than 4 days and less than 7 days for VI. The reason for the additional time for VI was the need to establish a triage panel to review the referrals made; the team had been receiving inappropriate referrals for conditions not considered to be in the remit of the service, e.g. squints, and the panel has served to review the requests and ensure the correct children are receiving access to the intervention. Training is now being offered to referrers to consolidate their understanding of the remit of the service and what constitutes an appropriate referral. It is anticipated that this will in time further improve the response time.

As with other services, NEWSSS has been working on developing and implementing appropriate monitoring systems to measure impact. This has been designed to measure the direct impact the service has on an individual's access to a number of core areas of their education, namely:

- Curriculum
- Environment
- Extra-curricular
- Equipment/technology
- Transition activities
- School trips and school events.
- Assessment and examinations

These were drawn from the NATSIP criteria, curriculum framework and guidance published by the Guide Dogs Association. As part of a trial of the system, the teachers within the service were asked to score the elements of Curriculum and Environment from 1 to 5 (1- no access, 5 - excellent access) on their initial visit and on a return visit in response to the advice, strategies, planning, training and equipment/resources that the school/pupil had received as part of the initial visit. For the 17 individuals who were involved in the pilot, the following results were noted:

Table 9: Impact of the sensory service on relation to access to the environment/curriculum

Environment	1 (No access)	2	3	4	5 (Excellent Access)
Initial visit	1	7	9	0	0
Return visit	0	0	1	11	5
Curriculum	1 (No access)	2	3	4	5 (Excellent Access)
Initial visit	0	4	9	4	0
Return visit	0	0	2	8	7

The data indicated in terms of access to the Environment, 29% of pupils had improved by 1 level, 65% had improved by 2 and a further 6% had improved by 3 levels. With regards to Curriculum access, 12% had not moved, 53% had improved by 1 level, 29% by 2 levels and 6% by 3 levels; the children who had not shown any movement were accessing the curriculum at level 3 and 4. The team are looking to build on this initial pilot in terms of methodology and also consider how this will be shared sensitively with settings.

Training remains an integral part of the service offer, with the aim of building capacity within schools/ placements in supporting children and young people with a sensory impairment. Over the year, training has been provided to ALNCOs via the county forum and to 12 settings across Flintshire. Participants were asked to respond on the following:

- Suitability/usefulness of content
- Quality of presentation and materials
- Skills and knowledge developed

All respondents gave full marks in response to the 3 areas and additional comments provided further insight in relation to the impact on overall awareness raising, the importance of considering the whole school site for children with sensory impairment and appreciation for the ongoing service input.

Stakeholder surveys have been undertaken with pupils, parents and schools in relation to the work of the service. A total of 24 learners provided feedback on the service, indicating that they found staff friendly and easy to talk to, that they were listened to, supported to become more independent, received advice in relation to school/home and that worries were addressed quickly. All but 1 indicated that they felt the teacher understood what helped them to access their lessons.

A further question asked them to rate the Sensory Service from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). There were no scores of 1 to 3, with 17% scoring the service as a 4 and 83% scoring 5. When invited to expand on the scores of 4, a desire for an increase in the frequency of visits was found to be the reason.

Schools were asked to rate the service in relation to the suitability and quality of training, quality of written reports, quality and promptness of communication between the service and school, support for the school/ learner to facilitate access to the curriculum and the management of equipment. The 13 school that responded to the survey all either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.

Parents were asked to comment on the impact of the service on their child's learning & wellbeing; child's inclusion in school life; feeling their views and opinions were valued; the response of their child to the intervention; contact with the service and the quality of reports. Parents scored each of the statements between 1 (low) and 5 (high); all responses were either 4 or 5. Where comments were provided in relation to improving the service, e.g. more regular feedback, the service has looked into facilitating this.

The service works closely with a range of health professionals across a range of boards and trusts. The survey identified that all professionals found the reports provided by the service to be informative, that the communication with the service was effective and that staff acted in a professional manner. A small number of respondents indicated they were not clear on the roles of the staff and also a number of challenges with the referral process/forms. These matters are being explored to identify how/if they can be addressed. Communication & Language Advisory Support Service (CLASS) .

Supporting the development of language and communication skills for Flintshire pupils remained a priority for the year. The service comprises of a Learning Adviser and Language Outreach workers who work in close collaboration with speech and language therapists from the local health board. A team of Language Development Assistants (LDAs) are also employed to operate as planted adults in schools, working with mono-lingual children or those with English as an additional language up to year 2.

A review of the annual Welsh Government (WG) census collection PLASC, indicated that Flintshire had numbers of children identified by schools as having speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) below the Welsh average, with 900 children identified as compared with 950 for the whole of Wales. The number of referrals to the service reduced this year from 54 to 47 and it is considered that the ongoing programme of training is enabling school-based staff to more accurately identify needs and put appropriate interventions in place, which is supporting this reduction. The reduced level of referral has impacted positively on the waiting time for access to the service which is a maximum of 2 terms following the intervention and specialist assessment by a speech & language therapist; children continue to access support from the health board’s mainstream therapists whilst waiting for this more specialist intervention. During the reporting period, a total of 47 children accessed the service, 20 of which were discharged with 7 no longer requiring specialist input due to the progress made, 4 moving on to specialist Resource provision and 9 moving back to the mainstream or an alternative therapeutic intervention in response to need.

As indicated, the Language Development project delivered by the LDAs has also continued to operate. This is a centrally funded time limited intervention lasting a term and a half. Schools were asked to rate the impact of the service over that period. A total of 135 pupils were supported across 16 schools in the reporting period. The following average ratings were received regarding the impact of the intervention (scoring 0-5, with 5 being the maximum):

• Effectiveness of planted adult model	4.71
• Impact on pupils’ language and communication skills	4.55
• Impact on staff understanding of how to support skill development	4.45

The project uses a 10-point scale to measure pupil progress. During this period the average starting score of pupils was 3.76, whilst the average post project score was 5.52, demonstrating the positive impact of the strategy.

The delivery of the Talkboost and Early Talkboost training has continued this year. As of March 2024, 60 primary schools have received training in one or both interventions, 57 in Early Talkboost (163 staff) and 52 in Talkboost (258 staff). Flintshire was the first Council to roll this out across the whole authority and discussions have taken place with WG with regards to the impact and the suitability of translation to the Welsh language. Schools are asked to report pre and post data for pupils in relation to the intervention and the Learning Adviser has continued to work with ‘I Can’ on a pilot to support data capture. A total of 27 schools are now sharing their impact data with the Learning Adviser, with information available for 555 pupils which has increased from 193. For this cohort, prior to the intervention, 55% were rated as amber (below age expected skills) and 41% were rated as red (significantly below). After the 9/10 week

intervention, only 13% were still deemed to be red, with 36% considered to be green, i.e. having achieved age expected skill levels. The tables below show the impact in specific areas of development:

Table 10: Early Talkboost Impact

	Attention and listening	Understanding words & sentences	Speaking	Personal social and emotional skills
% at expected level before intervention	15	31	15	6
% at expected level after intervention	28	49	28	26

The social impact of the pandemic is still evident through the low initial scores in the areas of social skills, along with the other more formal skills associated with academic development, i.e. sentence structure and storytelling. It is pleasing to see that all areas demonstrate a positive impact following the targeted intervention.

Table 11: Talkboost Impact

	Understanding spoken language	Understanding & using vocabulary	Sentences	Storytelling & narrative	Social interaction
% at expected level before intervention	27	35	29	3	12
% at expected level after intervention	63	67	61	36	49

Alongside the Talkboost training, two-day Language Development training is offered to all schools. A total of 25 schools took this up with 38 school-based staff accessing it. The feedback indicated that staff levels of knowledge and understanding had improved as a result of the training and that the strategies covered would be beneficial to learners and could be implemented in their schools.

Support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Gypsy Travellers

The number of pupils identified as EAL continues to rise with a further increase of 111, taking the total this year to 1683 compared with 1572 last year. All pupils are assessed against a 5-point scale (A – E) with regards to their language capabilities and appropriate support allocated either on an individual or group work basis. Those identified as being at stage A are new to English/Welsh whilst those at stage E are deemed to be fluent. Those at stages A and B are prioritised for direct intervention from the service and the following table shows the number of pupils over the last 3 years:

Table 12: EAL Stage A & B Overview

Pupils at Stage A & B	2024	2023	2022
Primary	701	631	625
Secondary	60	104	100
Total	761	735	725

The number of languages spoken across the county has increased from 57 to 68. This year there has been a change in the countries children have moved from, with a notable reduction of families coming from Ukraine. India is now the predominant country with 20 children in total; this reflects the movement of families to work in the care sector.

Children with English as an Additional Language are dispersed across the county and the service is supporting pupils in 10 secondary schools, including our Welsh Medium setting, 57 primary schools, Plas Derwen PRU and both specialist schools. The service provides support and guidance to schools to enable them to successfully education children with EAL in their setting. A recent Estyn inspection of a Flintshire High School with the highest number of children with EAL identified the following in the inspection report:

The school provides beneficial support for pupils with English as an additional language. A designated team provide individual and group sessions for these pupils to develop their language skills. This has a positive impact on their ability to access the curriculum and communicate confidently with their peers.

The Welsh Government has a National Assessment Framework against which pupil language levels are assessed according to the following 5 stages:

- A. New to English**
- B. Early Acquisition**
- C. Developing Confidence**
- D. Competent**
- E. Fluent**

The expectation is that pupils will move from stage A to B in around 1.5 years but that a move to full fluency can take up to 10 years. There are a number of factors which influence progress and development, including the level of literacy skill in their first language and any additional learning needs. The service prioritises direct involvement for pupils at language stages A, B and some C in secondary schools. When measured against the expected progress markers, 83% of children were deemed to be in line with expectations, with 17% not having achieved this. It was noted that the majority of children not achieving expectations were in Year 3 which can be attributed in the main to the literacy lag which impacts on many children coming into the country; written language is a key part of the assessment and this impacts notable on the assessment of children within this year group given that written skills take longer to develop as oral language develops first.

The monitoring of attendance levels of EAL pupils is integral to the work of the service and available data indicated that the average attendance of this cohort was generally above that for the whole of Flintshire. The service works hard to offer support and guidance for families in terms of expectations in Wales in relation to education. Guidance documents have been generated and this is supplemented by officer involvement where required. This has resulted in 100% of all children with EAL, including refugees, accessing education, the majority within their local community school. All parents of new midterm arrivals have access to advice and support including outreach and interpretation where required. All families are supported to access online forms for Free School Meals, Admissions, Transport and the School Essential Grant. All teachers and support staff of new arrivals have access to advice support and training and where possible, ALN needs are identified on admission to support a successful integration into the school community.

Flintshire schools are proactive and responsive to educating children from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds. The EAL service has provided training on anti-racism and also supported schools to implement the following:

- **Creating multi-lingual schools** - pupils are encouraged to learn vocabulary in the home language of new arrivals; singing songs in home language; multi-lingual signage; displays/maps celebrating aspects of the different countries.
- **Celebrating diversity and culture** - Applying for grants to purchase multi-cultural books for the library; celebrating Eid as a school; setting up prayer rooms in schools.
- **Access to emotionally available adults** - all EAL staff have accessed trauma informed awareness training and as such have acted as, and advocated for access to emotionally available adults for the pupils.
- **Identifying strengths and organising/encouraging extra-curricular activities** - Supporting access to local cricket clubs; access to music lessons for an exceptional musician who is due to play at a local festival; supporting access to local play schemes.

A sample of pupils was surveyed in relation to their overall experience in school. The findings were mostly positive and are outlined in the table below.

Table 13: Pupils with EAL - views on school

Question	Yes	Sometimes	No
Are you happy in school?	66%	33%	1%
Do you feel safe in school?	84%	14%	2%
Have you made friends in school?	94%	-	6%
Do you learn in school?	81%	19%	1 person
Do you understand the lessons?	32%	68%	1 person
Do you get help in school?	86%	14%	1 person

Officers followed up on the responses to ensure that all possible steps have been taken to support the child within their setting.

The wider work and approach of the Council was also noted in the Estyn report: Education and support for refugees and asylum seekers 2022-23:

“Flintshire local authority recognise that all families are unique, with their own culture, history and educational experiences as well as housing, medical and social needs. The local authority provides a holistic multi-agency person-centred approach to meet the needs of each refugee and asylum seeker family.

- **Emergency Management Response Team (EMRT)** - brings together senior leaders responsible for education, social services, health, housing, police, communications, fire safety, DWP and finance. This provides educational services with timely information enabling a rapid response to different families' changing needs.
- **Education and Youth Response Team** - supports school admission, transport, play team, youth services, family information services and collaboration from a range of inclusion services, for example English as an Additional Language (EAL) teaching, counselling and ALN.

- **British Red Cross** - provides orientation services for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees.
- **Adult community learning** - provides refugee and asylum seeker parents and other adults with access to education and training.
- **Youth services** - provide a range of community activities for parents and children dispersed across the county to facilitate networking between compatriots”.

The Traveller community in Flintshire remains incredibly transient, with numbers altering on a weekly basis. As of March 2024, the number had dropped from 148 to 142 for the same time period in 2023 with 29 new arrivals during the year. There has, however, been an increase in the number of traveller children attending secondary schools from 23 in 2023 to 28 this year which is positive. The service supported children across 38 settings, including 5 secondary schools, Plas Derwen PRU, both specialist schools and a number of local primary schools.

As with the EAL service, parents have access to a range of advice and support to facilitate engagement with education. Parents of new mid-term arrivals have access to advice and support in relation to admissions, free-school meals, Transport and School Essential grants. Training and advice is also offered to schools to facilitate an effective transition.

Improving attendance of the traveller community remains a challenge, particularly in relation to secondary provision. Of the new children who arrived within the year, 90% are attending school with 2 having chosen to Electively Home Education and 1 awaiting an ALN decision regarding placement. Small group literacy support is provided to all travellers with scores below 85 on standardised tests. When asked about their feelings in relation to school, the following responses were received from 50 respondents

Table 14: Traveller children Views in relation to school

Question	Yes	Sometimes	No
Are you happy in school?	64%	32%	6%
Do you feel safe in school?	92%	6%	4%
Do you get help in school?	88%	10%	2%

Officers followed up on the reasons where a No answer had been returned and these related to a range of issues including not liking work, school being ‘boring’ or sometimes getting bullied which schools were then informed about and links made to the Council’s work on anti-racism. This also featured in the meeting held between a number of Flintshire traveller children and the Children’s Commissioner for Wales in July 2024, where the children had the opportunity to share experiences on Education, Racism/Discrimination and Housing. In her response to the children following the visit, the Commissioner outlined the actions she would undertake in response but also noted the work of the Traveller Service in supporting the children to challenge incident of racism/discrimination.

An alternative curriculum offer is available to vulnerable children including Travellers, children with EAL and children who are ‘looked after’ from year 3 upwards. Staff comments in relation to the traveller children who participated this year indicated that pupils had benefitted from the intervention. This was supported by parental views, which indicated an overall willingness to engage with the programme - 70% of respondents noting an improvement in this area and 100% requesting further support from the Alternative Education Team. Pupil responses indicated that they generally felt happier having engaged with the programme and found it easier to make friends, with 67% indicating that they didn’t worry as they

did prior to engagement, and 75% saying they found it easier to try new activities. An important outcome was that 58% indicated that they liked themselves more and 83% recognised that it was okay to make mistakes. Where possible, culturally acceptable opportunities were sourced for pupils in years 10 and 11 to maintain their engagement, e.g. Hair & Beauty, boxing, cooking and craft. This has served to support increased engagement at secondary level with 2 individuals going on to secure GCSE accreditation. Of the 14 Travellers finishing year 11, 5 continued on to either sixth form or college.

The service has been actively involved in supporting parents, pupils and schools in relation to the Relationships and Sexuality Education element of the Curriculum for Wales. When this was initially introduced, a number of traveller families stated that they wished to withdraw their children from school altogether and there were incidences of children walking out of lessons. The collaborative approach from the Traveller service and Headteachers in response to parental fears has resulted in no children being withdrawn, although elements of the curriculum remain contentious for some Traveller parents.

Support for raising the educational achievement of Children who are Looked After (CLA)

The number of children entering and exiting the care system continues to grow year on year. The total number of children who were looked after at some point during the year is as follows for the past 3 years: 2021/22 - 329, 2022/23 - 359 and 2023/24 - 398. The majority of CLA are educated in Flintshire maintained provision (66%), with the remainder accessing their education in out of county maintained provision or specialist independent settings. This compares with 68% in the previous year. The data for 2023 shows a slight increase in the number of children being taken into care in the nursery age range, with reductions in all other year groups, with the exception of years 10 and 11 where an increase was also seen. Specific funding to support improved outcomes for children who are 'looked after' comes in the form of the Pupil Development Grant which is overseen by GwE at a regional level. Schools are required to operate in clusters and submit bids to GwE for funding. The Council also receives some funding to support wider county intervention or individual bursaries. The following are examples of how the funding has been used to support learners:

- Training for school practitioners on trauma informed practice
- Positive Power of Play training event
- Sand Tray Play training event
- Drawing & Talking therapy
- Dog therapy sessions
- Beauty course
- Transition support
- Additional individual tuition

Attendance data for the CLA cohort is for 2022/23 and was 82.1%, compared with 85.5% for the previous year. Whilst this is slightly down, 72.6% of CLA had attendance levels of above 85% which is an increase on the 64% of the previous year. Exclusion levels saw a significant drop with 14 individuals receiving fixed term exclusions resulting in 102 days lost to education compared with 21 individuals and 229.5 days lost in the previous year. There were however, 2 permanent exclusions for CLA. The focus on trauma informed practice has continued within the Council and it is hoped that this will support a continued reduction in the level of exclusion across the county and for this particular cohort of children. There were 17 CLA school leavers in 2023, 71% went on to a positive outcome, with 5 individuals (29%) becoming NEET. These young people were identified as Tier 2, i.e., those who were unable to engage in employment, education or training due to one having a baby and the others struggling with their mental health.

The Council had engaged with the Welsh Government initiative around the implementation of a virtual headteacher to oversee the education of CLA. Grant funding was available to councils to support the piloting of this post for 3 years with councils being required to submit a bid outlining their proposed model. Despite the work undertaken with colleagues in Social Services around the development of Flintshire's bid, it was rejected by Welsh Government. In the absence of direct funding, further research has been undertaken to review how the model is working in other authorities and to reflect on how existing approaches relating to CLA could be improved, e.g., the agreement to appoint a further education officer to support in the development and monitoring of Personal Education Plans. Welsh Government is currently reviewing the outcomes of the virtual headteacher pilots and we will look to respond to the outcomes of that review.

Engagement Services

The Council has a number of services which support and promote engagement, namely the Education Welfare Service, Progression Team, Community Focused Schools and Home Tuition. Pupils accessing the services are usually at risk of disengagement from their education or are unable to access school on regular basis. Disengagement can be the result of several factors. These may include fixed term or permanent exclusion, social welfare issues or as the consequence of personal crisis. Some pupils may be unable to attend school for medical reasons and others will have selected Elective Home Education (EHE) as an alternative to school-based education.

There are also numerous pupils that access their education via EOTAS (Education Other Than at School) and it is essential that all pupils are safeguarded and supported appropriately. Pupils in these categories are often extremely vulnerable or isolated from their community and may need additional support to enable them to access education. All Engagement services attend the EOTAS Forum which is chaired by the Senior Learning Adviser, along with representatives from the Plas Derwen PRU to ensure that any vulnerable learners are identified and recorded. Service and intervention inputs are recorded on the Synergy system so that any service activity delivered by one Engagement Service can be viewed by all others to facilitate a co-ordinated approach.

Education Welfare Service (EWS)

The EWS is unique within the Inclusion & Progression Service, as it is a school-based service. This service is accessible at point of need and is proactive in dealing with issues as they arise. This enables the EWS to provide a service which is based on early intervention. The EWS benefits from close working relationships with schools and partner agencies, as well as within the Inclusion and Progression Service and outside agencies, including the third sector. The EWS provides an important link between school, parents, and the wider community and is key in supporting an improvement in attendance and challenging pupil absence. The welfare of the child is paramount, with child protection and safeguarding being core elements of practice for the EWS; the EWS are the main agency within the Inclusion & Progression Service with operational responsibility for child protection and safeguarding.

The EWS is also responsible for licensing of Chaperones/Matrons for children participating in child performances and entertainment. There is a database of all licensed chaperones/matrons held by the Local Authority. This is actively managed and reviewed with the given timescales. There is a dedicated EWO for Chaperones/Matrons/Child Employment.

The EWS has a duty to investigate child employment which is integral to the child protection and safeguarding role. Children who are employed are required by law to have a work permit which outlines their working hours and specifies the nature of the work they are allowed to engage in. The EWS also has

a key role in monitoring Children Missing from Education (CME) and Elective Home Education (EHE). This is a core element of practice within the child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. There is a dedicated Education Support Officer for CME and EHE.

The EWS is the primary service that identifies children that are excluded from school. The EWS Manager attends Governor Disciplinary Panels for Permanent Exclusions. The EWS staff attend return to school meetings and are active in supporting pupils that are placed on Pastoral Support Plans (PSP).

The structure of the EWS was reorganised from September 2022 to differentiate the roles between the Education Support Officers (ESO) and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) with regards to attendance matters. ESOs have been allocated all of the primary school referrals leaving more operational time for the EWO staff, based in the secondary schools, to respond to more complex issues. The service has been further enhanced by the allocation of temporary Attendance Support Officers (ASO), funded by a WG grant. These officers have been targeted at particular schools with low overall levels of attendance and high levels of eFSM. The addition of the ASO role has been positive in supporting an improvement in attendance as demonstrated by an initial performance review with one of the schools outlined below: "ASOs have completed over 300 home visits, to over 140 students. Just over half (52.5%) of these students have improved their attendance since the first ASO visit. On average, 13% of students return to school on the same day as an ASO visit, and 65% of students are back in school the following day".

A revised model policy for attendance was issued to schools in September 2023 to support a more consistent approach across the county. A focus was placed at the start of the year on 3 primary school geographical areas with officers contacting schools to offer regular attendance review meetings and advice on implementation of the policy; post-intervention review indicated a positive impact of the activity undertaken with the majority of schools showing an overall improvement of at least 0.5% in levels of attendance.

A RAG rating of all schools' procedures in relation to attendance and their engagement with the EWS was also undertaken by the service to further inform the identification process of those in need of support and challenge. Actions were identified in relation to the rating, with officers following up with schools in relation to these. This activity has provided the service with a further mechanism for monitoring and identifying areas for improvement in terms of process along with the other activities such as attendance data profiling and regular meetings with staff and parents.

The service has continued with the implementation of fixed penalty notices (FPN) and court proceedings as appropriate, following the guidance on this from WG. A designated ESO has been allocated to administer the FPN process to ensure compliance; any unpaid fines were referred for legal action and resulted in fines ranging from £170 to £660. Schools are increasingly seeing this process as an integral part of their graduated response to education (99 issued in 2022/23), which can be utilised as a last resort where other actions have not been successful. The impact of this action on attendance remains variable but the improving overall trend of attendance suggests that it is supporting a greater awareness and understanding of parental responsibilities in terms of attendance.

Elective Home Education (EHE)

The levels of parents deciding to EHE continue to rise in Flintshire. In 2019, there were 95 children who were EHE. This rose to 167 in 2022 and 177 in 2023. This mirrors an increasing national trend. The largest cohort that became EHE in 2023 were children in year 7, with September being recorded as the month where the largest number of children became EHE. The majority of children who became EHE in 2023 were in years 7 - 9 and overall, the largest percentage of children who were EHE in the year were in year 10.

During the year 2022-2023 there were 45 successful home visits carried out. Parents have the option to decline a visit and/or to share an education report as this is not mandatory. All families were contacted by the LA at least once during the academic year. Home visits and/or telephone conversations were held for specific families who requested support when their child/ren asked to return to school. Support was given to decide on the most appropriate school and with the admissions process with 11 pupils returning to school. For the period September 2023 to March 2024, the level of successful home visits increased to 75, with 24 children returning to school during that period. This is reflective of the positive and trusting relationship that is being developed between the designated officer and EHE families. Officers work closely with colleagues across Social Services as required, where safeguarding is deemed to be a concern.

Community Focused Schools (CFS)

Flintshire has continued to receive WG funding to support the implementation of the Community Focused Schools initiative. The centralised service targeted 3 communities initially, selected on the basis of levels of eFSM, attendance data, index of deprivation and exclusion rates; this has now been expanded to 5. The service delivery model has evolved to a commissioning approach which allows for planning and agreement on delivery expectations between the service and school management and there has been a positive response from the schools where this has been established so far.

Key pieces of work this year have been to support the Food and Fun programmes over the summer holidays in the designated areas which provided key opportunities to not only deliver the programme objectives, but to provide additional transition support for some of the county's more vulnerable learners. Working alongside designated school staff, children accessed a range of important skills through the activities and also started to experience and build their knowledge of the new school building and importantly, build relationships with staff they would encounter in the new school year. A positive outcome of this, alongside engagement is that some participants have the confidence to return to support the project as year 7 buddies. Other community activities have included community lunches based in the schools where participants' comments were positive, indicating that they were feeling part of the school community again, something which had been lost during Covid. The team have also been instrumental in delivering food wellbeing boxes as part of the Children's University / Dylan's Restaurant initiative, engaged in Community Conference Meetings and facilitated delivery of the Safer Streets 5 projects. The beginnings of a Parent/Teacher Association(PTA) type group has also been established at a school along with delivery of a number of parental engagement sessions in partnership with the Health Improvement Team.

Alongside the wider community work, the team has delivered interventions to individuals and small groups. This has included support for transition for pupil who were identified as having persistent levels of absenteeism in year 6. Through this process it became clear that parents were not always contacting the school as required, and that some pupils had inaccurate views in relation to attendance, e.g. believing that 65% was an acceptable attendance level. Other pupils have engaged with support offered during lunch times to support them to maintain their presence in school for the full day and others have accessed courses to develop self-esteem, confidence and practical skills; 1 pupil accessing the support has gone on to be the first person in his family to attend college. Mechanisms for further evaluating service impact are under development, utilising the Outcome Star programme.

The continued development of community focused schools is also integral to the School Modernisation Strategy. Schools and other learning providers provide a range of well-planned community focused services for children, young people and families. They have an important role in promoting community cohesion, wellbeing, inclusion and diversity. Current capital plans and community facility grants continue to provide an opportunity to develop and provide access to facilities on our school sites. This has been

a successful strategy and we have developed a number of new exciting community facilities on a number of our capital projects.

Examples include:-

- Community room at Ysgol Penyffordd;
- Community Hub (Ty Calon) at Queensferry Learning Campus;
- Enhanced sports facilities funded through Sports Wales/WRU at Queensferry Learning Campus;
- ATP lighting improvements at Castell Alun School through Sports Wales;
- Community facilities incorporated into the MIM Mynydd Isa Campus (development underway)
- Childcare, Learning and Immersion Centre on new build Welsh Medium Campus (development underway)

Dedicated community rooms and facilities at new school sites gives the school a space within which they can explore community access. In addition, community facilities will be reviewed to ensure use outside of school hours and for Adult Community Learning (ACL) through the North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership (“the Partnership”).

The Partnership aims to develop adult community learning and also Welsh and bilingual provision and has identified gaps within its current delivery. An evidence-informed plan has been produced by the Partnership to develop provision for adults, families and communities in Flintshire.

Capital projects in the Sustainable Learning Communities rolling programme will be reviewed to align with priorities of the Partnership in that:

- Meets the needs already identified locally;
- Supports key ACL national priorities;
- Addresses the Partnership’s Estyn recommendation to “increase opportunities for adult learning in the community bilingually and through the medium of Welsh”; and
- Provides a visible presence in Flintshire where community facilities and bespoke delivery model could be developed by the Partnership

Progression Team

The Engagement Progression Coordinator (EPC) works with a range of partners under the Youth Engagement Progression Framework (YEPF) to achieve the following outcomes:

- more young people move on to a destination that is right for them when they leave school, whether that is education, employment, or training (EET)
- young people are prevented from becoming homeless
- young people experience positive emotional mental health and well-being, as a result of them being engaged in activity that is meaningful to them, and where they feel they are on the right path

The EPC specifically co-ordinates support for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 who are potentially at risk of disengagement or are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). The EPC co-ordinates termly meetings with schools, utilising the Learner Profiling tool which identifies individuals who are potential NEETs. Key partners attend these meetings including Careers Advisers, Homeless Co-ordinator, LEAP Co-ordinator, Education Welfare Officers, Pastoral Leads and if applicable Youth Workers. Individual needs are considered and appropriate actions are agreed via the meetings, one of which may be access to the Progression Team who work directly with potential NEETs and are managed by the EPC. The EPC also facilitates links with other relevant services such as Youth Justice, Sorted (Drug and Alcohol Team) and the Young Person’s Counselling Service.

Since the pandemic, an ongoing priority has been to support children and young people who have disengaged due to anxiety. Home visits are an integral part of the work of the Progression Team in particular, which serves to build rapport and explore the pupils' interests and needs. A range of opportunities have been made available from activities such as the theatre group Pwer which offered a safe space to engage creatively through music dance and drama, volunteering at Car Rhug Farm, cooking for the homeless, engaging with the Changes Lives Through Horses programme, to opportunities to secure level 1 NVQ qualifications in Outdoor Learning and Essential Skills Qualifications in Communication and Application of Number. Over the year, opportunities for 67 placements were offered through the activities referenced above along with direct contact from the team to build self-esteem, confidence and social skills for 115 individuals. Of the 32 Year 11 learners who engaged with the team, 94% progressed to a positive Post-16 outcome, either in the form of further training or employment with the remaining individuals continuing to access support and intervention from the service.

The level of year 11 NEET has remained relatively low over the past 4 years as a result of the targeted multi-agency work across the authority, underpinned by the work of the EPC and the Progression Team. The range of NEET levels across local authorities in Wales ranges from 4% (highest) to 1.1 (lowest). In 2023 the level in Flintshire was 1.9% - the 8th lowest value in Wales, and the lowest across the North Wales region. The data for leavers in years 12 and 13 also remains fairly steady.

Table 15: Year 11 Leavers (%) from schools in Wales known to be not in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2023	2022	2021	2020
Flintshire	1.9 (33)	1.7 (28)	1.4 (23)	1.2 (19)
Wales	2.0 (670)	2.1 (664)	1.6 (507)	1.7 (527)

Table 16: Year 12 and 13 Leavers (%) in Flintshire known not to be in education, employment or training (NEET)

	2023	2022	2021	2020
Flintshire Year 12	0.4 (2)	1.2 (7)	0.3 (2)	1.1 (6)
Wales Yr 12	0.5 (62)	0.7 (80)	0.4 (55)	0.6 (76)
Flintshire Year 13	3.9 (19)	2.9 (16)	3.4 (19)	3.7 (20)
Wales Yr 13	3.6(375)	2.8 (322)	2.3 (251)	3.5 (355)

Source: Careers Wales

The level of NEET has been a focus at the re-established YEPF Forum. The Forum includes membership from a range of partners relevant to the work of the framework and provides for greater understanding of challenges and collaboration. During the year, the appropriate and timely identification of individuals in tiers 1 and 2 was identified as a priority. Partners worked together to allocate resources to engage with individuals identified to confirm the tier status and determine the lead worker for those in tier 2. A pilot was also agreed with schools to support the accuracy of data for school leavers to facilitate accurate identification and contact information. The impact of this will be monitored for leavers in 2023/24.

The impact of the work in this area is recognised by partners, parents and the young people themselves. The EPC led panels in schools have been praised by colleagues in Careers Wales as effective examples of partnership working, along with schools who appreciate the different perspective that the EPC and the Progression Team can bring to discussions and also in terms of their involvement. Parents recognised the service as being vital support to the education system and the young people who may struggle with it.

Home Tuition

Children may have a need to access home tuition at any point in their educational career and this is usually in response to having a particular medical need which makes physical access to school difficult or where there are challenges in securing a suitable educational placement to meet the child's educational needs. Decisions to provide home tuition are made via the Additional Learning Needs Decision Panel and the Education Other than at School (EOTAS) Panel.

The vast majority of provision is commissioned externally in response to need. In 2022/23, a total of 38 year 11 pupils accessed home tuition funded by the Council. Pupils access tuition in the core subjects of English and Mathematics at a level suitable to their ability as a minimum, with access to a wider curriculum offer where appropriate. All pupils achieved at least one form of accreditation, with 29 (76%) pupils achieving accreditation for both core subjects and 10% of the cohort achieving 5 or more GCSE qualifications. Positively, all learners went on to further education, employment or training, with none becoming NEET.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Flintshire has an established multi-agency Emotional Health and Wellbeing Forum to oversee and guide its response to emotional health and wellbeing. The group is chaired by the Principal Education Psychologist and the forum identifies training needs and prioritises the allocation of the WG Wellbeing grant. The Council continues to promote and develop a relational approach to practice and intervention across its services and schools. Training on Trauma Informed Practice remains a priority and places on the 11-day diploma were funded by the Council with a particular priority for school leads for children who are looked after (CLA).

The training was well received, and a support group has now been established to support the ongoing practice across the county. This is in addition to the Trauma Informed Champions group that had been established in the previous year and is building a body of knowledge across the secondary sector. Where this is truly being embedded, it is possible to see the early shoots of a positive impact on levels of exclusion and attitudes to the use of exclusion changing.

The Forum oversees the allocation of the WG Wellbeing grant and informs decisions in relation to training and support. The ELSA training is valued by schools and was considered a priority for continuation, along with the Emotion Coaching training. Details in relation to attendees is provided in the table below.

Table 17: Training offered to support Emotional Health & Wellbeing

Training/support	Number of staff trained
ELSA Supervision	120
ELSA Line Managers	39
Emotion Coaching	125

In September 2021 the Education Portfolio introduced the 'Challenging Bullying online reporting system' for Flintshire schools. This was developed by Flintshire IT and hosted on the 'Flintshire Workspace' platform. It enables schools to report incidents of bullying, including racist incidents, on an online form and maintain these in one place and update as required. 'Challenging Bullying' sits alongside health and safety incident reporting on the platform and staff illness absence. Designated officers have access to this data which enables the Education Portfolio to maintain an overview of recorded bullying incidents in order to identify emerging trends or groups being discriminated against, and monitor exclusion rates. Long term, as the system embeds, the aim is that the data will show progress towards the Council's equality objectives.

Early Help Hub (EHH)

In early 2017 the Flintshire Public Service Board (PSB) commissioned the establishment of an Early Help Hub to support the delivery of more timely and appropriate early intervention and support for families with greater needs. There were multiple drivers for this including the introduction of the Social Service and Wellbeing Act 2014, the CSSIW inspection report recommendations about prioritising early intervention, intervening earlier at lower cost and for better outcomes and the extent to which so many cases being referred and re-referred to Children's Services did not meet thresholds for a statutory intervention, notwithstanding that the families often presented with persistent challenges.

Flintshire's Early Help hub model has continued to develop since and frequently adapts to the ever-changing circumstances and landscape of support needed across the county. The Early Help Hub is now a well-established provision within Flintshire Early Intervention Service which has received approximately 16,911 referrals since inception, the highest proportion being request for support for families with a 10-15-year-olds. Within the EHH there continues to be a total of 16 agency representatives including health, education, police, housing and third sector representatives participating in hub discussions and actioning support to ensure families receive services at the point struggles start to emerge in their family journey.

The Information Advice and Assistance Service (IAA) was formed to provide a swift response in supporting our front door statutory partners, including schools, police, health, and early years to identify families in Flintshire's support needs. The IAA officially became operational in February 2023. This includes 8 IAA Duty Officers who offer Information, advice, and assistance to both families and professionals alike.

This work requires skilled conversations that clarify and understand "What Matters" most to families in Flintshire and how best to help them. Referrals that do not meet threshold for safeguarding but require additional support will be passed to the IAA Service.

Each Duty Officer will contact the family or professionals directly. IAA duty officers have a close link with education services and subsequently have built effective working relationships with schools and education representatives in the Flintshire community. This has been fundamental in the process of exploring how best to help families through either giving information, providing advice, or Assistance.

An integral part of the IAA service is the link with Flintshire Early Help Hub. Currently there are approximately 1,690 families per quarter being referred into IAA. Out of the 1,690, approximately 690 are being signposted to Early Help Hub for either Advice or Assistance. The numbers above are in addition to the approximately 400 other direct referrals per quarter. Out of these direct referrals more than half (approximately 280) are from Flintshire schools or education services.

Nominated staff from the Education and Youth portfolio have remained a consistent and integral part of the offer, evolving from one education representative to the current inclusion of the Education Welfare Team. This has facilitated a wider dissemination of the knowledge shared as part of the process to schools and their wider partners and enabled comprehensive sharing of information.

The team disseminate valuable information about families and their needs enabling an appropriate and effective support package to be identified, as well as providing a valuable conduit to support often linking families and encouraging engagement with the identified services.

All referrals referred into the Early Help Hub receive an action, whether that be a single service provision, multiple service, or voluntary sector information support. This is an innovative and highly effective model of support that is having a tangible impact on children and families in Flintshire. The knowledge and experience that the Education Welfare Officers provide, and the continued positive working relationships with education services linked into Flintshire Early Intervention services remains an intrinsic part of the Service.

2.3 Other Education Support Services

Funded Part Time Early Years Provision - Early Entitlement

Flintshire has a long tradition of supporting early years' education. Eligible children, whose 3rd birthdays fall within relevant timeframes each academic year, are entitled to 10 hours of funded education in a registered Early Entitlement (EE) setting or school, for a maximum of 2 terms following the term in which they are 3 years old. During 2023-24, 44 non-maintained settings registered to offer EE education. This included 6 'Cylch Meithrin, Welsh medium, 19 English medium playgroups and 19 Private settings / day nurseries.

In addition, 29 Flintshire schools were registered to provide funded education to 3-year-olds during 2023-24. An additional 2 schools offering specialist provision were also able to provide funded education if required. Within the 'maintained' sector the quality of the learning opportunities available for funded 3-year-old children is monitored and supported by qualified teachers within each school.

Despite the removal of the grant conditions by Welsh Government to provide '10%' teacher time for funded settings and reducing central resources, the Council continues to maintain appropriate levels of support to settings registered for early education delivery to ensure high quality standards of provision, which in turn leads to better outcomes for learners. A central team of early years specialists work across the settings to provide targeted role modelling of teaching, to develop quality learning environments and support setting staff to produce robust self-evaluation reports and improvement action plans. This team includes a manager, 3 full-time teachers, 1 part-time specialist support assistant and 1 part-time additional support co-ordinator. Areas of specialism within the team include; early years education and child development, ALN and universal targeted provision and forest school provision.

The core team is also supported in this delivery by several early years' teachers in schools, funded by the Council, where the local playgroup is the main feeder into the school nursery class. The Council still has sufficient capacity to deliver the number of early education places required. As an early implementer of the Welsh Government's 30-hour Free Childcare Offer, many settings have registered as joint providers so this additional funding provides some mitigation in the sector. The Welsh Government acknowledged the pressure on settings to maintain a combined delivery of early years' education and childcare with a difference in funding rates. This resulted in WG using Flintshire as a pilot authority for the provision of additional funding to equalise the rates of payment.

Flintshire continues to work closely with Mudiad Meithrin, the Welsh-medium early years' organisation, to develop new Welsh language provision in key geographical locations in the county as part of its Welsh in Education Strategy (WESP). There is currently sufficient capacity to deliver Welsh medium early years' education, but the aim is to increase this as a stepping stone to more children accessing their full-time

education in a Welsh medium school and support the WG target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. A new Cylch developed by Mudiad Meithrin opened in May 2019 in Buckley as part of a longer-term strategy through the WESP, however this unfortunately was not able to be sustained due to difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. There is a refreshed strategy within the Strategic Outline Plan for the Sustainable Learning Communities programme that will enable a Welsh medium offer including early years' education to be delivered in the Buckley/Mynydd Isa area.

Over the last few years, the focus of the Early Entitlement team's training has been on supporting non-maintained settings with the implementation and delivery of the 'Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings'. The team completed regular evaluation reports to Welsh Government focusing on the progress being made with the implementation of Curriculum for Wales in funded non-maintained nursery settings within Flintshire. As part of this, Flintshire was asked to write a case study on its support for non-maintained settings to be shared across Wales and published on Hwb.

During 2023-24 the team increased the support options available for setting staff who have different levels of 'good practice' understanding. Increased opportunities for settings to visit other settings have been facilitated and staff who were new to early entitlement during the academic year were offered additional online support sessions to understand the key features of the Curriculum for Wales. These opportunities were offered alongside the routine visits to settings and 'Cluster' meetings.

The Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) continues to be used by the Early Entitlement Team (EET) for the professional development of the non-maintained workforce with a focus on strengthening staff impact on the engagement, well-being and performance of disadvantaged learners. In 2023-2024, the focus was on the ongoing support of children's early speech, language and communication skills. Funding was provided for staff to access an online ELKLAN course and to receive Makaton support material for staff and children. A selection of Welsh Government's 'Talk with Me' online resources were printed and setting's received access to a digital library of 'good practice' clips illustrating support of early language and other skills. Resources were provided for each setting to strengthen the increase in their provision of 'loose parts'. In addition, commissioning of a 7-part child development course delivered by external provider focused on increasing setting staff's knowledge of the stages of development and their understanding of how to support children's early speech, language and communication skills.

Alongside this, the early entitlement team (EET) allocated part of the Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS) funding to be spent the professional development of staff within settings. A new approach for 2023-24 meant that setting staff were asked to request this funding by submitting a proposal of how they intended to use it to develop their professional understanding of the curriculum and quality education. Approving and redirecting these proposals took time but eventually 35 of the 44 settings had staff who were engaged in some relevant independent and team professional learning during spring term 2024. This is helping to build self-improving capacity within the sector. Feedback from Flintshire settings is that this has been a very valuable use of the funding and that staff's understanding of the new curriculum has increased as a result.

During 2023-24 the EET has seen an improvement in the transition engagement between settings and schools. The Cluster Group meeting in summer 2023, where settings shared their good practice in supporting transition, had a positive impact on transitional arrangements between settings and schools. These positive changes have been sustained and witnessed by the EET team when visiting settings in the summer of 2024. Some examples of strong transitions include:

- An enhanced transition process for ALN children whereby they go over to the nursery setting more regularly. Practitioners are also making a book full of photographs of the provision in the

nursery class for ALN children to take home with them, parents will then share the book over the holiday to keep that in the forefront of their minds.

- During the last week of term, the setting planned to do a 'barefoot trail' where children step into different types of messy things and follow a tuff tray trail, the school staff will also join in with this so the children have opportunity to interact with them at this time.
- Practitioners have created a 'moving to maintained Nursery' transition action plan to support children's well-being through the transition process.
- Transition experiences within the setting include, talking about school at 'together time', providing school role-play activities, such as uniform and book bags, reading books about starting school and taking children to visit schools when dropping off or collecting nursery plus children.

The support provided for an EE child with developmental delays or difficulties traditionally takes place within the setting. The EET offer advice to setting staff on strategies that they can use with the child. Current feedback on this specialised input indicates that staff feel the strategies are having a positive impact on the child/children's engagement in learning. Support for children with developmental delays or difficulties is an area which the EET is focusing on in partnership with Childcare Services and the Inclusion Service in order to create a more integrated process for requesting and receiving support under the new ALNET Act (Wales). The multi-service Funding Delegation Panel plays a prominent role in ensuring that funded early entitlement children who require additional support are granted that support in order to access, as far as possible, the full curriculum within their setting. The additional support co-ordinator provides advice for setting staff on strategies they can use to encourage the full engagement of individual children in the routine and learning experiences provided by their setting. The Additional Support Co-ordinator also sits on the weekly multi-disciplinary health and education service Moderation Panel which determines the most appropriate placement and support for early years children within the LA.

The EET works in partnership with Flying Start, the Childcare Development Team and the Inclusion Service to agree an ALN training programme for the non-maintained sector. EET work cooperatively with Social Services teams to identify a range of resources suitable for supporting children's speech, language and physical skills. EET worked in partnership with the Early Years Pathfinder Project to identify opportunities for extending good practice in Flying Start settings into EE settings which resulted in the piloting of 'Wellcomm' - a speech and language screening tool.

Regionally the EET continues to work in partnership with other North Wales EE Teams and the EE Team Leader attends local and regional meetings supporting ALN transformation work. On a national level EET members continue to support the work of Estyn through their stakeholder meetings and support Welsh Government's working parties on the implementation of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. The non-maintained sector continues to experience a high turnover of staff, and this is being exacerbated by the national difficulty in recruiting childcare workers. The Early Entitlement Team are regularly providing training to some staff with no prior knowledge of how to meet the demands of education, rather than solely childcare provision, as well as providing professional development in the delivery of a new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Welsh Government (WG) have previously made available capital grants to councils for the purposes of providing seamless childcare provision to children in the early years, supported through several WG programmes including Flying Start childcare for 2-3-year-olds, the 3-4-year-old Childcare Offer and early learning. The WG Childcare and Early Years (phase 1) Capital Programme was completed at the end of March 2024. Planning for the next phase of the WG Childcare and Early Years Capital programme investment has already commenced.

Phase 1 of the Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme ran between 2019-2022 and saw the delivery of nine new modular buildings and the refurbishment of an existing building. The completion of the above projects has enhanced childcare provision in these areas. The settings have custom built buildings that have been designed with the needs of the children at the heart, improving facilities for childcare, which in turn attracts both parents and children to the setting/school and creates seamless pathways for children from childcare to early education.

The completion of the phase 1 Childcare and Early Years programme has seen delivery 163 childcare spaces, in a modernised and purpose-built building, become available within the County.

Flintshire Youth Service & Flintshire Play Service including Play Sufficiency

The Play Service has delivered the Flintshire Summer Playscheme since 1996. Summer 2023 witnessed delivery from 56 sites across the County delivered in conjunction with 30 Town and Community Councils. 3,681 children aged 5-11 were registered for the schemes which represents around 32% of this demographic in Flintshire. There were 11,907 attendances recorded and 1200 play sessions delivered. Summer 2024 participation data is currently being collated.

The play sessions are inclusive and cater for a range of disabilities and additional learning needs. To support this, a buddy scheme is utilised. 32 young people accessed this over the course of the six weeks of the 2024 programme.

The schemes support local employment through the employment of temporary Play Workers. 89 Play Workers were employed for between 3 and 6 weeks. 6 were retained in order to work on sustained provision.

Sustaining Play Provision is a key priority for the service and this has been developed over the reporting period with the establishment of two standalone Play Provisions in the Holway and Bryn Gwalia, as well as two Play/Youth transition clubs in Leeswood and Sealand. In addition to this, there are targeted schemes in half term holidays. The retention of staff, partnership with the Youth Service and sustaining of provision has enabled the transition of the service to a year-round service.

In order to support staff development, 3 of the current team have qualified to deliver the Level 2 Play Work Training Award which will ensure that future delivery can be done in-house and not necessitate the sourcing and funding of an outside organisation.

The service has been successful in sourcing external grant funding to enhance delivery and start new provision. This has also supported the sustaining of employment contracts.

Flintshire County Council upholds Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 which places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children, and to consider the many aspects of community life that affect play opportunities e.g. use of the environment; traffic and transport; play and leisure provision, and parental and community involvement with play. Flintshire is effective in adhering to the statutory guidance, 'Wales - A Play Friendly Country'.

In early 2023 the executive summary of the latest play sufficiency assessment was produced along with a self-assessment and action plan. To ensure that this is implemented, a strategic action group was established. Biannual meetings now take place to ensure that these actions are implemented. The membership consists of both internal and external partners and is Chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language and Culture.

Flintshire Youth Service delivers a diverse range of targeted and open access activities across Flintshire, both directly, and through working in collaboration with a range of statutory, non- statutory and voluntary

organisations. Core council funding for the service is supplemented by Welsh Government grant funding streams e.g. Youth Support Grant and Families First Grant.

In April 2023, the service launched its new monitoring, evaluation and learning tool, Upshot. This enables much more accurate reporting and recording of data and evidence across the service. All staff have received training on the system and all sessions/activities are being recorded.

The service delivers traditional open access youth clubs, detached youth work, youth homelessness, schools youth work, LGBTQ+, transition (Play to Youth), the Duke Of Edinburgh Award, Welsh language provision, resilience (NEET Tier 2), forest school, C-Card and the Youth Council.

In 2023/24 across all programmes there were 14,600 attendances across 2108 sessions of youth work in 65 separate locations. Sessions are targeted against a range of factors such as locations of clubs, areas of deprivation, high anti-social behaviour, higher levels of school exclusion, non-attendance and low attainment, areas of play deprivation or lack of activity for young people; or areas identified through a range of consultation factors.

Through the newly established Flintshire Youth Work Providers Forum, provision is planned in conjunction with partners, such as Aura Leisure and Libraries, NEWCIS Young Carers, the Urdd and Boys and Girls Club Wales. This helps ensure that there is a more balanced programme of provision across the county and duplication is avoided. It has also led to partnership delivery opportunities such as the joint work with Aura Leisure and Libraries in Buckley with the detached offer and sharing staff resources when running projects, such as Snow Camp. This approach has enabled the team to continue and sustain delivery in challenging financial times.

The service administers grants on behalf of Welsh Government (Youth Support Grant and Families First) to partners to support delivery across Flintshire and/or, for the benefit of Flintshire residents e.g. to Newcis Young Carers. The service also supports the Inspire Project in partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council to provide bespoke youth support services those young people who self-harm or are at risk of suicide ideation. This is the penultimate year of both funding streams. Partners in receipt of a grant report progress through a reporting proforma, newly designed for 2023/24 which is designed to help not only report against progress, but also identify gaps and further opportunities.

The service continues to work in partnership and create networks and systems which will improve and increase the range of delivery opportunities both in existing communities and in areas requiring youth work support. Those networks supported include the ASB/VARM meeting, MET Panel, Youth Justice Board, Ending Homelessness Board, Youth Engagement Progression Forum and the People and Places Strategic Groups.

Work has continued throughout 2023/24 to ensure that there is a qualified and professional workforce. The partnership work with Wrexham University to relaunch the Youth Work Degree programme has continued and it is anticipated that a new programme will be available in 2025. In order to support this development and support the growth of the sector locally, there has also been discussion and action with regards to a North Wales partnership delivering the Level 2 and 3 Youth Work Awards. Flintshire supported two members of staff to attend 'train the trainer training' and all of the team have agreed to attend either tutor training and/or assessor training in 2024/25 to support the delivery of the courses in conjunction with our North Wales partners. It is anticipated that a more flexible approach to delivery of training will result in a higher completion rate and, therefore, a greater opportunity to grow youth work in the county.

Two Youth Work apprentices were recruited through the Council Trainee Programme and have been a welcome addition to the team, supporting delivery across the full range of activities and leading on aspects of programmes in line with their qualification requirements. Both apprentices are completing the Level 2/3 Youth Work Award provided through the URDD and are on task to complete the end of 2024.

As part of the Council's pay modelling programme, all youth work job descriptions, currently on the JNC Youth and Community Workers (Pink Book) terms and conditions have been rewritten and re-evaluated and staff within those roles have been consulted on a potential change to the NJC pay scales (Green Book) pending a Council decision on the pay modelling exercise. As a result of this work the recruitment for the Duke Of Edinburgh (DoE) Award Lead Officer was delayed and this has caused a delay in developments. As an interim measure, the some staff had an uplift in hours and delivery with Aura enabled 5 community DoE sessions to continue running with practice expeditions taking place in March 2024 with over 40 young people taking part.

Recruitment was also delayed on the Welsh language officer post but a successful appointment was made in December, with the successful candidate starting in March 2024. Welsh language provision was continued through the work delivered in Ysgol Maes Garmon and also through the URDD and the establishment of two Welsh Language provisions. The service also supported the Arfer project with Bangor University, with most of the staff engaging and providing feedback, whilst improving confidence and knowledge in the use of Welsh in the workplace.

Young people's voices are continuously canvassed and the service has been as flexible and reactive in provision wherever possible to ensure it can respond quickly to changing need/priorities. The service also supports partners with their consultations, e.g. the Children's Commissioner's Office, as well as supporting Young Flintshire with the Three Issues Campaign and formation of the schools' Youth Council.

Examples of reflecting feedback from young people have been evidenced in a number of new programmes being established, such as the LGBTQ+ drop in operating in Flint, the Athena and Goliath projects which focus on the issues in and around toxic masculinity, a transition play to youth club in Sealand and projects such as Snow Camp, which enabled 20 young people to gain snow sports awards, 12 sports leadership qualifications and one to travel to Andorra to gain her ski instructor certificate.

Through 'Young Flintshire' the service is aware that mental health and well-being, education and community amenities remain as a priority for young people and that the youth service has a vital role to play in supporting and improving the associated action plans around these issues. The service has maintained its vision of being more agile and customer led and has made the difficult decision to reduce its reliance upon fixed buildings. This has enabled efficiencies to be found but also created greater flexibility within the current workforce and enables a more equitable provision now, and in the future.

Youth Justice Services & Flintshire Sorted

Within the last 12 months the Youth Justice Service (YJS) has continued its commitment to continuous improvement and as part of this commissioned a Peer Review from the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership (YJSIP) to review our approaches to leadership and governance. In March 2024 the Youth Justice Service was the subject of a routine inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation. The Inspection reviews the work of the YJS across a number of domains including; Leadership and governance, Court disposals, Out of Court Disposals and Resettlement. Overall the Inspectorate rated the service as 'good' overall and made the following recommendations;

Flintshire healthcare partners should:

1. make sure that healthcare provision for YJS children meets their emotional health and wellbeing needs
2. ensure that children supervised by the YJS are assessed for and have specific access to services that meet their speech, language and communication needs.

The executive management board should:

3. continue to challenge the Probation Service to ensure that it meets its statutory duties and provides the appropriate secondment provision to the YJS
4. review the format and purpose of the Bureau and ensure that it has the relevant input from staff who have met the child and the necessary agencies a in attendance, so that out-of-court disposals meet children's needs.

The YJS senior manager should:

5. improve the quality of planning in both post-court casework and out-of-court disposals to ensure consistently high-quality planning activity, tailored to each child
6. strengthen the quality and consistency of management oversight to ensure it drives improvements in the quality of practice.

The inspectorate found good practice within the Youth Justice Service across a number of areas. The Inspectorate commended the overall approach to leadership and governance, including the creation of a distinctive service within the Education and Youth portfolio. Leadership at a Management Board and operational level was seen as a strength in a number of areas and the inspection identified that the YJS provided good quality information to the Management Board and partners. Whilst relationships across the partnership were good, with the YJS having suitable visibility, it was identified that partners in Probation and Health needed to review resourcing into the service linked to the secondment of a Probation Officer, improving support for emotional health and speech and language needs for our children and young people.

The inspectorate commended the service in its development of trauma informed practice and close working relationships with academic institutions. The presence of a trauma informed approach was evident at all levels within the service. A specific strength was the work of staff, practitioners and managers who were identified as 'filling the gaps' of other services and providing support to children and young people. In addition, the work we provide to victims was identified as an area of strength.

The Management Board had already commenced work on a number of areas of practice that had been identified by the inspectorate following on from our peer review earlier in the year. Within the last 12 months we have started to increase the expectations placed on the partnership and have been reviewing resources that support the service. An improvement plan will be submitted to the Inspectorate which outlines how the service and partnership intent to further the recommendations from HMIP. The improvement plan will be monitored by the Management Board.

During 2023-2024 the YJS supported 134 children and young people, a reduction in 13 young people compared with the previous year. The service continues to engage with the vast majority of our cohort through the Out of Court framework. However, this year the service has seen an increase of 11 first time entrants into the service compared to the previous year. This issue is currently experienced across all North Wales Youth Justice Services and a working group has been established with North Wales Police to review the operating framework for our Out of Court Disposals. In January 2024 the service also commenced the use of Outcome 22 which allows the YJS to engage with children and young people with intervention but does not result in a criminal outcome being recorded and reduces the impact of criminalisation.

The service is committed to promoting the voice of children and young people and in the last twelve months 83 children and young people were asked to provide their views of the service. Most provided a positive assessment of the work of the service. To strengthen this further a participation oversight group has been established to ensure the views of children, young people, parents, carers and victims are captured consistently.

All young people involved within the YJS undergo a comprehensive holistic assessment which assesses their likelihood of re-offending, risk of serious harm to others in addition to their safety and wellbeing needs. This also includes issues and concerns relating to education, training and employment, physical health and emotional and mental health. The services remains concerned about the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on children and young people. A cohort analysis of 92 children and young people open to the YJS in the last 12 months has highlighted;

- **80%** of children and young people were known to Social Services for Children (increase of 17%)
- **23%** of children and young people have had a period in Care (increase of 12%)
- **23%** have a physical health need (decrease by 1%)
- **79 %** of children and young people were assessed as having an emotional and mental health need (increase of 12%)
- **33%** of children and young people were assessed as having alcohol needs (decrease of 4%)
- **33%** of children and young people were identified as being at risk of self-harm (increase of 2%).
- **63%** of children and young people were identified as having a substance misuse need (decrease by 4%)
- **61%** of children and young people have had attendance issues in education, training or employment (increase by 20%)
- **66%** of children and young people have had behavioural issues in education, training or employment (increase by 18%)
- **49%** of children and young people have had a previous school exclusion (increase by 16%)
- **28%** of children and young people have been identified as at risk of modern slavery.

The YJS promotes a trauma informed approach and has a TrACE development plan in place which is overseen by Public Health Wales and Wrexham Glyndwr University and has commenced discussions with North Wales Police to identify areas of mutual benefit and support to improve outcomes for children and young people. YJS works in partnership with the Forensic Adolescent Treatment Service (FACTS) to embed trauma informed approaches through Enhanced Case Management and has continued to train staff to become trauma informed. The Service has also utilised Ministry of Justice funding for 'Turnaround' to provide additional resources to intervene with children and young people at earlier stages of the criminal justice system, utilising a 'what matters' and trauma informed approach. However, funding for Turnaround remains in its last 12 months.

The YJS works closely with colleagues across the wider Education and Youth Portfolio to improve attendance and engagement in education, training and employment and ensure that every child or young person has an assessment of their education and employment when they enter the service. The service is also exploring opportunities to utilise alternative qualification frameworks to improve outcomes for its cohort.

The service has worked closely with the North Wales Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) on the Serious Violence Duty, contributing key data and information for the Serious Violence Strategy including developing a child and young people's survey which was completed by over 90 children and young people in Flintshire. As part of its previous Violence Audit, it was identified that the service needed additional training, support and interventions to help respond to children and young people involved in violence. The YJS successfully obtained funding through the 'Futures Without Violence Fund' through the OPCC, which funded 4 YJS and Sorted Practitioners to participate in training with Empire Fighting Chance to deliver their Box Champions programme.

In 2023 the Youth Justice Service commissioned Street Doctors to deliver their programmes for the first time in North Wales in a local Flintshire School. Street Doctors offer bespoke programmes to combat youth violence. Street Doctors seek to empower children and young people to become part of the solution to violence and through medical professionals (doctors, nurses and health professionals) provide lifesaving knowledge in the event of a knife related injury or assault and provide information to help understand the medical and psychological consequences of violence. Following a successful trial in a Flintshire School, Street Doctors have secured additional funding through the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioners 'Futures without Violence Fund' as part of the North Wales response to the Serious Violence Duty.

Through the Shared Prosperity Fund the service has secured funding to embed Action for Children's Sidestep Programme which enables children, young people and families at risk of exploitation and serious organised crime to receive tailored, individual 1:1 support. The programme also seeks to reduce vulnerabilities whilst securing positive outcomes through improved attendance in education, training and employment, health support and engagement with professionals. Sidestep is embedded into the Flintshire Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Panel and Contextual Safeguarding Panel and has established close partnerships with Youth Justice, Social Services for Children and North Wales Police to improve information sharing and data analysis. The programme is only funded until December 2024.

Previously YJS reported that there had been an increase in the use of remand and custody with 3 custodial sentences. However last year this reduced to 2 children and young people. In 2023 the YJS Management Board reviewed the cases and developed an initial plan to reduce the use of remand and custody. It will now review the strategy in line with recently published HMIP Thematic Inspections and respond to their recommendations. This will also extend to the service's approaches to managing resettlement.

Flintshire Sorted (Young People's Drug and Alcohol Team) aims to prevent substance use and to minimise the impact of substance use on children and young people, families and the community. It provides a universal, targeted and specialist service to children and young people up to the age of 25 years.

Flintshire Sorted delivers a universal and targeted service within every secondary school in the County with the overall aim of diverting young people away from the use of drugs and alcohol. The targeted content aims to promote healthy choices, challenge attitudes to drugs, anti-social behaviour and other risky behaviours, and strengthen protective factors. Flintshire Sorted provide universal delivery via awareness raising of the risk of using substances through the PSE (Personal, Social, Education) curriculum in schools and via outreach delivery within the community. Flintshire Sorted offer a referral-based service for more intensive work with young people whose substance misuse is having a negative impact on their lives. A range of therapeutic interventions is offered to meet the individual needs of young people and help them to make changes and lead healthier lifestyles. The service also provides a consultation service for parents and professionals who may have questions about suspected substance use in their children.

Between April 2023 and March 2024:

- **1171** sessions were held in 13 secondary schools and colleges
- **6459** young people were engaged in these sessions
- Drug and Alcohol Community Support Sessions took place with trained staff attending identified hotspots for anti-social behaviour where substances were an issue. The staff offered support and advice to young people at risk of offending and provided targeted support session to individuals and groups. They were also able to direct young people to specialist services
- **262** young people received a targeted intervention
- **73%** of young people reported that they had met their goals i.e. had gained more knowledge substances, understood the long-term effects of drugs, and/or had quit alcohol or smoking.

- **274** young people were referred to the service for specialist Tier 3 assessment and intervention.
- **216** professionals received training from Flintshire Sorted. These included: Social Workers, School Nurses, Residential Children Home staff, Safeguarding practitioners, Adult Substance Misuse Service practitioners.
- **74%** of young people reported that they had met their goals i.e. had gained more knowledge of substances, understood the long-term effects of drugs, and/or had quit alcohol or smoking.

Healthy Schools & Healthy Pre-Schools

Public Health Wales (PHW) identified that the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes required significant reform to optimise its potential in supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the future. Work started on reviewing the scheme in 2019 however this was delayed by the pandemic and work to complete recommendations identified in the review remained on hold until June 2021. The work was then recommenced by the national health improvement team. In autumn 2022, PHW proposed a reform to the architecture of the programme to move away from 22 schemes towards a single all-Wales framework.

Local delivery and ownership will continue but supported by a single benchmark and framework of what is considered effective practice, as part of a continuous improvement model. This change aligns with whole school approach principles and the integration of support to embed a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being. This process has been overseen by the Health Promoting Schools Programme Board and is currently awaiting Ministerial approval for a proposed set of Minimum Standards that describe the core components of a health and well-being promoting school.

These Minimum Standards have been developed based on research evidence, international best practices, and input from a range of stakeholders across health, education, and the health promoting schools' workforce. The standards will be shared with schools ahead of the national launch in April 2025. Following consultation, as part of the reforms, the new name for the scheme is the 'Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools' (WNHWPS). To reflect the name change, a new logo and branding has been developed by PHW.

Despite the pause on the accreditation aspect of the scheme since the start of the pandemic, the Flintshire Healthy Schools team between 2022-2024 have remained focused on providing crucial support and resources to schools in the areas of learner and staff health and wellbeing, particularly through this time of transition:

1. Whole Schools Approach to Emotional Health and mental wellbeing (WSA)
2. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
3. Food and Nutrition

Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Mental Wellbeing:

The Flintshire Healthy Schools team supported schools to complete the PHW WSA self-assessment tool to provide a current baseline of wellbeing provision for pupils and staff in their school and action plan accordingly. In Flintshire, 97.4% of schools have engaged with this process; higher than the Wales average of 82.6%. 94% of schools have completed the self-assessment tool in Flintshire in comparison with the Wales average of 71.9%. These schools are now developing their action plans. Support will remain ongoing for all schools as they work through this process. Once the schools have implemented their action plans they will be supported to consult with all stakeholders to repeat the initial surveys they conducted, which will provide a measure of the impact this work has had in their school to improve wellbeing of children and / or staff.

Analysis of the initial self-evaluation tools completed by schools have identified that staff wellbeing is an area which is considered to be a priority and this is particularly the case among secondary schools. A pilot was subsequently funded through the LA wellbeing grant for 'Wellbeing with Cari' to be used at 9 secondary schools in January 2024. This was voluntary for school staff to participate in and required the completion by staff of short online wellbeing surveys during the spring and summer terms, assessing their levels of commitment, resilience, engagement, and well-being. Staff were subsequently signposted to appropriate support in order to improve their wellbeing scores and supported by identified key staff members who had received specific training – to become Advocates and First Responders. 26 staff completed Advocate training in February, and 10 went on to complete First Responder training in March 2024 to upskill them to be able to support colleagues' mental health and wellbeing in their schools. When the Healthy Schools team receives the final data from Wellbeing with Cari staff survey, they will be reviewing wellbeing scores pre and post intervention in order to analyse the impact and share any case studies and good practice identified.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

The Flintshire Healthy Schools team have been supporting schools to meet the requirements of the RSE Code / Curriculum for Wales. Historically RSE has been a theme within the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes criteria addressed under the banner of 'personal development and relationships'. At a local level, officers supported most schools in the county to deliver a programme of sex and relationships education in line with the previous government guidance. They supported schools by commissioning experts in the field, sourcing training and resources, policy development and establishing platforms to share information.

For many schools, the introduction of the RSE Code has meant reviewing what they have delivered previously and refining the content to ensure it is developmentally appropriate; and enhancing this provision further to ensure all the mandatory content is met. A comprehensive programme of staff training for RSE has been fundamental to raise teachers' confidence with this area of the curriculum over the last two years.

In the summer term 2023, members of the Healthy Schools team met with health and wellbeing / PSE leads from the secondary schools at the termly forum where they explored the benefit of working in clusters with their primary school colleagues focusing on RSE in 23-24. GwE has advocated working in school clusters to develop RSE and Health and Wellbeing in the curriculum as good practice and as such the approach is being adopted by other North Wales Local Authorities.

The aim is to utilise the cluster approach for identifying and sharing effective practice and develop a plan with identified training needs which can be co-ordinated through the cluster model. In the summer term 2023 the LA worked with one secondary school and their cluster primary schools to support a meeting of their health and wellbeing leads. This was a pilot to establish how this model could work on a county wide basis with a focus on RSE.

The Healthy Schools team organised an RSE meeting at County Hall in November 2023 for primary school RSE leads to meet in their clusters with secondary RSE / H&Wb lead. The focus of the meeting was to review how RSE was delivered in the first year of Curriculum for Wales and the implementation of the RSE code in order to identify future training and resource needs, support transition and planning for effective delivery of RSE. This event was attended by 58 staff from Flintshire schools and the team received really positive feedback on the day from both primary and secondary colleagues. The event provided officers with a better understanding of which schools have made good progress in meeting the requirements of the RSE Code as well as those that still require additional support.

Following this, each cluster was allocated funding of £3000 and were required to submit a proposal of how this could be utilised to develop RSE. This was a really useful exercise and enabled the schools to work collaboratively to best utilise the funding. Some clusters have continued to meet in person and others have maintained dialogue over email. The intention is for schools to build on this practice and a follow up event will be held in the autumn term 2024 to review how the funding has been utilised and what the outcomes are. Upon reviewing this model with the Secondary Health and Wellbeing / PSE forum meeting in the summer term 2024, it was identified that some schools have faced barriers to hosting meetings with their feeder schools and coordinating training together. The Healthy Schools team therefore will resume coordination of one termly cluster meeting for all schools and training will be delivered through this model. The autumn term 2024 meeting will review how the funding has been utilised and whether the outcomes have been met and consider what the current priorities are.

All training is evaluated, and there has been a positive response by schools to the training programme offered. Feedback is utilised to make improvements to the training programme as required. In most cases this relates to what further training schools would benefit from. For example, sexual health and LGBTQ+ have been identified as themes many schools identified as requiring further support and the team ensured these were featured within the programme of professional development offered.

Working with colleagues at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), funding was accessed to support secondary schools with the RSE professional development training, equipped teaching staff with extensive, current, and comprehensive knowledge of the RSE code, delivered by a specialist provider.

In 2023 and 2024 the Healthy Schools team have coordinated two Flintshire secondary schools Pride events in partnership with the Youth Service and secondary schools: 'Celebrating being me' and 'Just the way you are' during Pride Month. In June 2024, the LGBTQ+ Ambassadors from Hawarden High welcomed approximately 250 attendees, which included learners from 11 secondary schools across the county, representatives from over 30 LGBTQ+ charities and organisations, and several distinguished guests. The evaluation activity conducted during the event highlights the positive feedback from the young participants, providing the following insights:

"It was truly amazing and made me feel so comfortable."

"This event has taught me to accept who I am! Thank you!"

"I enjoyed the day as it allowed people to express themselves and be happy feeling safe."

The secondary Health and Wellbeing / PSE forum continues to meet on a regular basis attended by representatives from all secondary schools including Special and PRU.

"I'm so happy to see so many people appreciating the LGBTQ+ community. I feel I can truly be myself here, and it is amazing that this event is ongoing."

Food and Nutrition

Taking a whole system approach to 'Eating Well & Being Active' in Schools is a local and regional priority for the Healthy Schools team. Following a review of existing food provision in line with Welsh Government regulations, work has continued with secondary schools. In December 2023, a third learner voice event was held in collaboration with colleagues from Newydd to review the food and drink provision and to gather feedback on the new menu which launched in September 2023.

By comparing responses of learners that had completed the food and drink provision surveys in June 2023 with the responses in December 2023 it is evident that there have been improvements made to the

provision (e.g. 84% of learners feel that there are now more healthier breakfast options available in their schools in comparison to 18% in June 2023) There is a greater awareness among learners about different options available (e.g. 72% of learners feel they are now more aware that there are options for vegetarians and vegans in comparison with 27% in June).

During the workshop, water provision emerged as a common theme across a number of schools. A further water specific survey was then developed and shared with schools to review what provision was in place and to identify schools that could benefit from any additional water coolers for the numbers of learners on roll. Subsequently 17 mains-operated water coolers at 8 secondary schools were installed and a water provision policy template for primary and secondary schools was developed, to reflect the importance of adequate water provision in schools.

Vaping / Smoking

Wales, in common with other parts of the United Kingdom and countries internationally is experiencing a rapid increase in reports of young people vaping. The School Health Research Network (SHRN) study showed a marked increase in vaping among young people between 2019/21 and 2021/22. Headteachers and parents, not only in Flintshire but across Wales and the UK, are raising concerns and experiencing significant challenges in managing behaviours around vaping. These include growing reports of addiction to nicotine which is disruptive to day-to-day life and learning. Concerns have been raised about the safety and quality of products and also about the growing presence of illegal products in the marketplace.

In 2021 in Flintshire 23.1% of 11-16 year olds reported having tried e-cigarettes in contrast with 4.15% of 11-16 year olds that reported smoking tobacco at least once a week. Flintshire have the fifth highest local authority data for secondary age students having tried e-cigarettes and reported to be smoking once a week.

In response, the Education and Youth Portfolio has developed a model Smoke Free policy template which will be issued at the start of the new academic year. All schools have been provided with clear signage. Primary school headteachers and wellbeing leads in secondary schools have been offered training opportunities through Ash Wales and Public Health Wales Educational Settings team have developed a 'Substances and Addiction - Focus on Vaping' Curriculum toolkit which has been cascaded to schools in June 2024.

JUSTB Smokefree is an evidence-based smoking prevention intervention developed and delivered to schools in Wales by Public Health Wales. JUSTB is part of and works in partnership with a wider health and wellbeing system for schools which includes the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme (WNHSS), Help me Quit and the School Health Research Network (SHRN). The peer-led programme is delivered to peer-identified, influential year 8 pupils in schools in areas where children are at the highest risk of smoking. It equips these young people with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to comfortably discuss the risks of smoking and the benefits of being smoke free amongst their peers, prior to the age of typical smoking initiation. Using the SHRN data a targeted number of secondary schools with smoking prevalence rates in the top quarter in Wales are invited to take part in the programme. 7 secondary schools were eligible in Flintshire and 1 did engage in the programme in 2023/24. Increasing the uptake in 2024/25 will be a priority for the Healthy Schools team.

Co-ordination of Programmes

Healthy & Sustainable Pre-school Scheme (HSPSS):

There are 52 settings participating in the scheme in Flintshire. Each setting must demonstrate that it is promoting health and well-being through its policies, planning and ethos over 7 different health themes. At the end of each theme the setting is locally assessed and once they met the required criteria, they are accredited by PHW.

In total 28 settings (53%) have now completed the scheme. During 23/24 there were 17 assessments undertaken: 5 of which were end of scheme assessments, 7 were preliminary assessments and 5 were health theme assessments. 14 reaccreditations took place. 10 settings joined the scheme bringing the total participating in HSPSS to 53. For 24/25 we will be actively recruiting more settings.

During 23/24 an officer from the team worked in partnership with the Dietetics team at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) to coordinate training and accreditation. 18 preschool workers attend the 2 hour snack training, 1 Day Nursery were supported to gain the Tiny Tums Best Practice Full Day Care Award and 9 Preschool settings achieved the Tiny Tums Best Practice Snack Award following the training they received.

HSPSS have promoted the Public Health Wales 'Breast feeding in the workplace' initiative and all 53 HSPSS settings are now engaged with the potential to reach 296 staff members.

An officer from the team has represented Flintshire as part of a review of the national HSPSS indicators on the PHW review group. This group informed the revised HSPSS indicators which were launched in January 2024; all settings in Flintshire are now using the new indicators.

Food and Fun:

The Healthy Schools team have coordinated the Food & Fun programme in Flintshire since it began in 2018. This includes the initial recruitment of schools, stakeholder group meetings, managing funding and direct support for schools prior to the programme beginning, throughout and afterwards. In 2023 13 schools (14 cohorts of 40 pupils) delivered the programme, with the support of NEWydd catering, Aura Leisure and Libraries and the Dietetics team at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB). In 2024 10 schools, 11 cohorts are delivering Food and Fun.

484 children benefited from Food and Fun at 13 schools which is an increase compared to 8 schools in summer 2022 which was of benefit to 286 learners. 496 'Bag Bwyd' (pantry ingredients) to feed a family of four, were provided to the parents of children attending in summer 2023.



Period Dignity:

The Healthy Schools team has overseen the grant expenditure for this national project since it was first issued in 17/18. In 22/23 and 23/24 this continued with the online ordering and delivery of home packs in partnership with an external provider, alongside a wide range of community-based initiatives to make products available, including through food banks, community hubs, youth services and adult community learning providers. All primary and secondary schools were also allocated a proportion of grant funding to purchase period products to ensure they had a consistent supply available which was accessible by any learner who needs them.

In 23/24 In response to the increased number of reusable products ordered by young people with the previous provider and feedback from young people that some schools did not routinely stock reusable products, we explored a different approach. Grace and Green were commissioned to deliver reusable only period products via online ordering, direct to homes of girls and young women aged 8-18 years (we did not offer single use disposable products). This pilot ran throughout March 2024 following a very similar process as delivered in previous years. A total of 1814 orders were received. Again, period pants were the most popular product. There has also been an increase in the number of menstrual cups ordered compared to the previous year.

A Period Proud Flintshire Steering Group has been established this year with representatives from the authority and community. Members of the steering group have reflected on the funding offer, explored further opportunities to raise awareness among communities and are developing a Flintshire Period Proud Action Plan which is in its initial stages. Feedback from the steering group highlighted the need to equip community staff with the knowledge and skills needed to have supportive period product conversations. Building on this in 2023-2024, a broader offer of training and education was co-ordinated with 10 parents and carers trained, 104 learners, 19 school staff and 16 community staff.

Children and Young People's Participation

The Council is committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are reflected in its work and actively seeks their engagement. Following the introduction of the Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Health and Wellbeing, schools are required to complete an assessment tool and develop an implementation plan based on the outcomes. This includes specific indicators where schools need to demonstrate how the whole school community is engaged and involved in day-to-day life of the school in influencing decision making and reviewing progress.

All secondary schools are supported to complete the bi-annual School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey. The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a partnership between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales (PHW), Cancer Research UK and the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods. It is led by Cardiff University and brings together secondary schools across Wales and academic researchers, policymakers and practitioners from health, education, and social care. The SHRN aims to improve young people's health and wellbeing in the school setting by providing robust health and wellbeing data for school, regional and national stakeholders. The availability of health behaviour data on both a county and school level are particularly valuable in terms of coordinating the delivery of services and interventions.

The recent expansion of SHRN into primary schools offers an opportunity for joined up working across childhood and adolescence, and an avenue to better understand and support events such as transition to secondary school. As in secondary schools, a key element of this expansion is a survey of school pupils.

The survey asks students about a range of health behaviours and outcomes as well as their age, gender and how they feel about school. Some questions in the survey come from the World Health Organisation's Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey, with some adaptation for younger pupils, ensuring comparability across primary and secondary surveys. Others are measures which have been used for younger pupils in other surveys, because some questions used in secondary SHRN surveys are too complex for younger pupils.



11 secondary schools participated in secondary SHRN survey in autumn term 2023. Although schools have received their reports, the county report for each LA has not been published to date. The last Secondary SHRN survey prior to this was undertaken in 2021 with 7537 young people from Flintshire taking part which is an increase from previous surveys - 6585 in 2017 and 6773 in 2019. Findings from the 2021 survey demonstrated the impact the pandemic had on young people's mental health and wellbeing and all areas of life from screen time to sedentary behaviour. The data for emotions and behaviour in comparison with 2019 indicates at Key Stage 3 there has been an increase in emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer relationships support. At Key Stage 4, data in comparison with 2019 also indicates an increase in emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, and peer relationships support. 43% of young people surveyed have screen time after 11.30pm on a school night, compared to 38% in Wales - a rise of 9% compared to county average of 34% in 2019. 21% of students surveyed spend 7 or more hours sitting down in their free time, compared to 18% in Wales. This is a rise of 4% compared to the county average of 17% in 2019.

All secondary schools have action plans in place based on their individual school report and provided with support to identify their priorities. There is a county action plan and monitoring of SHRN county data on a biannual basis.

18 primary schools participated in Primary SHRN in 2022-23 with 27.3% of students on roll taking part, equating to 1915 from Years 3-6. The data highlighted a difference of 4% or higher between Flintshire and the national average in the following areas:

- **33%** of children who reported consuming vegetables at least once a day in comparison with the national average of 37%.
- **67%** of children reported owning a smartphone in comparison to 63% national average.
- **76%** of children reported using portable devices to speak to family or friends a few times a day or every day, in comparison with the national average of 71%.
- **29%** reported being bullied as the thing that year 6 children in Flintshire were worried about when thinking about transition to secondary school - in comparison with the national average of 25%.

The Healthy Schools team will review the Primary data in line with the secondary responses to incorporate this in a new combined county action plan going forward. The primary survey will open in Autumn 2024 for another cycle and new data will be available for schools Easter 2025.

As part of the statutory processes in the identification of additional learning needs, children and young people are actively supported to contribute as appropriate to their age or stage of development. Youth Justice assessments and plans clearly reference the views and needs of the young person themselves and the Integrated Youth Provision regularly consults with its users and refines its services as a result. A Youth Council was in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and is in the process of being refreshed as part of the restructuring of Youth Service provision.

To strengthen participation in Flintshire, a model where both Youth Council and School Councils representatives (11-18 years old) collaborate to lead on participation across Flintshire has been developed under the identity of 'Young Flintshire'.

The Young Flintshire Aims are:

- Young people having their voice heard and speaking to decision makers.
- Opportunities for young people to feed into other working groups and projects running within the council.
- Awareness of how Flintshire County Council works and educating on democracy to young people and communities.

School Councils are a legal requirement and are fully operational in all schools in Wales. School Council representatives who are nominated as Associate Pupil Governors (APG's) will be invited from all secondary schools (including Specialist provision and the Pupil Referral Unit) to be members of Young Flintshire from Autumn 2024.

The Flintshire Youth Council has been in place for many years coordinated by the Youth Service. All young people can become members of the Flintshire Youth Council. The Youth Service also work with a variety of different groups of young people. Representatives from Youth Council will be invited to be members of Young Flintshire alongside School Council representatives from Autumn 2024. Prior to launching the Young Flintshire participation model in the autumn term 2023 a pilot with 9 schools took place during June and July 2024 focusing on the following three areas identified by young people across Flintshire through a consultation survey:

- 1. Community - Amenities & Safety**
- 2. Mental Health & Wellbeing**
- 3. Schools and Education**

Young people undertook a 'deep dive' in their school and local communities on the three identified areas from the initial consultation. Designated officers from various council services were asked to provide written and face-to-face feedback to the young people at a meeting chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language and Culture. The pilot has helped to fine tune the processes required to coordinate this model on a larger scale including safeguarding risk assessments, consent, formal and informal approaches and ensure representation from different groups. The work undertaken during the pilot brought young people across schools and communities together focusing on common priorities, developing a further a sense of belonging and also an understanding of how the Council operates in regard to its decision-making processes.

Sport Wales has coordinated the School Sport Survey for learners in Years 3 to 11 for over twenty years. All schools which collect the required number of survey responses from their learners receive unweighted results in a school report and providing enough schools have participated, the local authority also qualifies for a report. The numbers of learners that have completed the survey has steadily increased from 5090 in 2015, 5208 in 2017, and 5212 responses in 2022. 3052 secondary aged learners from 8 secondary schools completed the survey alongside 2160 primary aged learners from 25 primary schools in 2022. Schools, supported by the Portfolio, will be expected to share their reports with their School Councils and use the information to secure further improvements in sports and physical activities within their schools.

School Place Planning & Provision including provision for Welsh medium & admissions processes

Flintshire County Council has a strong track record in strategically managing its school estate through both its own resources and through the effective use of grant funding schemes e.g. Sustainable Learning Communities Programme, to manage effective and efficient delivery of school places. It has demonstrated

a willingness to take difficult decisions to modernise the school network to improve the quality of the learning environment to underpin teaching and learning and address issues related to condition and suitability within its school estate.

Under its School Modernisation Strategy the Council has undertaken a major programme of school organisational change proposals which have included the closure of one nursery school, three primary schools, one secondary school, the development of four federal arrangements across the primary and secondary sector, the amalgamation of all infant and junior schools, the rationalisation of post-16 provision in the north of the County resulting in a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria, the extension of primary Welsh medium provision, the building of two new primary schools and an award winning 3-16 learning campus and other major remodelling projects. The Sustainable Learning Communities Band A and B Programme have now been fully completed (on time and within budget) bringing the total investment envelope to £64.2m and £85m for these phases of investment.

The Council's Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for the next phase of rolling capital investment over a 10-year period is equally ambitious at £175.8m and is currently awaiting approval from Welsh Government.

The Council is constantly evaluating its programme priorities and how to use the differing forms of funding available e.g. Capital and Revenue based funding under the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).

The proposed programme provides efficient and effective educational infrastructure to meet current and future demand. The programme has potential to remove up to 12 educational buildings from the service portfolio and ensure suitable investment in new facilities. All projects within the programme will be designed to promote, where applicable, early years' provision and community access to school and sports facilities. The backlog maintenance for projects within the programme is £1.3m for secondary and £1.8m for primary. For new school projects, the Council would expect to achieve 100% reduction in backlog maintenance, for large remodelling projects an 80% reduction and smaller scale projects the aim would be for 50% as a benchmark. The Council has clearly defined arrangements for repairs and maintenance of schools and responds appropriately to emergencies.

The SOP is linked to the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The rolling programme is focused on the remaining one primary school which would benefit from capital investment within the Welsh Medium (WM) sector, significant investment has already been made into 4 out of the 6 WM schools, linking in with the Council's desire to ensure that WM is given priority and links into the National Welsh Language Strategy.

Further funding opportunities have been identified and secured to develop a new start up Welsh Medium Area Primary school to be located in an area of known Welsh medium demand and to serve nearby areas in the northeast of the county. Other funding opportunities through the Welsh Government community facility and childcare capital grant are also being reviewed to provide capital investment enhancing Welsh medium learning provision.

Voluntary Aided schools are maintained jointly by the County Council and either the Church in Wales or the Roman Catholic Church. Aided schools also have access to separate capital funding streams directly through the Welsh Government. The Council continues to work successfully in partnership with the Diocesan Authorities to ensure that Aided schools are appropriately located and fit for purpose.

In January 2024 the Pupil Level Annual School Census showed the 64 primary schools had a total capacity of 14,183 full time places and had 11,441 total numbers on roll (NOR), which is a surplus of 19.33%. 11 Schools in the secondary sector had a total capacity of 10,718 with 9,594 NOR and 10.49% surplus places. When combined, these figures equate to 14.91% average surplus places across the school network, which is higher than the maximum national target of 10%.

Unfilled places in January 2024 were 3,866. This is an improvement on statistics produced in January 2013, when there were some 4,000 unfilled places in Flintshire schools distributed across primary and secondary schools. The proposals contained within the Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for the rolling Sustainable Learning Communities schools' investment programme, should they be implemented, will reduce unfilled places in schools to near the national target.

Pupil number projections methodology is aligned with other authorities across the region and are completed twice per year; these are linked to school data returns, namely, January PLASC and September NOR returns. The capacity assessments are conducted using the Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales methodology and are audited once per year.

The Council has an up-to-date Asset Management system and data from the system is used to influence decision making on capital investment in the school network. Priorities for investment for the schools' capital programme are clear, linked to the School Modernisation Strategy and are funded and based upon up-to-date information.

In 2016/17 suitability surveys were commissioned and conducted across the schools' portfolio based on national guidance. Despite the significant investment through Sustainable Learning Communities Schools programme and the Council's own capital programme, it is estimated that an investment more than £130m is still required to address suitability issues across the schools' network. The proposals contained within the Strategic Outline Plan (SOP) for the rolling Sustainable Learning Communities schools' investment programme, should they be implemented, will reduce suitability graded D schools to 1.

Table 18: Suitability of Primary and Secondary School Buildings

Suitability Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	11	14.67%
B	23	30.6%
C	39	52%
D	2	2.66%

School condition surveys are re-assessed in line with national asset management guidance on a five-year cycle, with the repair & maintenance (R&M) backlog estimated in excess of £10.6m, a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 SOP.

Table 19: Condition of Primary and Secondary School Buildings

Condition Grade	No of Schools	Percentage %
A	5	6.67%
B	61	81.33%
C	9	12%
D	0	0.00%

Flintshire County Council has no schools in condition 'D' as this would mean that the school building life would have expired or be at risk of imminent failure.

The Council consults with children and young people, parents, school governors and staff and other relevant stakeholders prior to making proposals for any school modernisation change. The consultation process involves the completion and presentation of impact assessments around community, transport, buildings, equalities and language and includes a financial appraisal.

The responses from each formal consultation process are presented to the Council's Cabinet, along with the impact assessment, options appraisal and officer recommendations. Cabinet then decides on how to progress. For all construction projects the Head Teacher or nominated person from the school forms part of the "operational team".

Flintshire consults other admission authorities and coordinates admission arrangements with neighbouring authorities, including common dates of return and common offer dates. Flintshire participates in the regional North Wales Admissions Group to coordinate admissions arrangements and develop/deliver joint training. The Council is represented at the ADEW School Admissions Officers' Group and is aware of national and Welsh Government initiatives in the service.

The composite prospectus, "Guide to Education Services" is reviewed and published annually and is made available online to all parents on 1st September each year, as part of the annual admissions round. Feedback from Welsh Government on the composite prospectus has been incorporated into the Guide. Most parental preferences continue to be met (over 95%). All appeals are held before the end of the academic year and any appeals outside the timetabled admissions process are held, where practicable, within 30 school days in accordance with the School Appeals Code. Panel members are trained in accordance with the Appeals Code, and advertising, recruitment and training of panel members takes place every 3 years jointly with other admission authorities. This is a cost-effective way of managing recruitment and training and ensures consistency across the region.

Applications for mid-term transfers are made online and every effort is made to process the application to admit pupils within 15 school days. Flintshire's Managed Moves Protocol and a new Fair Access process is currently under review with Headteachers

Music Services for Schools

Music services for Flintshire schools are now delivered by Theatr Clwyd Music which was established in 2020 when Theatr Clwyd adopted the Flintshire Music Service to ensure this discretionary service was protected in the face of significant financial challenges for the Council. Flintshire pupils continue to have access to high quality individual, group and whole class music tuition. Learners have the opportunity to undertake music examinations and progress to county ensembles and national music groups. The Council works in partnership with the Theatr Clwyd Music Trust to maximise the impact of new national funding for music services provided by Welsh Government via the Welsh Local Government Association.



2. Quality of Education Services Areas Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- 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
- 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

Inspection area 3: Leadership and Management

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Council benefits from strong leadership with an effective working relationship between professional officers and elected members, led by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council. This is demonstrated through the portfolio structure within the Council where Cabinet Lead Members and Chief Officers work closely together to successfully achieve corporate priorities. This is exemplified in key documents such as the Council Plan and Well-Being Plan which are focused on improving outcomes for Flintshire communities and their residents, including children and young people.

Programme Boards are in place for each portfolio and are attended by the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, designated Cabinet Members, Chief Officer and senior managers. The Education and Youth Programme Board provides a purposeful platform for developing the strategic direction of the portfolio, informs policy development and ensures performance oversight. A robust and transparent scrutiny process ensures that there is continuous challenge of performance and evaluation of impact. Cabinet reports, Overview & Scrutiny reports, performance monitoring reports and risk registers are jointly owned by members and officers.

The leadership structure and hierarchy of accountability within the Council, both from an elected member and an officer perspective, is clearly articulated and understood. Roles and responsibilities are clearly documented and there is a constructive working relationship between officers and members that delivers an appropriate level of challenge to the work of the portfolio to ensure the best outcomes for learners but also ensures that positive impacts and successes are celebrated.

Professional and political leadership is used effectively to manage the Council's core business of providing quality and responsive public services in the face of long-term austerity, the ongoing impacts of the Covid pandemic and challenging budget settlements year on year. This has been clearly demonstrated by the collective problem solving by senior officers and elected members in managing the Council's financial strategy and achieving legally balanced budgets whilst protecting and sustaining services. Financial planning processes are robust with high levels of scrutiny and assurance. Officer and elected members have a track record of working together constructively and with clear purpose on difficult issues. This has been reflected in decisions taken e.g. the management of the school estate and the additional financial support provided for services supporting pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

The Council's approach to strategic leadership is underpinned by public service values. Within the context of delivery of services to children and young people there is a moral commitment to delivery in an inclusive, nurturing and worthwhile way which enables them to successfully embrace adult life and become responsible, independent, economically active and resilient citizens. This is clearly reflected in the structure and priorities of the Council Plan which reflect the Welsh Government's Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles and the Well-being Goals of the Future Generations (Wales) Act and focus on six core areas:

- Poverty
- Affordable and Accessible Housing
- Green Society and Environment
- Economy
- Personal and Community Wellbeing
- Education and Skills

The Council has a good track record of communicating with residents, service users, its workforce and wider stakeholders through external and internal processes. There is a strong culture of engagement and inclusivity when agreeing priorities. An example of this is the Council Plan and in its work through the Public Service Board. What matters to communities is integral to priority setting and resource allocation. From an educational perspective this can be seen in its engagement work around the budget settlement for schools, in its consultations around school organisational change, in the School Health Research Network surveys and action plans and in other key areas e.g. youth service provision, play and childcare sufficiency.

The Council is proactive in making difficult decisions and where needed, the professional and political leadership intervene effectively to overcome obstacles. Systems leadership and the delegation of resources support the efforts to place the learner first and protect the quality of education and support services. This has been exemplified in the work by all officers and elected members to set legally balanced budgets in the face of significant financial challenge.

Across all education services commissioned by the Council over the value of £25k, social value is considered and included as a key priority. Social value is separately weighted during the procurement process, and supply chain partners are expected to monitor and report against the generation of localised social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being outcomes, in order to evidence value for money and social return on investment. A significant amount of social value is generated through education services including; the creation of local employment and training opportunities, retention of local people in employment, employee upskilling, growth of the local economy through a commitment to local spend, investment in local community needs projects, increased engagement with local schools through investment and volunteer time to assist in the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales, and waste reduction through implementing circular economy solutions to reduce, reuse and recycle waste. Procurement activity across the Education Portfolio in 2023-24 resulted in over £2.4m being achieved in social value outcomes.

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. (See Annual Council Plan Report 23-24).

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:

- 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

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 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.

The Council and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and to developing a learning culture in the county, from early years to adulthood. They understand the impact of national and regional priorities and how these impacts on decision making locally for services e.g. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, Education in Wales - Our National Mission, Cymraeg 2050 - Welsh Language Strategy and the North Wales Economic Growth Deal.

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.

The Council works effectively with GwE (Regional School Improvement Service). Since the inception of the service in 2013, there has been a good track record of engagement with the service to support its development and robust scrutiny of the service in holding it accountable for the scope of its delivery on behalf of Flintshire. GwE officers participate fully in Flintshire business and understand and contribute to the vision, aims and objectives of the Council. This is evidenced by the way in which GwE Business Plans support the Portfolio's Business Plan and the Council Plan. Roles and responsibilities of GwE officers in contributing to the delivery of the service within Flintshire are clearly articulated. This mutually supportive, yet challenging culture fostered between GwE and Flintshire officers, helps the Council maintain its focus on outcomes for learners across all phases. The Chief Officer for Education in Flintshire is currently the Lead Director on the GwE Management Board.

During this academic year, Welsh Government initiated a review of the education system in Wales, referred to as the 'Middle Tier Review', in response to concerns about national education standards and issues raised by different stakeholders about the crowded space related to school improvement. This includes schools, local authorities, regional consortia, Estyn, the Education Workforce Council, the National Academy for Educational Leadership and Welsh Government themselves. The decision by Welsh Government to change funding mechanisms and effectively bring to an end the current regional approach to school improvement services from April 2025 will be far reaching. It has generated a significant amount of work, particularly for Council Education Services as new models for supporting school improvement in line with the recommendations from the review have to be developed, approved and implemented in a very short period of time. This work has begun in Flintshire and will be presented to stakeholders and elected members in the autumn term 2024.

All schools have chosen to access the Human Resources, Employment Services and Occupational Health SLA provision which provides for a range of services to assist them in complying with their 'people related' statutory responsibilities and operational/ business obligations. Customer led solutions manifest themselves in a wide range of service delivery including model policy and information provision, confidential telephone and face to face support, Heads Federation and cluster group briefings, conference sessions, case conferences and discrete advisory session. The take up rates, activity levels and repeat business support consistent 'buy back' levels and evidence that these services are valued and contribute significantly to school performance. Relationships between school leaders and central service providers are very good and the ethos is to support school leaders in their management functions.

Relationships between senior Council officers and trade union representatives are good and there is a high degree of engagement on key issues through the Education Consultative Committee and other statutory groups e.g. School Budget Forum. There is also a good level of informal interaction between the Portfolio's HR officers and local union representatives in individual school processes e.g. redundancy, absence management etc.



3.2 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 are 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.

Through its locally commissioned arrangements with GwE, there are clearly defined plans for primary and secondary schools which are agreed between the Chief Education Officer and Senior Manager for School Improvement and GwE Core Lead Officers. Agreed priorities in the business plans are based firmly on the findings of self-evaluation processes within schools. The plans accurately identify key issues and include bespoke improvement plans to address the specific challenges, drawing on the resources of both GwE and the Council's own services. Plans are regularly updated to reflect the outcomes of whole school reviews and support visits commissioned by the Education Portfolio. Progress towards achieving the agreed outcomes is regularly reviewed by the Senior Manager for School Improvement and the GwE Core Leads. This then feeds into termly Quality Board meetings with the Cabinet Member for Education, Chair of Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer for Education and Youth. This ensures that strategic leaders are fully informed on school performance in Flintshire.

The Portfolio works swiftly and effectively with GwE Officers to address 'Schools Causing Concern' and 360° support plans are put in place. Where rapid progress in some schools has been required, Accelerated Improvement Boards (AIB) have been used successfully to oversee progress. When deployed, these Boards meet regularly and include key officers of the Portfolio, GwE and school leaders, including governors. Where required, the Chief Officer has used statutory powers of intervention and established Interim Executive Boards (IEB) to replace traditional governance models. This has been successful in improving the pace of improvement in identified schools. GwE senior officers support the IEB alongside senior LA managers. At the current time there are no schools in Flintshire which have either an Accelerated Improvement Board or an Interim Executive Board.

Where it is available, education officers use data effectively to ensure areas for improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. As a result, the quality of information shared within Flintshire is of a high standard, enabling members to scrutinise and challenge progress effectively. With the Welsh Government decision to remove a range of data sets that were traditionally used for accountability purposes, officers of the Local Authority, Elected Members and GwE Officers continue to enhance ways to effectively monitor performance and measure progress.

Education officers within the Council focus well on joint planning and resourcing as well as building capacity for continuous improvement. The Portfolio has strong links with the community, has good liaison and communication with schools, engages positively with parents and carers and works effectively with other Council portfolios and external agencies enabling officers to deliver joined-up programmes that improve outcomes and wellbeing for learners. Good examples of this include the statutory processes around provision for children with Additional Learning Needs, the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Steering Group, the Adult Learning Partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council and provision through the Youth and Youth Justice Services.

The Portfolio engages well with partners, service users and other stakeholders in its evaluation processes and in planning for improvement. Any aspect of school organisational change includes consultation with the children and young people potentially impacted and school leaders are regularly consulted directly or through the Federations on major issues. The Council supports schools to make good use of surveys to improve provision and outcomes e.g. School Health Research Network and Sports Surveys and has engaged learners in evaluative activities in relation to school meal provision. Youth Service provision has been changed directly as a result of young peoples' feedback and the development of 'Young Flintshire' will further enhance the way in which the Council engages with young people on issues that matter to them and to gather their views on Council services.

The Council uses a corporate database for the recording of complaints, concerns and requests for services. A senior manager within the Portfolio is the link officer for complaints. Parental complaints about schools have to be re-directed back to the individual school to be dealt with via their own complaints' procedures. Complainants are advised of the correct procedure and as necessary, the Portfolio provides support to schools on ensuring its procedures are in line with the national guidance. On-line complaints training is available to all governing bodies. During 2023-24 there were 12 formal complaints directed to the Portfolio on a variety of issues e.g. admissions, school transports, inclusion provision, school closure in bad weather, youth services and youth justice provision. Two were upheld. There were no complaints in relation to education services in Flintshire investigated by the Ombudsman in 2023-2024.

The Council is compliant with the requirement regarding partnership agreements with its schools.

3.3 Professional Learning

Relationships between the Education Portfolio and schools are strong and productive. Regular head teacher meetings and the partnership groups in the consultative structure form an effective mechanism for raising issues and agreeing actions to tackle them. Flintshire benefits from well-established learning networks within and across schools, and more widely across the region, enabling schools to develop and share their professional knowledge. Working in clusters and alliances has developed well in Flintshire over the last few years with all schools engaging in this co-operative learning approach. Key areas such as Additional Learning Needs, Digital Learning and Welsh Language have all benefitted from a cluster training and support model.

Flintshire schools engage effectively with the range of professional development opportunities provided by GwE and the Council for school leaders, teachers and support staff at all levels. Flintshire staff have access to a comprehensive learning continuum provided by GwE which delivers appropriate training at all stages of professional development, from Newly Qualified Teacher to Executive Headteacher. Data shows that the take up of these opportunities from Flintshire schools is very positive. Staff within the Education Portfolio access professional development opportunities within GwE where appropriate e.g. curriculum reform.

Portfolio officers and senior leads from the regional school improvement service support governing bodies with senior leadership appointments. New and acting headteachers are then provided with mentoring by local headteachers and portfolio leads, as well as on-going support from the primary learning adviser via network meetings and school visits.

The Portfolio facilitates a professional network for deputy heads from across Flintshire primary schools. The network meets half termly and during the last academic year, seventeen primary colleagues from different schools shared good practice on aspects including positive behaviour management, assessment and curriculum planning. The senior Primary Learning Adviser brokers shadowing visits for deputies to other schools and signposts coaching opportunities to those seeking to further develop their leadership roles.

As part of the national Hub programme for digital learning, the Portfolio performs the intelligent client function for Ed Tech across all schools. This work is led by the Hwb Board, jointly chaired by the Chief Officer for Education and Youth and the Chief Officer for Governance. Annual meetings are held with all schools to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the HWB programme and that sustainability of the IT infrastructure remains a key priority.

The portfolio was able to recruit for a new post of digital learning adviser from September 2023. The impact of this additional capacity has been immediate, focusing on enabling schools to develop their provision in line with the digital competence framework. All schools have been supported to develop their own digital strategy. The digital learning adviser facilitates the sharing of effective practice through regular digital leader meetings. Teachers have access to a comprehensive support website that provides guidance on how to use all the digital platforms they need. Feedback from practitioners is positive, with evidence of increased confidence in trying new activities that clearly targets the DCF.

The digital officer has supported schools to plan for sustainability and is engaged in monitoring the provision of resources across schools to ensure parity of provision for learners.

Bespoke professional development is provided for portfolio education colleagues on digital learning and recent technology. Flintshire has allocated funding during this academic year for schools and the English as an Additional Language Service to continue to support pupils who are digitally disadvantaged. This

should enable up to 100 learners if required, to have additional resources to learn at home or within school to catch up and extend their learning and skills.

Partnership activities make a strong contribution to widening the range of choices for learners and this has benefits for their standards and wellbeing. The Council takes a leading role in developing joint working practices and promotes trust and good communication between partners. These include effective partnerships between the Council, North Wales Police, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Youth Justice Board, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and other local education authorities.

Partnership working between the Portfolio, further and higher education establishments, employers and secondary schools in developing the work of the 14-19 network is good. They successfully promote co-operation and enable school governors, Coleg Cambria, employers and the Council to plan, monitor and resource an effective 14-19 curriculum that meets the needs of learners.

The school improvement team works collaboratively to support schools in accessing appropriate services and educational activities. During the last academic year, ten schools provided adult community learning sessions and ten schools ran well-being sessions with a variety of mentors, introducing projects such as Foster Bear, working in partnership with social services. The portfolio makes good use of external funding streams and have provided innovative activities linked to improving wellbeing for over 25 service children and their peers through a successful 'Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru grant.



One priority in the portfolio business plan has been to support schools to further improve provision for outdoor learning. During the last academic year over 40 practitioners have attended outdoor network meetings run by the primary officer in conjunction with colleagues from natural resources Wales and other key partners. The aim has been to collaborate on a draft outdoor learning policy for Flintshire schools which will be completed by autumn 2024. This work has created a better understanding amongst practitioners and consistency in the offer for pupils across the county within and beyond their school grounds.

Work has continued on the implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus for RVE for primary schools with over 50 practitioners attending network meetings run by the primary officer and key partners from SACRE/ SAC, Wrexham and the Diocese of St Asaph. The aim of the network is to share information, resources, good practice case studies and key information from the RVE documentation in the new curriculum. This has created a more common understanding of how to teach the new aspects of RVE such as pluralism and equality.

The Welsh Advisory Team in the Portfolio actively encourages school staff at all levels, including head teachers, to engage in the Welsh Government sabbatical training programmes for practitioners who wish to teach through the medium of Welsh or wish to improve their Welsh-language skills. This is a key component of the Council's Welsh in Education Plan which has been approved by Welsh Ministers. Take up across the different sabbatical options are good and Flintshire staff represent a sizeable proportion of each cohort. This is extending the number of employees with improved Welsh language skills, which is contributing to the improving quality of provision for learners in both English and Welsh medium schools.

The professional learning offer supports current school leaders across Flintshire but also invests in developing leaders of the future. Subscription rates to the NPQH and Aspiring Heads courses from

Flintshire staff are strong. Newly appointed and acting headteachers are supported through development programmes and are also allocated mentors and leadership coaches.

Networking and peer-to-peer work is a positive feature in Flintshire schools. This collaborative work has led to a shared understanding of what constitutes good leadership. Collaborative practice amongst leaders is reinforced through strategic forums, at both headteacher and deputy level. These forums support strong effective communication and nurture a mutual sense of common responsibility for the development of responses and actions to local and national challenges.

The Council promotes professional learning for its core portfolio team through structured learning opportunities, most visible through the Flintshire Academi Infonet, which provides learning and e-learning modules on leadership and management, personal development, specific professional development, equality and diversity, Welsh language, health and safety and ICT. Education Portfolio staff also access training opportunities offered by GwE e.g. the development of the new curriculum.

The Council has a well-established and successful Trainee (Apprentice scheme). The Council recruit local people every year to undertake work-based qualifications. The most recent outcomes relating to the scheme remains very positive.

- **93%** of those who have undertaken an FCC Apprenticeship have had a positive outcome.
 - o The percentage of those gaining employment within the Authority after completing the programme **80%**
 - o The percentage of those gaining employment externally **10%**
 - o The percentage of those moving on to Higher Education or other professional training programmes **3%**

After a successful recruitment campaign in 2023, 21 apprentices across a range of disciplines commenced work placements in September 2023.

All staff benefit from the annual appraisal scheme which ensures personal and professional objectives are linked to the annual corporate service and portfolio plans. Centrally employed teaching staff have statutory performance management. The process enables employees and managers to explore individual strengths and identify wider opportunities for these to be utilised effectively. These opportunities support succession planning at a time where central services remain under pressure from financial and recruitment/retention challenges, particularly post-pandemic and also focus strongly on staff wellbeing.

As part of its People Strategy, the Council takes a proactive approach to talent spotting and succession planning. Senior managers regularly identify officers who have potential and signpost them to learning opportunities to develop their skills. Many officers within the Portfolio have accessed professional development e.g. Institute of Leadership & Management qualifications and NVQs through a partnership arrangement with Coleg Cambria. Senior managers are identified for external learning opportunities through Academi Wales and SOLACE (Chief Executives' professional association).

Senior managers network and share good practice through quarterly Flintshire Academi sessions which not only provide key updates but also are the driver for developing cross-cutting policies and strategies e.g. the Council's People Strategy and Carbon Reduction Strategy. Specifically within the Portfolio, there are termly workshops for service managers to share updates, future plans and engage in consultation and professional development opportunities. There is a comprehensive online training programme available for all staff of the Council to access on corporate training priorities e.g. safeguarding, GDPR, leadership and management etc. Networking by senior managers through representation on various groups of the

Association of Directors of Education in Wales ensures service planning is informed by current and best practice from across Wales. The Chief Officer for Education in Flintshire was elected to the Chair of ADEW for a two year period from May 2023 and is providing strategic leadership at a national level.

During the academic year 2023-24, the Senior Manager for School Improvement was seconded to Estyn for a fixed number of working days, at their specific request. This is an acknowledgement by Estyn of the post holder's skills and knowledge and the regard she is held in by the sector. The post holder successfully contributed to a number Estyn teams undertaking inspection activity on the Local Government Education Services framework.

In more recent times, and particularly since the pandemic, there have been increasing challenges in recruiting into key posts both in the Education Portfolio and in schools. Educational psychology, youth work, youth justice work and IT systems administration have all experienced difficulties recruiting appropriately qualified staff with adverts having to be go out multiple times and Head teachers are reporting challenges in recruiting skilled classroom support staff as well as key roles such as caretakers. In the secondary sector there are recruitment challenges in key subjects including Welsh, Mathematics and the science subjects. Recruitment in the Welsh medium sector is even more challenging. The recruitment difficulties in relation to school cooks, catering staff and cleaners has also had an adverse impact on the Council's key partner, NEWydd, which has sometimes made their service delivery to schools challenging at times.

3.4 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. This policy applies to Flintshire County Council employees, councillors, volunteers and organisations commissioned to provide services on behalf of the Council. Flintshire County Council is a member of the North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board (NWSCB) and North Wales Safeguarding Adults' Board (NWSAB).

The Corporate Safeguarding Panel is well established and includes representation from all portfolios, including Education and Youth, to ensure that all services integrate safeguarding awareness into the way they work. The panel is jointly Chaired by the Chief Officer for Social Services and the Chief Officer for Education and Youth. It receives information regarding the working practices and procedures of every service in the Council, providing assurance that the services are meeting their duties in accordance with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines and reports to Cabinet on an annual basis.

The Chief Officer for Education and Youth ensures that all the statutory requirements in terms of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults receive due consideration and that effective safeguarding arrangements operate within the Education and Youth portfolio at the three levels of responsibility of strategic, support and operational.

In order to further sharpen the focus on safeguarding, the Education Portfolio established its own Safeguarding Panel, and this is attended by senior managers within Education and Youth and with representation from Children's Services. It has clearly defined terms of reference, an action plan and ensures that communication up to, and down from, the Corporate Safeguarding Panel is effective.

The Senior Manager for School Improvement has the lead strategic responsibility for Safeguarding in the Portfolio and is the designated contact for officers and schools. The Learning Adviser for Health,

Wellbeing and Safeguarding is the deputy designated contact who provides operational activity support, including attendance at national and regional safeguarding meetings. This officer also co-ordinates training for schools, governors and portfolio staff and provides model policies for schools. There is effective communication between Education and Youth and other portfolios in the Council as well as with external partners. An annual safeguarding report is presented to the joint Health and Social Care/Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Committee to provide members with the assurance that safeguarding functions are being appropriately delivered and having a positive impact on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The 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).

A Flintshire Secondary Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSP) Forum was established in October 2023 to ensure that a continuing dialogue exists to support the development of robust safeguarding arrangements in Flintshire secondary schools, and the effective implementation of the Welsh Government's statutory safeguarding children in education guidance, Keeping Learners Safe. The terms of reference set out the purpose of the group and the proposed governance arrangements. The group is jointly chaired by a secondary school DSP and a Children's Services Team Manager. It is the intention to establish an equivalent primary forum and advice has been sought through head teacher colleagues about the most effective means of establishing this for the next academic year.

The DSP forum has been an effective means of engaging DSPs and senior managers in children's services and has had a significant impact. One proposal of a direct phone line for DSPs into children's services has been actioned and after an initial successful pilot with secondary schools in the spring term, has been opened up to primary schools in the summer term 2024. This has resulted in DSPs acquiring support sooner and enabled more timely decision making in order to safeguard children. As a result, DSP's have further strengthened working relationships with colleagues in children's services.

A structured rolling programme of 'core' safeguarding training is in place which includes Level 3 training for new designated safeguarding persons (DSPs) and refresher training for existing DSPs, Level 2 safeguarding for managers and senior leaders. Governor awareness training is also delivered as well as Ask and Act. Materials and support are provided to DSPs annually to deliver regular basic awareness training to all school staff.

In 2022 Social Care Wales developed the National Safeguarding training, learning and development Framework and also the National Safeguarding training, learning and development Standards. There is an expectation that organisations in Wales incorporate the standards into their safeguarding policies and procedures and ensure practitioners understand their responsibilities relevant to the group they are in. This has been underway in the local authority already and during the last 12 months the current training offer for schools has been reviewed and mapped against the standards.



In order to support the review of the existing training offer and the implementation of the national training standards, a sub-group of the DSP Forum specifically focusing on training has been formed. The updated training offer will be implemented as part of a phased approach from September 2024.

Professional Development - Safeguarding 2023-2024

Autumn term 2023 - 8 courses (138 attendees)

3 x level 2 courses

3 x level 3 Refresher courses

2 x level 3 Full course

Spring term 2024 - 7 courses (106 attendees)

3 x level 2 courses

2 x level 3 Refresher courses

2 x level 3 Full course

Summer term 2024 - 9 courses (150 attendees)

3 x level 2 courses

4 x level 3 Refresher courses

4 x level 3 Full course

During the 23/24 academic year, a total of 394 staff have accessed Levels 2 and 3 safeguarding training from 24 courses. This is an increase in the number of courses delivered and number of attendees in comparison with previous years:

2023/24 - 394 staff from 24 courses.

2022/23 - 371 staff from 23 courses.

2021/22 - 299 staff from 17 courses.

2020/21 - 262 staff from 15 courses.

The level 2 and 3 courses (including refresher and full course for new safeguarding leads) continue to be delivered online. Colleagues in Social Services continue to provide an incredibly valuable input into level 3 refresher courses and training for new safeguarding leads. Feedback from headteachers confirm the training and support for schools is welcomed and effective. Evaluation forms are completed at the end of each training delivery and the information is reviewed on an individual basis in addition to any immediate response that can be implemented. Feedback is also included in the annual report to the North Wales Regional Safeguarding Children's Board.

Safeguarding updates are incorporated into local authority headteacher meetings and into planned LA training programmes for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and new and acting headteachers. In addition, key safeguarding themes are addressed on a rolling programme including Prevent and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual violence (VAWDASV). There are strong relationships with key local partners including North Wales Police, Rape and Sexual Abuse Support (RASA) and the NSPCC.

The Portfolio and schools operate safe recruitment procedures and make sure that all appropriate checks are carried out. All schools are routinely reminded of their responsibilities under Section 28 of the Children Act and as outlined in the Welsh Government guidance - Keeping Learners Safe.

There is regular monitoring of safeguarding activity by the local authority through audit procedures. Schools are required to complete an annual monitoring report for school leaders alongside a safeguarding self-evaluation (audit) tool. Information from returns is reviewed and results shared with headteacher federations and individual schools annually. Support is prioritised accordingly; either on an individual school level or through a broader approach, including training or policy development or updates.

Between April 2022 and July 2024, 33 primary schools, one Pupil Referral Unit and six secondary schools were inspected. All schools except one, were judged to have safeguarding arrangements that meet requirements and provide no cause for concern. The school with an identified recommendation to improve safeguarding processes was quickly supported to develop and implement an action plan in response. The school was able to confirm then to Estyn that this recommendation had been addressed. Three primary schools had health and safety issues relating to site security identified and the local authority provided advice and support to those schools in quickly responding to the issues raised.

The strategic lead for safeguarding and the learning adviser work effectively in partnership with managers from social services and the human resources team in the management of allegations against members of staff from schools. Online safety is an area regularly considered by the Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Council actively encourages all schools to use the 360° Safe Cymru Tool and the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme. The IT Service Level Agreement provides for web filtering in schools.

3.5 Use of resources

Flintshire's response to funding reductions in recent years has been measured and appropriate. The Council has adopted a systematic approach to ensure that efficiencies are secured across all services and the organisation has embraced alternative models of delivery where appropriate. There are plenty of examples of good practice and innovation within the Council.

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. The schools' delegated budgets have been generally protected from efficiency reductions in recent years until the difficult decision taken for 2023-24 to cut 3% from the earmarked uplift for schools, reducing it to 5.1% rather than the 8.1% originally planned. 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 school funding formula is regularly reviewed in consultation with schools and reported to the School Budget Forum. Staffing, accommodation and financial resources are effectively managed and deployed to support learning and improvement. Partnership activity provides good value for money because it contributes to extensive opportunities and improved outcomes for learners in aspects which the Council and its schools alone could not provide.

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. The Council has also secured funding in recent times through Welsh Government's additional grant funding streams for Small and Rural Schools Infant Class Sizes, Welsh Medium, Childcare, Community Learning and Community Facilities and Additional Learning Needs. The Council has also maximised its investment programme through seeking additional external funding through Sports Wales to support schools to improve their facilities. The Council has a positive reputation for delivering quality projects on time and within budget.

The Council currently has an estimated Repair & Maintenance (R&M) of approximately £10.6m, which is a substantial improvement from the £35m backlog reported in the 2010 Strategic Outline Programme and has been achieved through targeted capital investment. However, the level of R&M remains a risk and is strategically linked to the rolling programme of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

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 in 24-25, 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 financial year in deficit in March 2024. 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.

Demographic changes in the distribution of pupils across the primary and secondary sectors have taken place in recent years, with secondary pupil numbers increasing whilst primary pupil numbers declined. This resulted in a redistribution of funding between sectors. Overall, in 2024/25, the fall in number of learners across sectors, led to a net reduction in funding to schools of £0.675m.

This downward trend in numbers of learners is forecast to continue, however it is anticipated that pupil numbers across both the primary and secondary sectors are likely to decrease, which will have a further negative financial impact on school funding, going forward.

Forecasted pupil numbers, for the next 3 years, are shown in Table 7 below and this highlights the decline in pupil numbers across both sectors. This is reflective of the declining birth rates in Flintshire.

Table 20: Pupil Forecasts

Sector	September 2024	September 2025	September 2026
Primary	11,099	10,835	10,641
Secondary	9,538	9,382	9,182

This worsening financial position is also reflected in a significant rise in the number of redundancies and other reductions in teaching and support staff across the school network at the end of this academic year.

Table 21: Redundancies 23-24

	No. of schools that commenced formal redundancy processes	Voluntary Teaching Redunancy notices issued for 2024/25*	Voluntary Support Staff Redunancy notices issued for 2024/25*	Complusory Teaching Redunancy notices issued for 2024/25*	Complusory Support Staff Redunancy notices issued for 2024/25*
Primary	5	2	2	0	0
Secondary	3	2	1	1	4
Specialist	0	0	0	0	0
Total	8	4	3	1	4

*as at 31st August 2024

A data gathering exercise with Flintshire schools in the summer term, to which over 80% of Headteachers responded to, identified the range of difficult financial decisions schools are having to make in order to manage their budgets. These cuts in posts and hours will obviously impact on the offer for children and young people and increase the workload of other staff in schools:

- Total Number of Fixed Term Contracts not renewed: **122**
- Total Number of leavers not replaced: **197.8**
- Total Number of maternity/paternity leaves not covered: **27.3**
- Total Number of posts where hours have been reduced: **118.75**

Where balances are above the recommended levels, schools are required to submit spending plans to clearly demonstrate how resources are being invested appropriately for the benefit of current learners. An annual report on school balances is presented to the Council's Education, Youth and Culture Committee and the Audit & Governance Committee for member scrutiny in September of each year.

The Portfolio's services are heavily dependent on funding from Welsh Government through the Local Authority Education Grant and the Education Improvement Grant and any reduction/removal of these grants poses a risk. This is carefully monitored through the risk management processes within the portfolio and more widely across the Council. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that grant funding is maximised to support strategic priorities and deliver quality services and drive positive change. Late notification from external funders for some services e.g. Youth Justice can make strategic planning difficult and create uncertainty within the workforce, impacting on recruitment and retention. In the best examples of targeted funding streams, early bespoke interventions with families make measurable contributions to improved educational outcomes.

There are detailed and rigorous financial management processes across the Council and regular reviews of portfolio budgets to ensure value for money and the identification of efficiencies. Cost pressures and other financial risks e.g. price volatility and inflation, are closely monitored. Over the last fifteen years the Council has taken £110m from its operating budget. The Education and Youth Portfolio has delivered £3.3m of efficiencies through the business planning process over the last eight years.

These efficiencies have been achieved whilst ensuring high quality services continue to meet need. Through regular portfolio budget management processes, senior managers take responsibility for their services budgets and are well supported by the corporate finance team. However, the Portfolio's budget has extremely limited capacity for any further efficiencies to support the Council's medium term financial strategy. It is also facing an unprecedented demand for services than ever before, particularly in relation to Additional Learning Needs and Education other than at School provision.

With a significant proportion of its budget used to commission the regional school improvement service, it is important that the Council is reassured that GwE has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation about financial arrangements are effective with both core funding and grant-expenditure kept under regular review by GwE, the host local authority, the Joint Committee and all Chief Executives across the region. Detailed work has been undertaken to align grant allocations with priorities. Supporting Improvement Advisers to challenge schools on their use of grant funding to improve pupil outcomes remains a priority.



In January 2024, there was a Ministerial decision to reroute grant funding from regional consortia to local authorities for 2024/25, as a result of the Middle Tier Review. Flintshire County Council supported in full the Ministerial request to ensure appropriate levels of funding were passported back to GwE to enable the ongoing delivery of effective school improvement services for the financial year whilst new models of delivery are developed and approved. Services for schools have continued to be delivered effectively through the Local Authority Commissioned Plan. A new model based on Welsh Government guidance is in the process of being developed for approval in the Autumn Term 2024.

Overall, the Council's education services, including schools, continue to provide good value for money.

3. Leadership & Management Summary

Areas for ongoing improvement & sustainability

- 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.
- 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.

