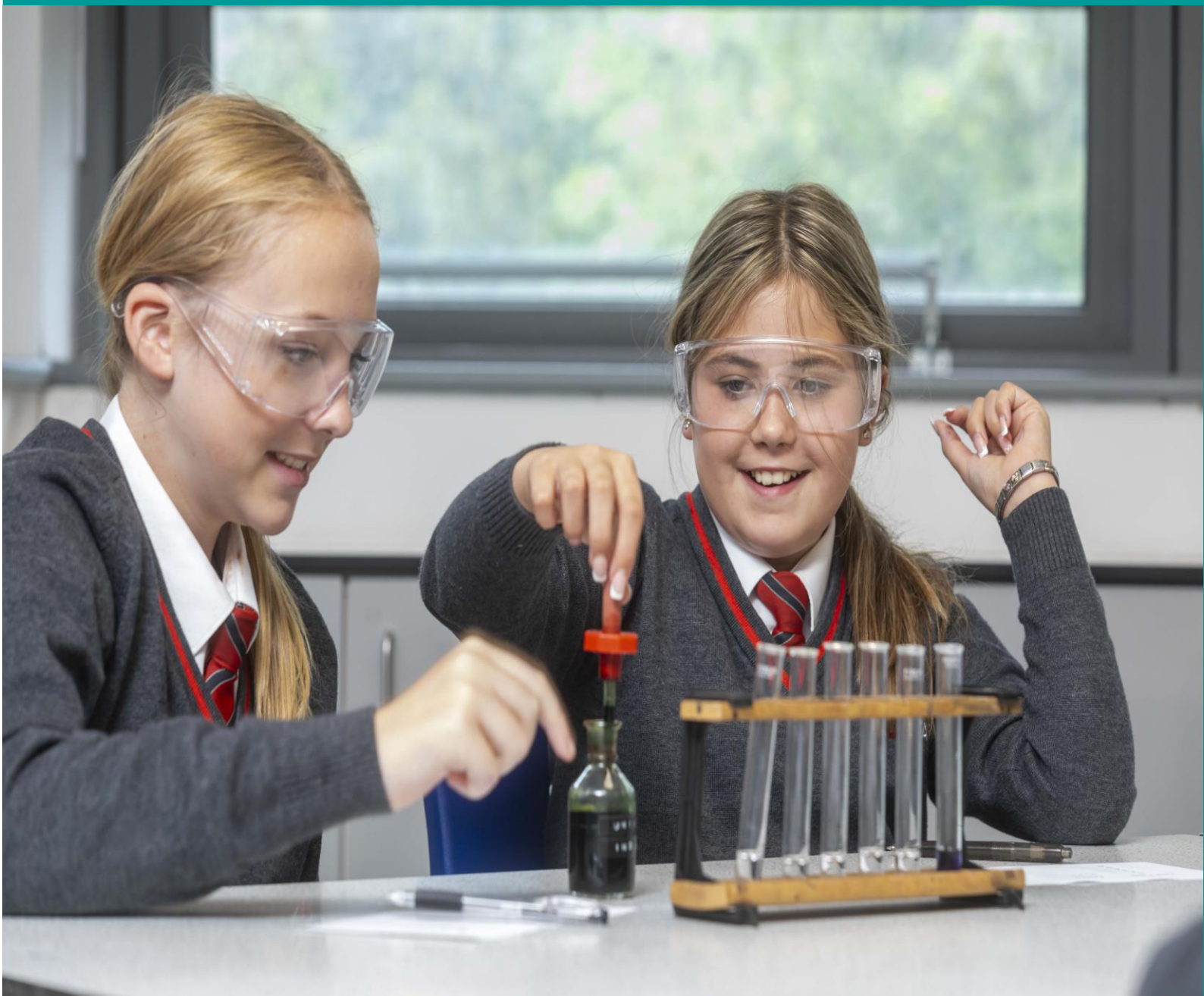




RHONDDA CYNON TAF

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES DIRECTORATE

EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-30

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg

This document is available in Welsh

November 2025

FOREWORD

As we look to the future and consider the [Council's Corporate Plan 2024-30](#), there is a need to renew and refresh our strategic vision and priorities for improvement within the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate and across our educational settings, schools and PRUs. So much has been achieved during the lifespan of the [Education Strategic Plan 2022-25](#) due to the tireless dedication of our education workforce and we have every confidence that through the effective implementation of this new plan and collaborative working across the system we will build on recent successes and further improve the services provided, the performance of our schools and learner outcomes.

Research tells us that the attainment gap between children and young people living in poverty and those who do not remains far too wide and generally increases as our learners move through the education system. Underpinning this strategic plan is a strong moral imperative and aspiration to tackle this attainment gap and to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their individual circumstances, access high quality teaching and learning, in excellent schools and timely support to enable them to fulfil their potential.

This plan aims to ensure that every school is led by strong leaders and governing bodies so that continuous improvement is secured, and the highest quality and educational provision is put in place for our learners. It is proposed that this will be achieved by investing in our educational workforce and by ensuring that our learners are well supported in inclusive schools, with access to a stimulating and appropriate curriculum that prepares every young person for life beyond school.

This cannot be achieved without the highest quality early years education so that children have a fair start in life and every opportunity to succeed as they progress through the education system.

It is imperative that we deliver for all our learners irrespective of their needs and personal circumstances, through access to timely support and early intervention and effective collaborative approaches across our schools, families, communities, directorates and strategic partners. By ensuring that we all work in effective partnership as one team to deliver on our new vision and identified strategic priorities, further improvements will be secured for the benefit of our learners, families and communities.



Gaynor Davies
Director of Education and Inclusion
Services



Cllr Rhys Lewis
Cabinet Member for Education and the
Welsh Language

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1. Introduction

Looking ahead to 2026–30, RCT’s Education and Inclusion Services Directorate is committed to building on recent achievements and driving further improvement across all services, educational settings and schools. This plan will build on the successes delivered through the successful implementation of the [Education Strategic Plan for 2022-25](#), the very positive [Estyn inspection](#) of Local Government Education Services in RCT in 2023, and an improving picture of Estyn inspection and learner outcomes across our registered education providers and schools.

Our new strategy is underpinned by a clear ambition: to close the attainment gap for children and young people living in poverty, ensuring that every learner, regardless of background or circumstance, has access to high-quality teaching and learning, effective and timely support, and opportunities to fulfil their potential. Ensuring equity and inclusion is fundamental to the strategy as every learner has the right to an inclusive education and access the necessary support to enable them to reach their potential.

This plan is rooted in the belief that strong leadership, effective governance, and collaborative working are essential to securing continuous improvement. By investing in our educational workforce and ensuring effective school improvement, high quality teaching and learning, we aim to provide excellent educational experiences for our learners so that they achieve the very best outcomes they are capable of. High quality early years education remains a cornerstone of our approach, as the foundational skills developed during this period are crucial for future success as learners progress on their education journey.

Our priorities for 2026–30 reflect the diverse needs of our communities and the challenges we face, including socio-economic barriers to learning, and the need to further improve the wellbeing, attendance, behaviour, and the outcomes for all learners.

We are committed to:

- Securing strong leadership and governance in our schools through effective collaboration and school improvement.
- Embedding excellent teaching, learning, and assessment practices that deliver good progression and outcomes for all.
- Ensuring all learners have access to the highest quality inclusive education and the right support to overcome barriers to learning and participation.
- Delivering safe and sustainable communities for learning, with modern facilities and strong family, community and external agency engagement to ensure the best possible outcomes for all learners.

By working collaboratively and successfully with schools, families, communities, and strategic partners, and aligning our efforts with the Council’s Corporate Plan, we will

collectively strive for excellence, equity and inclusion and secure the best possible outcomes for our learners in RCT.

2. Our Context

RCT is the third largest local authority in Wales, serving a diverse population of over 242,000, including nearly 43,000 children aged 0–15, the second largest population of this age range in Wales. The area is rich in culture and identity but faces significant socio-economic challenges, with a relatively high deprivation rate of 32% and the second highest number of young children living in these circumstances when compared with other local authorities ([Welsh Index Multiple Deprivation Analysis Relating to Young Children 2019](#)). Whilst the impact of the cost-of-living crisis is clearly evident in our communities, we have seen a significant reduction in the percentage of learners eligible for free school meals in recent years. It is likely that this is partly attributable to Welsh Government's roll out of Universal Primary Free School Meals. Extensive promotional activities are undertaken to compensate for this and to ensure that eligible families continue to apply for free school meals and benefit from the wider associated entitlements such as the School Essential Grant. The demand for early intervention and statutory services remains high due to complex community needs and the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

Welsh language use is growing in RCT, with 12.4% of residents able to speak Welsh—one of only four Welsh authorities to see an increase since the last census reflecting the strong commitment to the [Welsh language promotion strategy](#) and [Welsh in Education Strategic Plan](#) in RCT.

There are clear disparities in educational attainment in our communities: while over a quarter of residents hold a degree or equivalent, nearly a quarter have no qualifications. Despite this, learner outcomes at GCSE and A level are improving, and the attainment gap between our learners in RCT and the rest of Wales is narrowing. However, the gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers remains too wide and improving this remains a strategic priority for the authority across all outcome measures.

3. Strategic Planning

This new Education Strategic Plan 2026-30 will be closely aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan for 2024-2030, 'Working with our Communities'... The Corporate Plan outlines the Council's vision for an RCT where ...

All people, communities, and businesses can grow and live in a healthy, green, safe, vibrant, and inclusive County Borough where they can achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives and work, both now and in the future.

The Council's purpose and the reason it exists is...

To provide community leadership and deliver high quality public services, working alongside residents, communities and our partners so that people, businesses, and the environment can thrive and prosper.

The Corporate Plan focuses on four wellbeing objectives which will help the Council to improve the social, economic, environmental and well-being of RCT.



These four areas mirror the four pillars of sustainable development in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and are summarised as follows:

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES: Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

WORK AND BUSINESS: Helping to strengthen and grow RCT's economy.

NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT's environment and nature.

CULTURE, HERITAGE AND WELSH LANGUAGE: Recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future.

All four of the wellbeing objectives, contain priorities which specifically relate to our children and young people, our schools and the work of the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate. These have been summarised for ease of reference:



PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Children and young people have the best start in life and can learn and grow safely

- Supporting children and families to have the best opportunities to develop, be healthy, and enjoy activities in libraries and Community Hubs
- Helping children of all abilities and backgrounds to do the very best they can in school, focussing on continuous improvement and high standards
- Identifying and meeting the needs of our learners and their families as quickly as possible
- Providing great learning environments through new and improved early years settings and schools, including a new

NATURE & THE ENVIRONMENT

Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

- Protecting, supporting and working with nature to tackle both the climate and nature emergencies
- Managing public sector land to support sustainable projects including producing 'green energy' storing carbon, managing flood risk and increasing biodiversity and community food growing

Using Nature's Assets to benefit people and communities

- Continuing to invest in solar energy across our schools and Council buildings
- Providing a range of quality green spaces for people and communities to enjoy

special school and making Welsh medium education accessible to all

- Supporting children and young people of all abilities and backgrounds to overcome barriers to learning, including those experiencing poverty, so that they can achieve their best educational outcomes
- Ensuring that children, young people and their families have a voice and help us to shape and further improve our services and educational experiences

Residents can take care of their health & wellbeing so that they can live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives

- Tackling health inequalities and wider health determinants that directly affect the life chances of our residents through the Health Determinants Research Collaboration
- Developing community focused schools, that provide a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider communities

Safeguarding our most vulnerable residents of all ages, providing protection care and support when they need it most so that they can maximise their potential

- Protecting children, young people and adults at risk from harm, neglect and exploitation
- Giving vulnerable children and young people the best possible opportunities in life and ensuring access to safe and supportive environments suitable to their needs, to improve their well-being

CULTURE, HERITAGE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE

An RCT where culture and heritage are vibrant, and difference is celebrated in strong communities that enhance wellbeing

- Continuing to grow the use of the Welsh language so that it thrives in our homes, communities and work
- Recognising and improving our awareness of diversity in our communities so that we strengthen community cohesion and better meet the needs of our residents of all backgrounds

WORK AND BUSINESS

Supporting people into rewarding career pathways, skilled and secure work

- Supporting people of all ages to gain the skills, they need for jobs in our local communities and working with local businesses and training providers to identify appropriate opportunities for them
- Leading by example by providing experience, work and training opportunities within the Council particularly for young people and those experiencing barriers to work
- Working with our suppliers to increase social value and community benefits for all contract, for example through jobs, work experience and training
- Identifying and support jobs and skills development as part of Cardiff Capital Region e.g. in new and emerging technologies

The Corporate Plan also sets out some of the outcomes we aim to achieve with our communities by 2030, including:

- Attendance, exclusions and attainment in all our schools will continue to show strong progress, compare favourably with other parts of Wales, with improved educational outcomes, work and training opportunities for our school leavers.
- Families will have greater resilience; fewer children will be 'looked after' in our care and will have improved life chances.
- More of our residents will use the opportunities available across the county borough to keep active, healthy and well and reduce their risk of disease and ill health.
- More people in RCT will have the skills they need to find and progress in work.
- More people will be confident to use Welsh in their everyday lives and more learners access Welsh Medium Education.
- More opportunities will be provided for residents of all ages and backgrounds to 'connect' through arts, libraries and community activities and events

In addition to these elements, in April 2025, the Council's Cabinet committed to becoming signatories to the Welsh Government's Corporate Parenting Charter and approved priorities linked to RCT's promise to care experienced young people which include:

- We will make sure you feel cared for and supported.
- We will listen to you and take your opinions on board.
- We will provide you with a home that is a good fit for you, where you can be happy.
- We will make sure your mental health and wellbeing is prioritised.
- We will make sure you have access to education, employment and training opportunities that are tailored to you as an individual.
- We will support you to learn the skills you need to live a happier and independent life.
- We will celebrate your personal wins, however big or small.

The Education Strategic Plan for 2026-30 will reflect these overarching corporate priorities, outcomes and commitments and a golden thread will run through the Corporate, Directorate and Service Plans to ensure alignment of strategic priorities and developments.

4. The Education and Inclusion Services Directorate

The Education and Inclusion Services Directorate has a revenue budget in excess of £249M (2025/26) and has over 1,270 central staff and 4,590 school based staff. A significant proportion of the Council's capital investment programme is prioritised for

our schools and our ambitious Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme for the next nine years currently stands at £414M.

The Education and Inclusion Services Directorate serves 181 registered Care Inspectorate Wales childcare settings, 33 registered education providers and 111 schools. This includes 4 special schools (with a further new additional learning needs school in construction), 2 pupil referral units and 52 learning support classes. There are wide ranging multi-disciplinary services available to support schools, with areas of responsibilities including:

21st Century Schools

- Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme
- School Building Maintenance and the Capital Programme
- Risk Management and Compliance, Business Continuity and Emergency Planning
- School Organisation and the Planning of School Places
- Breakfast Clubs, Catering, Community Meals and School Cleaning
- Childcare Development and the Childcare Offer for Wales
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

School Improvement

- School Improvement Service
- Registered Education Providers
- 14-19 Strategy
- Hwb Education Technology
- Welsh Language Immersion Service
- Music Services

Inclusion Services

- Educational Psychology
- Learner Support Services
- Additional Learning Provision and Early Years ALN Team
- Virtual School/Children Looked After Team
- Additional Learning Needs Administrative Service
- Education Otherwise than at School
- Elective Home Education
- Minority Ethnic Achievement Service
- Family Liaison and Complex Case Team

Service Transformation and Data

- Management Information/Data
- School Information Management Systems
- School Admissions
- School Governance

Attendance and Wellbeing Service

- Attendance and Wellbeing Support

- Fixed Penalty Services
- Children Missing Education
- Community Focused Schools
- Child Licensing, Employment and Chaperones
- Safeguarding in Education
- Period Dignity and Poverty

These wide-ranging service areas, all work in close partnership with our educational settings, schools and PRUs and key Council services, including Human Resources, Finance, Health and Safety, Corporate Estates and Children's Services to support our educational settings to achieve their strategic priorities.

5. Service Self-Evaluation and Stakeholder Engagement

The Council's Performance Management Framework and Education and Inclusion Services Directorate's Service Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review Framework outlines how a strong performance culture, effective service self-evaluation and improvement planning is supported.

The service self-evaluation is an annual process that is central to the Council's performance arrangements. The process enables services across the Council, including the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate, to formally evaluate and identify strengths, priorities and areas for improvement which inform the annually refreshed five-year Directorate Delivery Plan. In the Education Directorate, there is one over-arching service self-evaluation and Delivery Plan covering all service areas and priorities for improvement for 2025-30. Our annual service self-evaluation process provides an opportunity to reflect on the extent to which sustainable development principles are embedded in our planning and decision-making processes, namely: long term thinking; prevention; integration; collaboration and involvement.

The analysis of data, quantitative and qualitative, is an important strand of our service self-evaluation which provides a secure evidence base for areas of improvement across all aspects of service delivery in the local authority and across our schools. This includes ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review of our performance; robust analysis of data dashboards across all service areas and schools; Estyn inspection outcomes and the progress of schools causing concern and accessing enhanced support; and formal and informal stakeholder engagement outcomes.

To inform our thinking, in addition to using existing feedback from a range of engagement activities and ongoing conversations gathered as part of our regular evaluation processes, extensive stakeholder engagement has taken place specifically

to inform the co-construction of the Education Strategic Plan for 2026-30. Key sources of information have included:

Education Colleagues

- School Leaders: headteacher perception survey outcomes (March 2025) and workshop outcomes (June 2025).
- Education and Inclusion Services Directorate staff: workshop sessions (July 2025).
- RCT's Governors Association: workshop session (July 2025).

Community Engagement

- Focus groups with parents/carers (June 2025).
- Focus groups with children and young people (June 2025).

Trade Unions

- Joint Consultative Committee (October 2025).

Elected Members

- Cabinet: Elected member feedback in meetings, including senior officer briefings (ongoing).
- Education and Inclusion Services Scrutiny Committee: members' feedback in meetings (ongoing).

Council Directorate

- Senior Leadership Team (SLT): Chief Executive and Director feedback in SLT meetings and senior officer briefings (ongoing).

The emerging themes from our stakeholder engagement highlighted the shared priorities for improvement over the next four years, with a strong consensus relating to the following areas in particular:

- Leadership; school improvement; self-evaluation; learner voice; workforce pressures and support; sharing best practice and success; and professional learning for schools and governing bodies.
- Teaching and learning; digital innovation; skills development; and improving standards.
- ALN; attendance; behaviour; safeguarding; equity for all, including vulnerable groups; and diversity and culture.
- Engagement and collaboration with families, communities and partners; community focused schools; and effective communication systems.
- School modernisation programme.

Emerging themes from stakeholder engagement have been captured in our strategic vision and priorities for improvement for 2026-30.

6. Our Strategic Vision for 2026-30

Welsh Government's [National Mission](#) is to achieve 'High Standards and Aspirations for All' by tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment and supporting every learner to achieve their aspirations. Central to this national mission is the commitment to ensuring that all learners access a broad and balanced education through the [Curriculum for Wales](#), which sets high standards for all, combining knowledge, skills and experiences. The [four purposes of Curriculum for Wales](#) are the shared aspiration for every child and young person, which guide the national ambition for lifelong learning and preparing our learners for life and the workplace.

Our Vision for Education in RCT for 2026-30, builds on this national mission, so that that we support all learners to overcome barriers to learning and achieve their potential. This will be achieved by all partners successfully collaborating to tackle the aspiration and attainment gap, ensuring that every school strives for excellence and delivers high quality teaching and learning for all learners. Our vision will focus on:



Effectively collaborating to secure excellence, equity and inclusion for all

The vision aligns with the Welsh Government's National Mission, the Council's Corporate Plan and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, emphasising sustainable development, prevention, integration, involvement, and long-term thinking.

Our vision, is centred on **collaboration** as this is the most effective way of addressing persistent inequalities, responding to local challenges and ensuring that every learner, regardless of background or personal circumstances, can access excellent and inclusive education. This approach is grounded in evidence, stakeholder feedback, and aligns with both local and national priorities.

Collaboration is at the core of our new model of school improvement due its strong focus on developing a self-improving system where schools can collectively share expertise, improve teaching and learning, and raise standards for all learners. This approach allows for more effective self-evaluation, encourages a culture of shared responsibility, and is focused on the effective implementation of national priorities, such as the Curriculum for Wales, consistently across our schools. There is already excellence within the Education system in RCT, however we need increasing numbers of schools to transition from good to excellent and for the minority of schools causing concern to make accelerated progress. Leadership and governance are strengths in

many schools but there are inevitable inconsistencies across the system. It is imperative that we build on the good practice where this exists and enhance capacity for self-improvement across the system so that services, schools, teaching and learning, and outcomes continue to improve.

Collaborative approaches are critical to ensuring that we deliver high quality educational provision for all, including vulnerable learners. The effective implementation of the [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#) (the ALNET Act) is reliant on collaboration so that learners with ALN receive early and effective support through improved information sharing and joined-up services. Working in close collaboration with key partners is vital for creating a simpler, more transparent, and less adversarial system that fully involves children, their parents, and carers in decision-making processes that affect them. Good work has been achieved in implementing the ALNET Act, but further improvement is required across the system. **Inclusion** in education remains an important focus as it creates a sense of belonging, enhances academic and social-emotional development for all learners, preparing all for life outside of school. Ensuring that school improvement and inclusion become more fully integrated over the next four years, will be an important strategic focus given the widely documented challenges within the system, both locally and nationally.

Achieving greater **equity** in education and learner outcomes in RCT is critical if we are to achieve [a more equal Wales](#) and is directly linked to improving the well-being of all learners. By ensuring every learner has the resources and support they need to succeed in inclusive environments, this will positively contribute towards improved outcomes and life chances. Our data suggests that closing the attainment gap for our vulnerable learners remains a significant priority, given the strong link between educational underachievement, poverty, and wider social inequalities which perpetuates the cycle of disadvantage in our communities.

Our vision can only be achieved by ensuring that everyone across the system aims to deliver **excellence** in education for all learners and strives for continuous improvement across our services and schools. Research consistently highlights that strong leadership, effective governance, and collaborative working are essential for continuous improvement and better learner outcomes for all. This collaboration must include our schools, families, communities, directorates, and strategic partners if we are to deliver timely support, early intervention, and inclusive education for all learners.

7. Our Strategic Priorities for 2026-30

Based on our extensive self-evaluation and stakeholder feedback, and building on the work of our 2022-25 strategic plan, local and national priorities, it is proposed that the following strategic priorities are adopted for the Education Strategic Plan for 2026-30:

Strategic Priority 1: Securing strong leadership, governance, and continuous improvement through effective collaborations

Strategic Priority 2: Embedding excellent teaching, learning and assessment practices that deliver good progression and outcomes for all

Strategic Priority 3: Ensuring all learners have access to the highest quality inclusive education and the right support to overcome barriers to learning and participation

Strategic Priority 4: Delivering safe and sustainable communities for learning

Sustainable development principles will underpin our approach to delivering these strategic priorities and a clear focus will be placed on the five ways of working as defined by the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The five ways of working include

- **Collaboration:** Working with others to deliver sustainable solutions and meet well-being objectives.
- **Integration:** Taking social, economic, and environmental issues into account in everything that is done.
- **Involvement:** Involving children, young people and stakeholders in the decisions that affect them.
- **Long-term thinking:** Making decisions that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- **Prevention:** Focusing on preventing problems from occurring or getting worse.

As defined in our vision, ensuring collaborative working will be of particular significance in ensuring that we secure our vision during the life of the new strategic plan.

Strategic Priority 1: Securing strong leadership, governance, and continuous improvement through effective collaborations

Strategic Priority 1: Rationalisation for prioritisation

The current policy landscape in Wales places leadership at the heart of collaborative, system-wide approaches to school improvement, raising standards and achieving equity for all learners.

Welsh Government's [School Improvement Partnership Programme](#) and policy direction on school improvement is based on a collaborative model of school improvement, where leadership is distributed across schools, local authorities, and national bodies. Our newly established school improvement service in RCT is based on a collaborative model and encourages school-to-school working, shared responsibility, and a shift from competition to collaboration, where leaders play a key role in sharing best practice and supporting each other to raise standards across the system.

Effective leadership is crucial for school improvement in Wales because leaders set a clear vision and foster a positive culture of continuous improvement. The strong link between [leadership and school improvement](#) is consistently identified by Welsh Government and Estyn as the most significant factor in improving schools and ensuring high-quality learning and teaching for all learners. Estyn reports and case studies highlight the role of effective leadership in the improvement journey of schools. Recruiting and retaining the highest calibre of leaders is imperative and we will continue to invest in the professional learning of our aspiring leaders, within schools and in the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate.

Leadership is central to the [School Improvement Guidance: Framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability](#), and highlights that embedding reflection, self-evaluation and improvement within schools requires strong leadership at all levels. Improving self-evaluation and improvement planning remains a frequent recommendation for improvement in inspection reports at school and local authority level across Wales, as highlighted in [Estyn's Annual Report 2023-24](#) and in the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate's inspection in 2023.

Leadership development is central to our school improvement efforts, and our recently established regional Professional Learning and Curriculum Support Service will continue to be closely monitored to ensure that it enables us to deliver on our strategic priorities.

[Welsh Government guidance](#) highlights that strong governance is essential for school improvement, effective leadership, and ensuring compliance with statutory duties. Governors play a vital role in overseeing the quality of education, setting a school's

vision and direction, and holding leaders to account for educational standards and financial management. However, governors' first-hand involvement in school improvement activity is variable across our schools and greater consistency is required.

High quality mandatory training and ongoing support for governors is required to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Enhancing our school governors' ability to act as critical friends and ensuring high quality training will be key given [Estyn's thematic report on governing bodies \(2023\)](#) and the variation in practice that exists across our schools.

Strategic Priority 1 will build on the successes of the Education Strategic Plan for 2022-25 which are summarised as follows:

- Successful local authority [Estyn inspection \(2023\)](#) of education services, which included two best practice case studies identified by the inspectorate on:
 - The development of future leaders in education through a strong professional learning offer and effective succession planning
 - The use of data across the local authority to inform planning, decision making and support for schools.
- Other positive leadership aspects identified during the inspection suggested that leaders provided clear, purposeful leadership and had high expectations. It was also felt that there was a clear understanding of leaders' roles and responsibilities and that they were empowered to take action to provide valuable services and improve outcomes. It was felt that there was a clear programme for evaluation and improvement in place and that staff felt supported, valued and well-informed of the direction and vision for improvement. As a consequence, Estyn felt that over time, the local authority had effectively and incrementally improved the services provided.
- The Directorate's Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review Framework has been updated, Delivery Plans structures aligned with strengthened use of performance indicators and success criteria across all service areas in Education. Highly effective use of data and stakeholder engagement is now used to inform service self-evaluation and strategic planning.
- There have been 63 published school inspections across the 2022/23 to 2024/25 academic years. 48 schools inspected from a total of 111 schools with published reports were judged to require no follow up. At the time of writing, 107 of our 111 schools (96.4%) are not in a statutory follow up category with Estyn. During 2024/25, there have been 6 registered education provider inspections with good and excellent outcomes achieved in most cases.
- Multiple schools have been identified as demonstrating strong leadership (e.g. [Ysgol Hen Felin](#); [Dolau Primary School](#); [Llwydcoed Primary](#); [Llanhari Primary School](#) and [Y Pant](#)) during school inspections and asked to write best practice cases studies.
- Very positive perceptions of strategic leadership within the Education Directorate (March 2025) with most headteachers strongly agreeing or agreeing that:
 - effective policies were in place which reflected national and local priorities (95.3%);

- the vision, mission, and LA priorities for improvement were clearly identified and well communicated (92.9%);
 - the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) was clear and prioritised the growth and development of the Welsh language and provision (91.8%);
 - there was effective and regular communication (91.8%);
 - there was strong and effective leadership in the Education Directorate (90.6%);
 - there were robust systems for managing finances (90.5%); and effective partnership and multi-agency working (88.2%).
- Very positive perceptions of the Quality of Services and Support in the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate (March 2025).
 - Nearly all headteachers (over 95%), rated the support and services for: Human Resources; resource and financial management; and safeguarding provided as good or excellent
 - Most school leaders (over 90%) rated support and services for: health and safety; school governance; attendance and wellbeing; safety and risk management; emergency planning; school admissions; data and information management; and professional learning for aspiring leaders as good or excellent
 - Over 85% rated support and services for: building management and maintenance; school organisation and planning; and children looked after as good or excellent
 - Over 80% rated support and services for school improvement (Central South Consortium and the Local Authority); professional learning (Central South Consortium) and registered education providers as good or excellent.
- Established effective relationships and partnerships with our schools, and opportunities for sharing best practice across a range of fora, including the Federation of Primary Headteachers, Association of Secondary Headteachers, Deputy Secondary Headteacher Forum and Cluster Convenors.
- Transformational changes to our schools' information management systems have taken place, with highly effective approaches adopted to the management of this change across all schools.
- Extensive work has been undertaken in relation to the Middle Tier Review and a co-constructed new school improvement service established, with supporting guidance documents developed.
- Developed highly effective systems and processes for reviewing all schools and for providing early intervention and support for schools causing concern. As a result of RCT's intervention programmes, five senior leaders were supported by System Leaders and 12 schools accessed Regional Leads for Governance support during 2024-25.
- Delivered highly effective Aspiring Leadership programmes, with high success rates for securing leadership positions and ensuring effective succession planning. A full complement of 16 practitioners accessed the Aspiring Leadership programme in 2024-25 and feedback is consistently excellent.
- Strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan ([Education and Inclusion Services Scrutiny Committee, 2025](#)) has been effective with improved outcomes achieved across most outcome measures. Engagement from partners has also been extremely positive and a

positive Estyn inspection of the Welsh Language Immersion Service was undertaken in October 2025.



Strategic Priority 1 will need to build on the following identified areas for improvement:

- Continually refine our approaches to service self-evaluation (Recommendation 1: To sharpen approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning – Estyn Inspection 2023).
- Further improve self-evaluation processes and improvement planning in our schools as this continues to be a frequent recommendation from Estyn inspections.
- Headteacher perception survey outcomes suggest that there is a need for the Directorate to strengthen parental/carers and learner engagement in strategic planning.
- Establish focus groups with school leaders to further explore less favourable stakeholder perceptions in relation to a small number of service areas.
- Further improve school performance and reduce the number of schools requiring enhanced support from school improvement services due to concerns (eight at the time of writing) or Estyn statutory follow up (a further four schools at the time of writing).
- Ensure that the newly established school improvement service delivers highly effective school improvement through direct support and effective deep and purposeful collaborations across the education system.
- Ensure that the new professional learning and curriculum support service meets the needs of our schools and governing bodies and contributes to school improvement.

Strategic Priority 1: High Level Strategic Actions

This priority focuses on ensuring that we have the highest quality and skilled education workforce possible, and that governance is robust and effective, resulting in aspirational and high performing schools and services. The identified actions to deliver this priority are:

- Leaders and governors across the system create a culture of high ambition, expectations and performance within their schools.
- Leadership and governance across our schools is highly effective, with timely support and intervention provided where concerns emerge.
- Systems and processes within the local authority result in the swift identification of schools causing concern, timely intervention and school improvement.
- Schools and services accurately self-evaluate their performance and have evidence-based improvement plans in place that deliver continuous improvement and measurable impact.
- Schools and governing bodies' self-evaluation and improvement plans focus on the development of highly effective teaching and learning strategies and improving the outcomes of all learners.
- Schools and services being equipped with robust and efficient management information systems and digital literacy training, enhancing data-driven self-evaluation, strategic decision making, service and school effectiveness.
- Children, young people and their families are provided with meaningful opportunities to help shape and further improve services and educational provision.
- School improvement services facilitate deep and purposeful collaborations that deliver highly effective school to school support, the sharing of best practice and improvements across the system.
- Professional learning provided by the regional service and central services for schools and governing bodies reflects strategic priorities and deliver improvement.
- Governors are provided with high quality professional learning that equips them with the strategic leadership skills to engage in school improvement activities and to evaluate impact.
- Effective workforce development plans are in place which focus on effective recruitment and retention of staff, and robust approaches to succession planning.
- Collaborative approaches to addressing workforce pressures, sharing expertise and staff across groups of schools, ensuring economies of scale and resilience.
- Leaders and managers are supported to improve performance and outcomes through effective performance management and professional learning opportunities.
- Cross directorate collaborations are strengthened to ensure that early intervention and prevention approaches are aligned, efficient and deliver improved outcomes.
- The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan delivers improvement across all seven outcomes.
- Support is provided to ensure that nearly all schools remain within a positive budget position and effective use of grant funding is made at school and Directorate level.

Strategic Priority 1: Outcomes we want to see by 2030

- Effective leadership and governance are evident in most schools (90% or more)
- Governor vacancies are reduced (by 25% or more).
- Many schools (70% or more) are involved in collaborative school improvement activity with other schools and can demonstrate impact.
- Most (90% or more) school leaders either strongly agree or agree that the regional professional learning and curriculum support services is good or excellent.
- Nearly all (95% or more) schools are not in a statutory category or require enhanced support.
- Nearly all (95% or more) schools requiring enhanced support and not in a statutory category no longer require support following two terms of intervention.
- The % of year 1 learners attending Welsh medium education is increased by at least 4% over a four-year period.
- Transition rates across all key transition points in Welsh medium education show improvement year on year across all PIs.
- Nearly all (95% or more) schools do not require support via the budget deficit protocol.

Strategic Priority 2: Embedding excellent teaching, learning and assessment practices that deliver good progression and outcomes for all

Strategic Priority 2: Rationale for Prioritisation

Over the next four years, careful consideration needs to be given to how approaches to assessment can be further developed to reflect the context of the Curriculum for Wales, recognising that assessment is integral to helping good teaching and improving children and young people's understanding of their learning. Teaching and learning strategies should focus on high quality inclusive education through the delivery of a highly effective curriculum, and a strong emphasis on pedagogy that promotes learners' independence and authentic experiences.

In line with Welsh Government guidance, assessment should be viewed as [supporting learner progression](#), continuous and integral process of teaching and learning. Assessment for learning practices are central to the Curriculum for Wales, enabling teachers to use ongoing assessment to inform teaching decisions and helping learners to understand their progress and next steps. Additionally, assessment is most effective when it supports learner progression, is embedded in curriculum design, and promotes meaningful dialogue about learning. As a result, there is a need to ensure that schools' assessment approaches effectively identify the progress learners are making across the curriculum and the changes that are required to ensure further progression.

The overarching purpose of our school improvement service is to provide effective support and professional challenge to all schools, which ensures all learners have the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background or circumstance, in order to achieve high standards and aspirations for all. Teaching and learning approaches should foster independence, reflective learning, and authentic experiences that develop the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. The most recent thematic report from Estyn on [teaching the Curriculum for Wales](#) highlights the pivotal role of teaching in realising the aims of the Curriculum for Wales and in securing improved outcomes for all learners. It emphasises the importance of placing pedagogy at the centre of educational improvement, calling on schools, local authorities and national partners to maintain a strong focus on high-quality teaching.

Similarly, the report refers to the impact of professional learning opportunities and states ‘where high-quality professional learning has the greatest impact, it is sustained, collaborative and focused directly on improving teaching’. In addition, effective and impactful teaching, learning and assessment are the key to successfully engaging all learners in their education journey and delivering improved outcomes.

The four key strategic aims listed below are fundamental if school improvement strategies within a school are to secure effective learner progress and improved outcomes for all learners:

- Develop effective, collaborative professional learning for the workforce.
- Embed systemic assessment practices to robustly inform both teaching and learning.
- Ensure all learners have equal access to education regardless of their background or vulnerabilities, including a focus on developing skills in communication and Welsh language acquisition.
- Provide targeted support for those with additional learning needs.

It is vital that high quality professional learning is fully embedded in all our schools and underpins the development of formative assessment practices that are relevant to the context of individual schools. All teaching and learning approaches must encourage reflection, evaluation and collaboration between all staff and pupils as part of an active teaching and learning cycle which demonstrates strong and effective learner progress. Furthermore, all approaches that enable teachers and support staff to evaluate learners’ understanding and application of knowledge and skills, requires careful and skilful planning and implementation.

The impact of these strategic aims will be a highly skilled workforce that promote resilience and independence in all their learners. As a result, all learners would use their skills and knowledge effectively to evaluate and improve their own and their peers’ learning and make strong progress from their initial individual starting points.

The [Welsh Language and Education \(Wales\) Act 2025](#) is strategically important for this plan and Welsh language development as it transforms the aspiration of a bilingual Wales into a statutory, system-wide reality. It will ensure that every child in Wales has the opportunity to become a confident Welsh speaker, regardless of their background,

and that the education system is equipped, accountable, and resourced to deliver this vision.

Strategic Priority 2 will build on the successes of the Education Strategic Plan for 2022-25 which are summarised as follows:

School Improvement

- Estyn inspection findings during this period were mostly positive and indicated that the quality of teaching was strong in most schools, with good practice case studies requested from a number of schools. For example, [Dolau Primary School](#) was commended for developing leadership and teaching through professional learning pathways.
- Inspection outcomes in registered education provider settings are consistently good or better.
- A [new School Improvement Service](#) and models of service delivery have been established in partnership with schools.
- Eleven pilot collaboratives have been established, eight vertical and three horizontal.
- A newly commissioned regional professional learning and curriculum support service has been established, and the offer informed by an analysis of strategic priorities across our schools.
- The Directorate has well established All School Review protocols and systems for enabling collaborative reviews of all schools' performance, and the brokering of support for schools causing concern. Through the early identification of support needs, this collaborative process for evaluating schools with emerging concerns has facilitated tailored interventions and ensured greater consistency in teaching quality.
- Team Around the School approaches have ensured effective collaboration by bringing together multiple local authority services to jointly address and overcome teaching and learning challenges.
- School improvement activity has reviewed the effectiveness of schools' tracking systems to ensure that all learners, particularly vulnerable learners, make appropriate progress.

Curriculum Design and Implementation

- Schools have embedded Curriculum for Wales principles into teaching and learning policies, which are routinely discussed through All School Review processes.
- Improvement Partners highlighted that all schools have effective teaching and learning policies and schemes of learning aligned to the Curriculum for Wales.
- Curriculum design is becoming increasingly bespoke and learner-centred, focusing on progression and local context.

- Development of professional learning communities across clusters have been established to support curriculum design and assessment for learning.

Professional Learning and Leadership Development

- Central South Consortium (CSC) collaboration projects have provided effective curriculum and pedagogy expertise.
- A strong and coherent professional learning offer has been embedded across schools and central services, with 96–100% of participants rating training as good or very good.
- Aspiring Leader and Middle Leader programmes have effectively developed leadership capacity to secure strategic succession planning across the local authority. 34 practitioners commenced CSC's Middle or Senior Leaders Development Programmes in 2024-25 and nine new or acting headteachers commenced their participation in the New and Acting Headteacher Programme from December 2024. A further nine school leaders engaged in the new Leadership of Vulnerable Learners professional learning programme during 2024-25.
- Subject-specific networks and cross-phase moderation support has provided consistency in approaches to pedagogy and assessment.
- Improvement Partners have routinely evaluated and reported on the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in our schools, ensuring accountability and timely support and intervention.

Effective Use of Data and Assessment for Learning

- There has been a strong focus on using data to inform teaching and intervention, with Improvement Partners routinely analysing school data to ensure tracking systems identify vulnerable learners early.
- Local authority staff use School on Page analytics to triangulate teaching performance with outcome and wellbeing indicators.
- Schools routinely use performance data effectively for self-evaluation and improvement planning. Power BI dashboards and the new management information system for schools, enables teachers and leaders to access real-time data on attendance, exclusions, and progression.

Support for the Welsh Language and Bilingual Teaching

- Good progress has been made in expanding Welsh-medium teaching capacity through the development of the Taith Iaith Welsh Language Immersion Service, supporting learners transitioning to Welsh-medium settings. Cymraeg yn y Cartref short courses have also been made available for parents/carers to support bilingual learning at home.
- Estyn has highlighted good practice in relation to the development in Welsh oracy skills and one school was invited to write a best practice case study ([YGG Llwyncelyn](#)).

Collaboration and Good Practice Sharing

- Termly headteacher and deputy headteacher forums routinely focus on key teaching and learning themes — self-evaluation, assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy.
- Primary and secondary forums use Estyn inspection findings to share good practice and address common improvement areas. For example, Ysgol Rhydywaun recently shared their positive best practice case studies on [their provision for developing pupils reading and oral skills](#) following their recent Estyn inspection.
- Cross-service collaboration ensures joined-up professional learning, inclusion, and wellbeing support directly impacting classroom practice and removing barriers to learning.

Impact Evidence and Outcomes

- Access and Inclusion Service delivered and evaluated year-3 of the Early Years Language Project, with positive outcomes delivered.
- Teaching and learning quality are showing alignment with improving Estyn outcomes with 96.4% of schools not in a statutory follow-up.
- Improved GCSE and A-Level outcomes (unverified summer 2025 data) on many measures, with a narrowing of the gap between RCT learners, and all Wales datasets.



Strategic Priority 2 will need to build on identified areas for improvement:

- Ensuring that the Curriculum for Wales for non-maintained settings is robustly developed across all its settings.
- Continuing to develop, evaluate and evolve new school improvement models and performance frameworks based on Welsh Government guidance.

- Ensuring that schools become self-improving and less reliant on enhanced support or statutory intervention support to secure improvement.
- Supporting schools to effectively self-evaluate and deliver robust school improvement practices that secure strong learner progression and narrow the attainment gap.
- Supporting secondary schools to effectively self-evaluate and further improve teaching and assessment standards.
- Making sure that primary schools use robust self-evaluation strategies to effectively underpin and secure high-quality teaching, learning and assessment practices
- Ensuring that primary schools effectively self-evaluate practices to systematically embed learners' independence.
- Ensuring schools are focused on improving learners' skills development.
- Further improving Key Stage 4 and 5 outcomes on all performance indicators.

Strategic Priority 2: High Level Strategic Actions

Strategic Priority 2 will align closely with Welsh Government's [School Improvement Guidance: Framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability \(2024\)](#) to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are developed systematically. It will also support leaders in engaging with the [Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership \(2019\)](#) and the [National Professional Learning Entitlement \(2023\)](#). Professional learning should be collaborative, enquiry-based, and focused on improving classroom pedagogy and assessment practice.

The identified actions to deliver this priority are:

- Ensure that the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings is consistently implemented in registered education provider settings.
- Develop effective strategic plans across directorates aimed at improving early years provision and effective multi-agency working.
- Develop a robust understanding in all schools of what constitutes effective teaching and learning.
- Ensure that school leaders consistently evaluate the effectiveness of their provision, the quality of teaching and impact on learner progress.
- Facilitate regular professional learning opportunities for all school practitioners to improve their understanding and use of effective formative assessment practices.
- Support and evaluate the impact of collaborations, vertical and horizontal, to promote and develop a self-improving system which has learners' progress at the heart of the process.
- Ensure that the new school improvement service evaluates the curriculum offer, meets the mandatory and statutory Welsh Government guidance and places a relentless focus on learner acquisition of literacy, numeracy, digital and Welsh skills.

- Develop and support the delivery of the National Framework for the Welsh Language Education, further enhancing the learning of Welsh across all of our schools.
- Develop a local authority digital strategy to further enhance teaching and learning and skills development across all educational settings.
- Ensure robust and effective transition planning with a focus on skills development and progression cross the curriculum.
- Ensure that every school has effective assessment processes and procedures for tracking learner progress and providing timely support where necessary.
- Ensure that schools have effective policies and strategies in place to promote equity and mitigate the impact of poverty or other barriers to learning on educational achievement and engagement in education.
- Support the effective evaluation of the impact of school provision for ALN, vulnerable and more able and talented learners, identifying and prioritising areas for improvement and further evaluation.

The strategic implementation of these priorities will ensure consistency in formative assessment, greater alignment of teaching and learning practices with the Curriculum for Wales and enhanced professional collaboration across schools and clusters.

Strategic Priority 2: Outcomes we want to see by 2030

- Future school-based Estyn inspections have case studies and spotlights which focus on the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- Future school-based Estyn inspections have case studies and spotlights which focus on the effectiveness of pupils' skill development and independence.
- Most schools (90% or more) do not have a recommendation for skills development when inspected by Estyn.
- Nearly all (95% or more) of schools are not in a statutory category or require enhanced support.
- Most (90% or more) of schools requiring enhanced support (and not in a statutory category) no longer require support following two terms of intervention.
- Most schools (90% or more) show improvement across all Key Stage 4 outcome measures.
- Most schools (90% or more) show improvement across all Key Stage 5 outcomes across all measures.
- The gap between RCT and all Wales Key Stage 4 outcomes shows improvement across most measures, including vulnerable groups (e.g. eFSM, ALN, looked after children).
- The gap between RCT and all Wales Key Stage 5 outcomes shows improvement across most measures, including vulnerable groups (e.g. eFSM, ALN, looked after children).

Strategic Priority 3: Ensuring all learners have access to high quality inclusive education and the right support to overcome barriers to learning and participation

Rationale for Prioritisation

The local authority has made significant progress in implementing the [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#) and in embedding inclusive practices across our schools and educational settings. Despite this, our data and stakeholder feedback demonstrate that there are unprecedented pressures in the system due to increasing numbers of learners with complex needs, against a backdrop of significant budgetary and workforce challenges. Demands on central services and ALNCoS have increased dramatically, and we have seen a significant growth in the number of Educational Tribunal Wales appeals against the local authority. Developing highly effective partnership and dispute resolution approaches has never been more important as parents/carers navigate a complex ALN system.

In view of national challenges, the Welsh Government recently commissioned a [Review of the Additional Learning Needs Legislative Framework](#). Since its publication, the Cabinet Secretary for Education has set out five priorities for the next phase of ALN reform:

- Clarifying who and how learners get support
- Ensuring national consistency
- Improving support for families
- Strengthening multi-agency integration
- Advancing bi-lingual and inclusive education

Significant improvements in the quality of ALN policies, quality assurance processes and provision have been evident during the last four years and effective use of ALN grant funding has been made. However, stakeholder feedback tells us that our systems and processes require further streamlining and more advanced digital platforms to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and reduced workload.

Leaders and staff at many schools and settings have made good progress in developing inclusive cultures and practices, but there is still work to be done in further developing schools' vision for inclusion and ensuring that teaching and learning meets the needs of all pupils effectively and reduces demand for specialist placements. Whilst there is excellent inclusive practice in many of our schools, further work on upskilling the workforce in improving teaching and learning for all learners would be beneficial so that there is greater consistency across our schools.

Investment in ALN provision has been significant, but demand for specialist placements are unprecedented. Estyn feedback on our learning support class provisions is consistently good, and we are seeing increasingly positive feedback in

relation to mainstream inclusion approaches which has been shared widely and celebrated. Indeed, our own Estyn feedback during our inspection in 2023, identified provision for ALN as being strong but pressures across the system, both locally and nationally, persist.

There has been some growth in the number of learners requiring a school or local authority maintained individual development plan (IDP), but numbers remain relatively low in comparison to the number of learners identified as having ALN under the old SEN system.

Significant progress has been made in terms of early years processes and procedures, and in providing specialist transitional support for learners requiring early intervention and support. Further work is required with wider agencies to ensure timely support for younger children with emerging or identified ALN through improved collaboration with health and third sector organisations. Expansion of Welsh medium ALN provision has been undertaken, but further growth is likely to be required for the duration of the plan.

Whilst small and steady gains in attendance rates have been evident across the system, this has not been consistent across all schools and there is a need to further improve the attendance of learners eligible for free school meals, especially at secondary level. Attendance remains a significant strategic priority, both locally and nationally. Estyn's thematic review into [Improving Attendance at Secondary School](#) highlights the need for local authorities to work with parents and carers to understand the importance of good attendance and to provide schools with regular and effective challenge and support to improve pupils' attendance and help to evaluate the impact of their work.

Concerns around the non-engagement of some learners in education due to their mental health needs, has created increasing demands on education other than at school services, and a significant growth in electively home educated learners, especially in years 10 and 11, has been evident.

Exclusions have shown a steady increase in the post-pandemic phase, but a significant reduction was evident in fixed term and permanent exclusions during 2024/25. This progress needs to be built upon, and best practice shared by the schools that have demonstrated the most significant improvement. Estyn's thematic review into [Fostering Mutual Respect Promoting Positive Behaviours in Secondary Schools](#) highlights the challenges across the Education system in Wales and the importance of effective leadership. It was highlighted that the most successful schools had high expectations of their learners and staff, strong leadership of well-being, supported by effective behaviour policies consistently implemented by staff and regular professional learning for teachers. Estyn highlighted that effective practice was often underpinned by a strong commitment to trauma-informed and restorative approaches to support pupils' emotional needs, and effective engagement with parents, carers and the wider community.

Our local data highlights significant variation across schools, with nearly half of our primary schools not excluding any learners. Similarly, at secondary level, there is some excellent practice in some settings and some schools have successfully reduced their

exclusion rates by adopting a more bespoke curriculum offer and strengthening their whole school approach to managing pupil behaviour. The Welsh Government's Rights, Respect, Equality guidance frames anti-bullying work as part of a broader commitment to children's rights and equality. Effective anti-bullying strategies are necessary to ensure every child's right to education in a safe and respectful setting particularly given the well documented adverse impact of social media on learners mental health and wellbeing, and Estyn's thematic report on [experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales](#). Bullying data does not highlight significant issues, but there are concerns that this may not accurately reflect school-based issues experienced as learners may not wish to disclose some of the challenges faced.

Strategic Priority 3 will build on the successes of the Education Strategic Plan for 2022-25 which are summarised as follows:

- The local authority Estyn inspection highlighted that support for ALN was strong and there was effective use of data and information that reflected community needs and promoted equity of provision.
- Estyn inspection outcomes suggest that schools' provision for wellbeing is generally effective, and recommendations for improvement relating to behaviour and wellbeing as rare.
- There has been significant investment in ALN provision and we have opened three Welsh medium learning support class provisions in the last three years. A further five learning support class (LSC) provisions were opened in 2025, including a new early years satellite base for Ysgol Hen Felin and a new ALN school is currently under construction (due to open in September 2026). All special schools have also received investment to improve and/or extend facilities.
- School inspection reports generally comment very favourably on our LSC provision which generally highlight high-quality differentiated teaching and individualised strategies, clear understanding of pupil needs, and effective monitoring of learning progress. Learners in LSCs have also been identified as making progress commensurate with or better than their mainstream peers in some settings.
- A number of our settings have received very favourable comments from Estyn on ALN. [Ysgol Hen Felin](#) was asked to write a best practice case study on the school's wellbeing hub and its crucial role in enhancing community engagement and promoting overall well-being of pupils, parents and staff. [Ysgol Rhydywaun](#) was also commended by Estyn for its highly effective whole school approaches to supporting pupils with ALN and [Tai Education Centre](#), our primary pupil referral unit, had an exemplary inspection report.
- Through the effective use of grant funding, teaching staff have increasingly adopted trauma-informed and nurture-based approaches, improving engagement and behaviour in our schools.
- Since 2020, the local authority has invested nearly £5M in step 4 provisions, enabling schools to deliver more inclusive, personalised teaching for learners with behavioural or emotional challenges. This has resulted in improved

exclusion, attendance, engagement and learner qualifications for targeted groups of learners.

- Post-pandemic exclusion rates showed a sharp increase, but improvement was evident in 2024-25 with a 51.7% reduction in permanent exclusions and a 23.5% reduction in the number of days lost across schools.
- Although attendance at both primary and secondary phase remains below the Welsh average, primary attendance has increased 1.3 percentage points between 2022/23 and 2024/25 and secondary attendance has increased 2.2 percentage points in the same period. Secondary attendance has outperformed the Welsh average increase of 1.5 percentage points in the same time frame.
- Effective early intervention approaches involving outreach from our special schools have delivered positive outcomes in the early years.
- A total of 180 year 11 pupils at risk of becoming not in education, employment and training engaged positively with the Green Light Project in 2024/25 (an increase of 43 compared to 2023/24) and have secured positive post 16 plans prior to leaving school.
- Over the last five years, the Council has significantly invested in family engagement officers (34 school settings to date) which has enhanced the capacity of schools to strengthen their engagement strategies and support for the most vulnerable. Extensive family learning projects have been undertaken across many schools, utilising multiply grant funding, resulting in significant improvements in [community focused schools](#) initiatives across the county borough.
- A pilot junior apprenticeship scheme commenced in 2025 in Coleg Y Cymoedd, involving 34 year 10 and 11 learners from five Rhondda schools. Early feedback is very favourable.
- Our breakfast club provision has been digitalised and provides daily provision on all primary school and special school sites.
- The roll out of Universal Primary Free School Meals was completed in April 2024, six months ahead of schedule, with an investment exceeding £8M in upgrading kitchen and dining facilities.
- A highly successful Food and Fun provision was delivered in 14 schools over the summer period (2025) for families in need.
- Big Bocs Bwyd facilities have been established on 10 schools sites, providing pay-as-you feel shop facility for families in school communities.
- In line with the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience within the Curriculum for Wales, we have launched a new menu to all schools aimed at supporting healthy eating habits.



Strategic Priority 3 will need to build on identified areas for improvement:

- Despite significant investment in additional learning provision, significant capacity pressures in the ALN sector persist, suggesting that strengthened medium to long term strategic planning relating to ALN provision is required.
- Guidance documents require review and revision to reflect all recently issued national documentation relating to the implementation of the ALNET (Wales) Act.
- Given the perception feedback on the quality of services and support for statutory ALN processes and behaviour support there is a need to strengthen statutory processes and the provision for learners with social, emotional and behavioural needs within our services, schools and specialist provisions.
- Continue to evaluate the step 4 provision, to ensure that the alternative pathways and support offered complies with policies, provides value for money and delivers improved outcomes.
- Evidence suggests that engagement in individual and group tuition requires improvement, and greater alignment of key policies and processes is needed to ensure consistency and efficient service delivery.
- Increases in the numbers of learners accessing elective home education learners, has seen rates per 1000 exceeding the all-Wales average for the first time in 2025.
- Exclusion and attendance data requires further improvement so that Estyn recommendations are met, and outcomes for vulnerable learners are improved.
- The incidence of learners presenting with complex needs in the early years continues to grow, resulting in significant capacity pressures in mainstream settings.
- Parents/carers continue to experience difficulties navigating a complex ALN system and find it challenging to access timely advice and guidance.

- Need to ensure that there is sufficient specialist workforce capacity, including Welsh medium provision, to meet the increasingly complex needs of our learners, their families and schools.
- Whilst some work has been undertaken to develop anti-racist action plans, further strategic developments are required to celebrate diversity.
- Ensure that statutory anti-bullying policies and strategies are effective and keep learners safe.
- A new accessibility strategy now requires development in partnership with key stakeholders.
- An attendance, safeguarding and wellbeing strategy aimed improving the wellbeing of our learners, including vulnerable groups, and our workforce is required.
- All schools should have a strong family engagement strategy that promotes effective partnership working with families and communities facing challenges.

Strategic Priority 3: High Level Strategic Actions

All children and young people should be well prepared for their future lives, and this is a clear aspiration of the Curriculum for Wales; enabling them to become ambitious, enterprising, ethical and healthy with accessible support for their careers, relationships, health and wellbeing. It is essential that there is equity in education so that all learners are supported in inclusive schools to overcome barriers and fulfil their potential. In order to achieve this, learners should be well supported to develop a wide range of skills, experiences and dispositions that enable them to thrive and achieve success.

The identified actions to deliver this priority are:

- Undertake a strategic review of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision, so that this informs strategic investment over the next four years and ensures sufficiency of ALN provision to meet need.
- Provide effective school improvement and inclusion support for schools to ensure high quality additional learning provision in accordance with the requirements of the ALN legislation and Code.
- Further develop early intervention and preventative approaches to support learners with emerging ALN and high incidence ALN.
- Update local authority guidance to ensure greater clarity and transparency around decision making and the definition of 'significantly greater difficulty in learning' and provision that is 'generally made available'.
- Further improve the access to information, advice and guidance for the families of children with ALN and effective dispute resolution support when issues emerge.
- Adopt an authority-wide approach to promoting positive engagement between families and schools.

- Continue to work collaboratively with the School Improvement Service and schools to promote inclusive education, targeting support where needed and strengthening co-ordination of support services to ensure high quality teaching for all pupils.
- Strengthen the continuum of support and provision for learners with social, emotional and behavioural needs within our services, schools and specialist provisions.
- Develop a new three-year accessibility strategy in partnership with key stakeholders.
- Utilise high quality professional learning, specialist support and grant funding to develop schools' strategic capacity to meet need through evidence-based approaches (e.g. school based counselling; restorative, nurture and/or trauma informed approaches).
- Ensure that there is a co-ordinated strategic approach to supporting learners living in poverty so that barriers are overcome and the attainment gap closed.
- Continued roll out of the Green Light project and a broadening of the reach.
- Expand the availability of alternative pathways and apprenticeship schemes to support vulnerable young people (e.g. eFSM, looked after children, learners accessing Youth Justice support) who require a more bespoke mainstream offer, including the expansion of the junior apprenticeship scheme in partnership with Coleg Y Cymoedd.
- Develop the Virtual School model and the strategic approaches adopted to further improve the educational progress and achievement of children who are looked after.
- Collaborate in order to sustain and improve the rate at which children and young people known to the Youth Justice Service are in education employment and training.
- Facilitate and ensure education and support for young people known to the exploitation pathway.
- Ensure that young carers access timely advice and support.
- Ensure that there is effective careers guidance in schools and that the post-16 offer is accessible and widely publicised so that learners can make informed choices about school, college, training and employment opportunities.
- Strengthen partnership working with further education, higher education, Welsh Government and employers so that the post-16 offer provides choice, breadth and opportunity, and reflects learner requirements.
- Undertake a robust review of individual and group tuition processes so that the offer is cost effective, efficient and meets the needs of learners.
- Strengthen policies, processes and provision for elective home education learners.
- Ensure that there is sufficient specialist workforce capacity and efficient models of service delivery to meet the increasingly complex needs of our learners in English and Welsh medium schools.
- Provide effective support to schools on developing positive anti-racist and anti-bullying cultures and practices in schools.
- Ensure that all staff are fully cognisant of the duty to recognise and report concerns about safeguarding.

- Develop an attendance, safeguarding and wellbeing strategy aimed at improving outcomes for all learners, including vulnerable groups, and our workforce.
- Ensure all schools have a robust attendance strategy that connects with other aspects of schools' work (e.g. wellbeing strategies, community engagement, impact of teaching and the curriculum, and extra-curricular activities).

Strategic Priority 3: Outcomes we want to see by 2030:

- 15% reduction in the number of incidents of fixed term exclusions per 1,000 learners.
- 15% reduction in the number of permanent exclusions.
- 10% reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions for vulnerable groups of learners.
- 2% improvement in primary school attendance rates.
- 3% improvement in secondary school attendance rates.
- 8% reduction in the number of learners displaying persistent absence from school.
- The gap between eFSM and non-eFSM learner attendance at secondary schools is reduced by 2%.
- The gap between RCT and all Wales attendance data shows improvement across most measures, including vulnerable groups (e.g. eFSM, ALN, looked after children).
- A sufficient supply of special school and learning support class places to meet need.
- The number of learners not in Education, Training or Employment is reduced.
- Most schools (90% or more) have a dedicated or shared family engagement officer.
- Many schools (70% or more) engage in family learning activity at least once a term.
- The rates of EHE learners per 1,000 falls below the national average for Wales.
- Personal Education Plans (children looked after) performance indicators demonstrate 5% improvement in timescale compliance rates.
- Local Authority maintained Individual Development Plans performance indicators demonstrate 5% improvement in timescale compliance rates.
- A 10% reduction in the number of appeals lodged with the Education Tribunal for Wales.

Strategic Priority 4: Delivering safe and sustainable communities for learning

Strategic Priority 4: Rationale for Prioritisation

The Council has made a number of commitments to modernising the school estate to ensure that it can deliver its statutory obligations in line with national and local strategies, and where it can, exceed them. It has an ambitious [Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme](#), supported by Cabinet and Welsh Government's long-term infrastructure investment which is aimed at creating high-quality, technologically advanced, sustainable and energy-efficient learning environments that are integrated with local communities.



The Council's overarching ambition is to increase the number of learners benefitting from this ambitious school modernisation programme so that they benefit from sustainable, accessible and significantly improved learning environments. The programme also aims to promote a growth in Welsh medium and ALN provision, and places a strong emphasis on developing [Community Focused Schools](#), and the co-location of key services on school sites and strengthened engagement with parents

and carers outside traditional hours. This is an integral part of Welsh Government's policy on tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment to ensure high standards and aspirations for all. As referenced in strategic priority 2, there have been some effective strategic developments relating to family and community engagement, but there is still scope for building on this work and significantly strengthening partnership approaches and the co-location of services on school sites.

Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and the Council's Capital Investment Programme will continue to improve the quality of school buildings, reduce surplus capacity, address maintenance costs and improve sustainability. Whilst considerable progress has been made in developing state of the art educational facilities across the landscape in RCT, there is still work to be done in further modernising our school estate and progressing with the community focused schools' agenda.

Active Travel in our schools, supported by government funding where available, and by organisations like Sustrans and Public Health Wales, is also a focus in the new plan in partnership with other key service areas so that schools encourage learners and staff to walk, cycle, or scooter safely to school and reduce car dependence, contributing to both individual health, well-being and broader environmental goals.



Strategic Priority 4 will build on the successes of the Education Strategic Plan for 2022-25 which are summarised as follows:

- The Sustainable Communities for Learning programme has delivered £175M worth of investment, including the opening of seven new schools over an 18 month period: [Penygawsi Primary School](#), [Llanilltud Faerdref Primary School](#), [Pontyclun Primary School](#), [Ysgol Afon Wen](#), [Ysgol Bro Taf](#), [Ysgol Awel Taf](#) and [Ysgol Llyn Y Forwyn](#). In addition to this, we have also opened state of the art 6th form provision at [Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School](#). The programme has delivered immense benefits including: enhanced capacity for Welsh medium education; high quality general classroom and specialist teaching rooms; energy

efficient and highly accessible school buildings; shared heart spaces; multi-use games areas; modern digital technologies readily accessible; and flexible learning spaces that promote innovative approaches to teaching and learning. This has reduced: surplus spaces in English medium settings; backlog maintenance costs; poor quality accommodation; and inaccessible school buildings. The impact on learners and the education workforce has been significant. For example, Bryn Celynnog recently delivered excellent A level outcomes (summer 2025 unverified data).

- Welsh Government has provided approval in principle for a 9-year Rolling Programme of funding via their Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, totalling £414M up to and including 2033. This programme builds on the [Council's extensive school investment programme](#) since the commencement of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme.
- Works have commenced on £62M worth of planned investment for two new schools, namely a new [ALN school](#) in Clydach Vale and a new primary school for [Glyn-coch](#).
- New facilities for several Welsh medium schools are also to be delivered including: Ysgol Cwm Rhondda (secondary school); Ysgol Llanhari (all through school); consultation has taken place in relation the opening of a new Welsh medium primary school in Llanilid; and a new English medium primary school for Penrhys is also progressing.
- Childcare and Early Years Capital Grant has delivered £3.5M investment over the last three years, including four new childcare settings (two Welsh medium) and £1.4M delivered in 150 small grants.
- The Community Focused Schools Capital Grant has delivered £3M investment and provided new community facilities on four school sites. A further £1.65M has been secured the 2025/26 academic year for a further nine projects.
- With a further £1.6M secured this financial year, the total ALN capital grant will have delivered £6.5M investment over a four year period.
- A total of £21.7M has been delivered as part of the capital investment programme to keep buildings 'safe, watertight and warm'.
- Voluntary Aided major works totalling £3.2M have been delivered.
- Community focused schools developments have progressed well in the last three years. Tailored workshops for parents increased from 50% in 2022 to 82% in 2025, and over half of the schools indicated that they had prioritised community developments in their school improvement plans in 2025. Most schools (90% or more) offered activities for children outside of the school day, with 26% also offering adult community learning opportunities in 2025 (an increase of 18% since 2022). However, the co-location of services on school sites remains underdeveloped.
- Extensive guidance and training has been provided to schools on risk management and compliance, business continuity and emergency planning.
- The RCT Eco School Award was launched, with 19 schools actively involved. A total of four schools have completed the Bronze award to date.

Strategic Priority 4 will need to build on identified areas for improvement:

- Ensuring the successful roll out of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and capital investment in our school buildings so that they remain safe, watertight and warm.
- Utilising Childcare and Early Years Capital grant funding effectively so that this addresses priorities for improvement in our WESP and the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.
- Ensuring that the investment in ALN provision is timely and addresses local needs.
- Ensuring that our services contribute towards the early help and prevention agenda across the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate.
- Building on the excellent [Community Focused Schools](#) work undertaken to date by further improving family, community and agency engagement on school sites.
- Ensuring that active travel is actively promoted across schools and brings about reduced reliance on car travel.

Strategic Priority 4: High Level Strategic Actions

The identified actions to deliver this priority are:

- Develop a 10-year school organisation strategy to ensure the Council has the right number of schools in the right locations to support learners, including those with ALN, their families and communities.
- Deliver on the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment outcomes and ensure sufficient supply of places in the right location across the county borough.
- Deliver the Council's Sustainable Communities for Learning nine year rolling programme of investment.
- Ensure that the needs of the community are considered as an integral part of the design process associated with school modernisation projects.
- Ensure that all school modernisation plans, and the local development plans are aligned with our ambitious WESP targets and aspirations where possible.
- Ensure that the capital maintenance programme keeps the school estate in good working order and reduces carbon emissions.
- Ensure schools are supported to mitigate safeguarding and health and safety risks through the issuing of advice and guidance, training and compliance checks.
- Continue to support schools with updated procedures and strategies in the event of a business interruption affecting the running of schools to ensure continuity of learning for pupils.
- Create learning, employment and training opportunities from all investment projects, delivering social value and community benefits at every stage.
- Develop an effective community focused schools' strategy, which promotes effective partnership working with families, communities and agencies and builds community resilience.

- Protect and enhance the natural environment and use nature's assets to benefit our school communities.
- Continue to roll out the RCT Schools Eco Award to positively contribute to the Council's Tackling Climate Strategy – Think Climate RCT.

Strategic Priority 4: Outcomes we want to see by 2030

- Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, Capital Maintenance Programme and grant funding streams result in: a reduction in surplus places; diminishing maintenance costs; improved building conditions and energy efficiency; and enhanced ALN, Welsh medium and childcare capacity.
- Nearly all (95% or more) in-catchment families consistently secure their first-choice school place.
- Most (90% or more) families secure childcare in their community.
- Active engagement from all stakeholders is secured when designing and developing new school buildings.
- Sustainable Communities for Learning projects are delivered on time and within budget.
- Post project feedback from stakeholders demonstrates positive impacts and informs all new developments and future projects.
- Family, community and multi-agency partnerships and access to school facilities are significantly improved and meet community needs and aspirations.
- All investment programmes deliver social value and improved outcomes on a range of performance measures.
- 50% of all schools have an RCT Schools Eco Award.

8. Conclusion

The Education Strategic Plan 2026–30 sets out an ambitious and collaborative vision for RCT, one that is rooted in excellence, equity and inclusion for every learner. By building on the successes of recent years and responding proactively to the evolving needs of our communities, this plan provides a clear roadmap for continuous improvement across all educational settings and local authority services.

Central to this strategy is the commitment to strong leadership, robust governance, and purposeful collaboration at every level. Through ongoing investment in our workforce, modern learning environments, and inclusive practices, we aim to ensure that every child and young person has access to high-quality teaching and learning, timely support and intervention, and opportunities to thrive and succeed.

The four strategic priorities - securing strong leadership and governance; embedding excellent teaching, learning and assessment approaches; ensuring inclusive

education and support; and delivering safe and sustainable communities for learning are underpinned by the principles of sustainability, prevention, integration, involvement, and long-term thinking. These priorities reflect both local aspirations and national policy, ensuring alignment with the Welsh Government's vision and the Council's Corporate Plan.

Success will depend on the collective efforts of early years settings, schools and PRUs, families, communities, and strategic partners working together as one team. By fostering a culture of shared responsibility, reflective practice, and innovation, we will continue to strive to raise standards, close the attainment gap, and secure the best possible outcomes for all learners.

As we move forward, robust monitoring, evaluation, and stakeholder engagement will be essential to ensure that the plan remains responsive and impactful. Together, we are committed to delivering on our vision: effectively collaborating to secure excellence, equity, and inclusion for all in RCT.