A report on

Newport City Council
Civic Centre
Newport
NP20 4UR

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by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

About Newport City Council

Newport City Council is located in South East Wales and has a total population of 151,485. The local authority maintains 55 schools. There are two nursery schools and 42 primary schools, including three Welsh-medium primaries. Of the nine secondary schools, one is a recently opened new Welsh-medium school. In addition, there is a pupil referral unit and two special schools.

The chief executive took up his post in January 2013 and the chief education officer was appointed in November 2017. The council leader and the main portfolio holder for education services began their roles in May 2016. The local authority's last inspection was in November 2011.

Newport is one of five local authorities in the EAS regional consortium for school improvement. It is also involved in other joint working arrangements with the five local authorities, for example the partnership supporting education for ethnic minority children and young people in schools (GEMS).

n 2018-19, the Council's net education budget increased above the Wales average percentage change and the delegated school budget per pupil is the second lowest of all local authorities in Wales.

IInspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating outcomes and the quality of education services. They consider this information alongside information about the national population. Some of the most useful information about children and young people in Newport is noted below:

- Over a three year average,18.6% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are eligible for free school meals, slightly higher than the Wales average of 17.9%
- 2.1% of pupils are fluent in Welsh, which is considerably lower than the Wales average of 16.2%
- 24.8% of pupils are from ethnic minorities, significantly higher than the Wales average of 11.1%
- 21.0% of pupils have special educational needs, slightly lower than the Wales average of 22.6%
- 83 children per 10,000 were looked after by the local authority in 2017, which is lower than the Wales average of 95 children per 10,000

Summary

Overall, many pupils in Newport make strong progress during their time in primary school, but pupils' progress is too variable across other sectors and in secondary schools in particular. The local authority's support for pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language is very effective and nearly all pupils in receipt of long-term language support achieve as well as their peers.

Officers know their schools well and have strong partnerships with individual schools. These are supportive but also robust and challenging. The school improvement services provided in partnership by the local authority and the regional consortium, EAS, are working well to support and challenge primary schools to improve. However, the services have had little impact in promoting improvement in a minority of secondary schools that are causing concern. There are effective strategies to support young people at risk of leaving education, employment or training, but provision to support pupils eligible for free school meals lacks a coherent plan. Provision to improve attendance and reduce exclusions is purposeful and nearly all schools apply agreed strategies consistently. The local authority has a clear vision for the long-term development of digital technologies and an appropriate strategy to promote these across its services, including schools.

Senior elected members and officers have a clear vision and high expectations of outcomes for children and young people. However, the quality of self-evaluation processes at all levels in the education service is too variable. Leaders respond appropriately to key financial pressures and are flexible in their approach to delivering priorities.

Recommendations

R1 Improve the overall performance of secondary schools

R2 Establish a coherent strategy across all relevant services to improve the outcomes of pupils eligible for free school meals

R3 Ensure that self-evaluation activities focus on the impact that services have on outcomes and their value for money

R4 Strengthen opportunities at a local authority level for children and young people to influence decisions that affect them

R5 Deliver the strategic plans to develop Welsh-medium education further

What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations identified through the inspection process.

Main findings

Outcomes

Overall, many pupils make strong progress during their time in primary school but pupils' progress is too variable across other sectors and in secondary schools in particular. Many pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language, who receive long-term language support, make particularly strong progress in primary and secondary school. Most pupils make good progress in Welsh first language during their time in primary school.

During the last three years, the proportion of primary schools in Newport judged to be at least good for standards compares favourably to inspection outcomes nationally. The number of primary schools receiving excellent judgements for standards in this period is significantly higher than across Wales as a whole. The sample of secondary schools inspected during the last three years is too small to make any meaningful comparisons of inspection outcomes, but a third of Newport secondary schools are currently in statutory categories. Two of these schools have remained in a statutory category for too long.

The performance of pupils in key stage 4 over the last three years, in the key indicators that include English and mathematics, has improved and many pupils make strong progress. Pupils' performance in these indicators now compares favourably to that in local authorities across Wales. In 2018, the performance of more able pupils also improved and is now in line with that of the same group of pupils in other local authorities. However, the performance of other groups of pupils and in other key indicators is not as strong. For example, pupils' performance in the key indicators that include a wide range of qualifications does not compare well with that in similar local authorities. This is also the case with the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Pupils who receive continuous support from the Gwent Education Minority-ethnic Service (GEMS), over a period of years, perform well at key stage 4 in the key indicators that include English and mathematics. They achieve to a standard comparable with that of other pupils. The service helps pupils to develop their language skills rapidly through, for example, support from bilingual teaching assistants. This enables pupils to engage better in school life at an academic and social level and enhances their wellbeing considerably. In addition, the service supports parents to communicate meaningfully with their child's school and to become involved in their education.

The rate of fixed-term exclusions from school of five days or less has decreased in recent years but remains higher than the Wales average. The rate of fixed-term exclusions of more than five days has also reduced. In 2017, this indicator was below the Wales average. The local authority's managed moves strategy is successful in supporting a few vulnerable pupils who would otherwise be permanently excluded. Despite this, rates of permanent exclusion have remained slightly above the Wales average for the last three years.

The percentage of pupils who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has fallen sharply over the last four years and is now below the Wales average. A good range of projects across the local authority support this reduction well due to the valuable services they offer for vulnerable pupils, particularly in secondary schools. These projects include many initiatives provided through 'Newport Live' the local sports and arts trust, such as school sport clubs, health promotion activities, primary to secondary school transition projects and a peer-mentoring programme. In addition, services such as 'Talking Zone' counselling provided by the local authority in conjunction with the University of South Wales have a positive effect on the wellbeing of pupils who access these services. The standard of pupils' wellbeing, judged good or better in inspections, has been similar to the Wales average over the last three years.

Overall, pupils' contributions to the evaluation of the range of initiatives on offer are underdeveloped. Although there is a Newport Youth Forum, few pupils of secondary school age are aware of this body or have knowledge of its work. Pupils lack a voice in helping to set the strategic direction of education within the local authority. However, there are examples of good practice. The feedback from pupils and their parents on the services provided by GEMS led to a re-structuring of the service to increase the numbers of bilingual teaching assistants and to reduce the numbers of specialist support teachers.

During the last three years, attendance in secondary schools has improved slightly but remains below the Wales average. During the same period, attendance in primary schools shows a trend of improvement and is in line with the average for Wales. Rates of persistent absence, where pupils miss more than a day of school per week on average, across the local authority for the last five years are considerably worse than the average for Wales.

Education services

Under Inspection Area 2, Estyn sets local inspection questions that are relevant to each local authority. Local inspection questions focus on education services that relate to the local authority's current strategic priorities or result from information that Estyn has about education services in the local authority.

To what extent are pupil outcomes influenced by the quality of the work of the school improvement services?

Newport local authority knows its schools well and has a strong understanding of many individual school issues. The local authority and the regional consortium, EAS, work together well to provide effective support to schools on many aspects, including governor training, school-to-school working and improving performance in English and mathematics. As a result, this partnership has a positive impact on pupil outcomes in important areas. It is particularly effective in supporting strong outcomes in primary schools and in English and mathematics in secondary schools. However, the school improvement services provided by EAS and the local authority have had insufficient impact on promoting improvement in the pupil referral unit and the three secondary schools, which are in a statutory category. This is also the case for the performance of secondary school pupils in the indicators that include a wide range of qualifications and the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

When brokering support for schools, the local authority considers carefully the services provided by EAS to assess whether these meet the needs of its schools. It negotiates amendments where necessary. For example, it has worked with EAS to adapt its target-setting processes.

The local authority's evaluation of the impact of its own and EAS's work is generally suitable and officers have provided feedback to EAS to improve the quality of aspects of the services provided by EAS, such as the work of challenge advisers. However, the local authority does not evaluate sufficiently the effectiveness of the services it or EAS provides in terms of their impact on pupils' progress and standards, particularly in schools in statutory categories.

How well do services support young people to sustain progress to employment, training or further education (NEET) when they leave school?

The local authority places a high strategic priority on identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET and reducing the number of young people who become NEET. The chief education officer chairs the Youth Support Services Board, which monitors closely the action plan for the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF). This plan sets out the local authority's approach to addressing this priority. Three working groups, focused on young people below 16 years of age, those aged between 16 and 18 years and learning providers, support the work of this board well.

Officers undertake early identification well for pupils from Year 7 onwards and there are relevant strategies in place to support pupils at risk of becoming NEET. These include guidance from Careers Wales and the use of learning coaches to help pupils to choose a suitable route for them when they leave school. The engagement and progression co-ordinator monitors the young people who move on to further education, training and employment well. This helps to ensure that they maintain their engagement.

In 2017, the Youth Support Services Board commissioned an independent review of its work. One of the review's main findings was that young people at risk of becoming NEET need to be identified earlier. At present there is insufficient focus on identifying those at risk at primary school age to help the partnership to plan support.

The local authority has started to address this recommendation suitably through the YEPF action plan.

The strong partnership arrangements between the engagement and progression co-ordinator, secondary schools, Careers Wales and Coleg Gwent help to ensure a strong focus on those children and young people who are at risk of becoming or who are NEET. A good range of alternative curriculum opportunities, including bespoke programmes, help to support the engagement or re-engagement of many in this group successfully.

Does provision for pupils eligible for free school meals support them to make good progress in school?

The local authority recognises that the provision to improve the outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals is underdeveloped. Over time, officers' response to the

relatively weak performance of these pupils has not been swift or effective enough. In particular, the local authority's strategic approach is not sufficiently coherent and lacks a clear vision. Provision for these pupils does not take enough account of the potential of working with wider local authority services and other agencies to ensure that the approach is more coherent and holistic. As a result, the provision of support for pupils eligible for free school meals has not had enough impact on their progress, particularly in secondary schools. These pupils do not make sufficient progress in comparison with similar groups in other local authorities.

Officers recognise that a few primary schools in the local authority have practice that supports vulnerable pupils particularly well. The approaches developed by these schools include effective multi-agency working, the provision of community and family learning centres and programmes that support parents and children facing challenging domestic situations. They also focus robustly on improving teaching and ensuring that there is an appropriate curriculum for all pupils. These schools provide valuable examples of how to support pupils eligible for free school meals to make good progress.

The local authority requires EAS to carry out suitable activities to ensure that schools maintain a focus on the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals. Although EAS evaluates whether schools comply with the terms and conditions of the pupil development grant, officers do not evaluate sufficiently the impact of specific strategies in improving outcomes for pupils.

Overall, the lack of a coherent strategy to support pupils eligible for free school meals means that there is no comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to addressing the issue of their underperformance across the local authority's schools.

How effective are services that support schools to improve pupil attendance and reduce exclusions?

The local authority generally has effective strategies to improve attendance and reduce exclusions. Its attendance and exclusion protocol supports targeted intervention and effective communication with schools, governors, challenge advisers, education welfare officers and local authority officers. Officers have developed consistent strategies to hold schools and their governing bodies to account for their pupils' attendance regularly and robustly. This challenge helps to ensure that schools implement a consistent range of strategies that have a positive impact on overall attendance.

The high profile local authority campaign, 'Attendance Matters', highlights the importance of good attendance and the link between this and attainment. The attendance forum provides useful opportunities for schools to support one another and to share strategies to improve attendance. Multi-agency work is particularly effective in supporting individual vulnerable pupils to engage with school. However, the overall rate of persistent absence remains higher than the Wales average.

There are consistent protocols and processes that are effective in reducing overall exclusion rates. The local authority challenges schools about these regularly and monitors performance against the targets set for reducing the number of exclusions. The managed moves panel monitors pupil exclusions carefully and supports pupil

transfers between schools effectively wherever possible. The panel meets weekly and involves a wide range of agencies and schools. It allows partners to share effective practice and have useful professional discussion about the appropriateness of strategies to reduce exclusion rates. This helps to spread effective practice, for example the use of effective alternative curriculum packages provided by 'Newport Live' and alternative restorative approaches to promote pupils' re-engagement.

The local authority works closely with a range of providers to enable pupils at risk of exclusion to access bespoke packages, for example to support their emotional wellbeing and build resilience. These support the needs of vulnerable pupils well and help to re-engage them in learning. There is a strong school commitment to the wellbeing and success of pupils who access this alternative provision and schools take responsibility for funding this from their own budgets.

How well do services support young people to develop behaviours and skills that improve their wellbeing?

Provision to support the wellbeing of children and young people is a high priority within the local authority. Officers across a wide range of services ensure that they adapt their provision effectively to meet the changing wellbeing priorities of children and young people. They work productively with other partners to secure external funding and services to support the wellbeing of different groups of children and young people successfully.

The local authority's well-established wellbeing monitoring group, which includes representatives from schools and officers, is effective in assessing schools' provision for the wellbeing of their pupils. For example, the group regularly analyses a wide range of data from the local authority's school wellbeing tracker, to identify school needs and aspects of wellbeing that are strong. This enables them to organise training events, such as attachment training, where providers have the opportunity to share effective practice with colleagues.

GEMS provides a high level of support for pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language and their families, particularly through their home language. They deliver bespoke support in schools, which improves the wellbeing of these pupils successfully. In particular, bilingual teaching assistants work effectively with new arrivals to help them to settle well and feel included. The 'See the world though our eyes' project has helped promote inclusion through introducing pupils to the features of different cultures, including Roma Travellers. This has helped to nurture good relations within communities and improved the wellbeing of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.

The local authority works closely with 'Newport Live', to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. For example, it organises projects to help vulnerable pupils make a smoother transition from primary to high school. Last summer, their 'Fit and Fed' campaign had a positive impact on improving wellbeing in the school holidays of around four hundred pupils by providing them with heathy meals and sports, cooking and arts activities.

A wide range of initiatives support the skills and behaviours of children and young people in schools. Many of these have a positive impact on improving the wellbeing of pupils. For example, many schools use restorative approaches to prepare pupils to cope with conflict more successfully and thus improve behaviour.

Local authority officers recognise the need to understand and address the mental health of children and young people. For instance, educational psychologists have used action research to design the 'Arrow Project' to support secondary schools in their work in this field. These professionals are working with three schools to help pupils and staff understand mental health issues. Educational psychologists have used data from the national 'Schools' Health Research Network' project to identify and provide beneficial training on pupils' greatest mental health concerns. For example, they have worked with pupils to improve their sleep routines and address their anxiety over body image through interactive workshops. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this work on improving the mental health of pupils across the local authority.

How widely do pupils access high quality digital learning experiences and does this help them to develop effective digital skills?

The local authority has a clear vision for the long-term development of digital technologies in Newport. It places a high priority on the city's connectivity and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in delivering services. For example, it is working well to improve the speed and efficiency of broadband connections available to its service areas, including schools. The local authority recognises the importance of developing the digital skills of its community and identifies this as a high-level priority in its corporate plan. However, the education service does not reflect this in its improvement planning processes. In addition, the local authority does not communicate its arrangements to support teachers to improve pupils' digital skills well enough and schools are not clear about the support that is available to them.

Regular reports from EAS provide senior leaders with a generally appropriate understanding of the nature of provision for the development of pupils' digital skills. Senior leaders have a good knowledge of, for example, digital pioneer schools that deliver high quality digital learning experiences for pupils. They monitor how frequently pupils access the Welsh Government's digital learning resource platform. However, they do not have a wholly accurate picture of the quality of provision across all schools because they do not have sufficient first-hand evidence on which to base their judgements.

Where schools identify a need, the local authority works well with EAS to ensure good quality professional learning for school staff to improve the teaching of digital skills. Officers recognise the benefits of school-to-school support to share good practice in the development of these skills. As a result, they have improved processes for identifying and sharing effective practice. This provides teachers with beneficial opportunities to view good practice and adapt it for use in their own school. For example, a network lead primary school works effectively to develop the leadership skills of middle leaders in ICT across the local authority. This supports digital leads to develop valuable skills to improve provision and deliver training in their own schools. Officers consider the impact of professional learning on teacher skills appropriately and seek the views of participants consistently to help to evaluate its impact.

The local authority works well to support pupils to stay safe online. It promotes the use of effective resources to develop pupils' understanding of the measures they

need to take to stay safe when using the internet. It monitors carefully which schools access these resources and how frequently. Officers broker effective support to ensure that schools' connections to the internet include appropriate safety procedures. There are suitable systems to ensure that headteachers and governors are aware of their responsibilities when they choose not to use the local authority's chosen provider.

Leadership and management

Senior elected members and senior officers have a clear vision for education in Newport. These leaders are highly committed to education and have high expectations for outcomes for children and young people in the local authority. The priority given to education in the 2017 to 2022 corporate plan and the level of resources allocated for education services reflect this. The corporate plan gives due consideration to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Over time, the local authority has secured improvements in services and outcomes in some areas but has had limited impact on others. Since the last inspection in 2011, outcomes and provision for pupils in primary schools have remained strong overall. The local authority has provided sustained, strong leadership of GEMS over many years, resulting in very good outcomes for supported minority ethnic pupils across all phases. However, leaders of education services have not had enough impact on improving outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals and for those in secondary schools and the pupil referral unit.

During the last 18 months, many senior and middle leaders in the education services have taken on higher-level roles and responsibilities. The local authority has managed this period of change effectively. These leaders generally have a good understanding of education performance and the quality of education services.

Senior and middle leaders engage well with staff in the education service, schools and in regional services to develop shared ownership of the local authority vision. This engagement enables staff to influence actions to meet the objectives in the corporate plan and to improve education services. However, the local authority provides limited opportunities for children and young people to influence the work of the education service as a whole.

Senior leaders are prepared to make difficult decisions. For example, the local authority has used its powers to intervene recently in schools causing concern by using senior officers and elected members to strengthen governing bodies. However, the local authority has occasionally made significant decisions about education services without considering the consequences fully. For example, the closure of the learning resource base at Llanwern High School resulted in increased costs associated with out of county placements for affected pupils.

The quality of relationships that the local authority has developed with its schools and EAS means that there is sufficient trust on all sides for mature discussion over difficult issues and for robust quality assurance and challenge at a strategic level to be encouraged and accepted.

The education services plan provides a useful platform for delivering the relevant objectives in the corporate plan as well as addressing priorities within the service itself. Team plans complement these plans, but the actions and their expected impact are not consistently specific enough.

Newport's approach to developing Welsh-medium education has been reactive and not strategic enough. The more recent plans demonstrate a stronger commitment to developing Welsh medium provision and the intention to open a fourth Welsh-medium primary school is a positive step forward. In addition, the local authority has taken a stronger approach to promoting the benefits of Welsh medium education.

Leaders in the education service use a range of helpful approaches to monitor the delivery of plans through the year. They check on progress in key priority areas and assess the impact on outcomes. However, leaders are less rigorous in monitoring commissioned services, such as 'Newport Live' and the school-based counselling service. As a result, the local authority is limited in its ability to assess the value for money provided by such services.

The education service has a clear self-evaluation policy, which is in its first cycle. There is a healthy approach to self-evaluation by senior leaders and a commitment to critical self-reflection. However, the quality of self-evaluation at all levels within the service is too variable, including judgements about value for money. The usefulness of key performance indicators and the tracking of progress within teams is inconsistent. As a result, the 'team on a page' termly report does not always provide an accurate assessment of progress to senior leaders.

The scrutiny process is improving. Elected members are increasingly robust in monitoring and challenging progress and supporting decision-making in key areas.

Senior leaders use the corporate system for performance management effectively within the education service to support staff to carry out their roles. The local authority values its staff and demonstrates strong levels of investment in their professional learning and support for their wellbeing. Leaders support new managers well, and staff at all levels have a variety of valuable opportunities that develop their skills, broaden their awareness and prepare them for new work.

The local authority has clear policies and appropriate procedures for safeguarding that meet requirements.

Leaders are responding appropriately to the key pressures within the education budget. This includes out of county placements, which they recognise will require a long-term approach to secure sustainable and cost-effective solutions. They draw appropriately on additional internal capacity to support the education service to address significant budget pressures.

The local authority takes a proactive approach to seeking funding to deliver its priorities, for example for school buildings and support for minority ethnic pupils, including both internal and external funding. There are suitable arrangements for ensuring that schools' use of grant funding is appropriate.

There is an effective partnership with the schools' budget forum around the financing of schools. For example, an effective consultation with schools around recent changes to additional learning needs funding. The funding formula for schools takes account of relevant factors but senior leaders recognise the need to review the formula to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of schools in light of the changing pupil population.

Processes to support all schools with their resource and financial management are systematic. In response to the increased financial challenges schools now face, leaders are developing a useful short-term programme to provide them with additional support and advice about resource and financial management.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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