



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Appendix 1

RAISING ASPIRATIONS RAISING STANDARDS Llwyddiant i bob plentyn

**Improving educational outcomes in
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough 2020-2025**

Abstract

A five-year strategy to improve and sustain the highest possible educational outcomes for all children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil. It will ensure the best possible start in life so that when leaving education, they will have the skills, qualifications and aspiration to do the very best they can throughout their lives. s

Contents

- Foreword 2
- Case for Change 3
- Detailed Context 4-6
- Vision & Values 7
- Desired Outcomes 8
- Themes and Goals 9-21
 - Themes 10-11
 - Partnership and Collaboration 10
 - Pandemic Recovery 11
 - Goals 12-21
 - Performance Management and System Governance 12-13
 - Developing the Education Workforce 14-15
 - Supporting Learners’ Health and Wellbeing 16-17
 - Improving Achievement and Progression 18-19
 - Developing the Environment for Learning 20-21

Foreword

This strategy sets out our commitment to our roles in achieving the very best for the children and young people of Merthyr Tydfil. It also recognises that outcomes for our youngsters are inextricably shaped outside of school by families and communities.

Merthyr Tydfil's education community believes that all our children and young people are entitled to the best possible life chances. This can only be achieved by enhancing their access to the highest quality educational opportunities, and by supporting and encouraging them to aim as high as they can.

Currently, whilst there have been successes in many areas, we accept that we need to do more to deliver sustainable change for our children and young people. Outcomes across schools are too variable and this, combined with consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, makes it even more important to focus on improving the life skills and academic achievements of our children and young people.

We recognise the many challenges ahead, but we believe that by working together we can realise the ambitions for all our children and young people set out in this strategy/ document.

KEVIN O'NEILL

(Leader of the Council)



LISA MYTTON

(Cabinet Member Education)



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The Case for Change

Merthyr Tydfil has a long and proud history. Whereas heavy industry is our past, it is tourism, retail, light manufacturing, and the service and public sectors that are our present and future. A visionary and multi-strategic 25-year masterplan is being developed which will see the history of our town being used to support the regeneration and cultural development of the Cyfarthfa Heritage Area, Merthyr Tydfil and beyond.¹

However, this must be placed in the context of high-quality education opportunities for all children and young people, where learning is valued and supports young people to make aspirational decisions for their future career choices.

Academic achievement across the County Borough has, for too long, been variable with too many young people not achieving their academic potential. Whilst young people who are eligible for free school meals do as well as other children eligible for free school meals across Wales, the same cannot be said for those young people who do not receive free school meals. The gap between other similar areas in Wales has widened over recent years. There has not been the acceptance or the drive from key partners and stakeholders that fundamental change is required to achieve the highest possible outcomes for each young person and to ensure that this change is sustainable. This fundamental change must be underpinned by the recognition that the success of our young people is everyone's responsibility – this is where the compact size of the County Borough is a strength – and that by working in partnership we can achieve far more for our future generations.

For its size Merthyr Tydfil has a diverse cultural makeup. 8% of our school population do not have English as a first language with approximately 25 languages being represented across our schools. 31% of our English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils attend our Faith schools.

At the time of the 2011 Census 8.64% of the population stated they were able to speak Welsh although the Annual Population Survey, July 2019 estimated this is now around 18.5 % of the population. Currently the County Borough has two Welsh medium primary schools with a third being planned as part of the Welsh Government Capital Grant Scheme. There is no Welsh medium secondary school within Merthyr Tydfil with approximately 99% of the pupils from the Welsh medium primary schools receiving their secondary education outside the County Borough. The #Shwmaeronment Strategy aims to promote the use of Welsh in and around the County Borough and supports the vision for a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

The pandemic has and will further hit economy hard but ensuring that each young person leaves statutory education with the best possible academic profile is a pre-requisite for sustainable future growth and security.

Whilst schools have traditionally been seen as the bastion of education, the route to successful learning is no longer the role of the teacher exclusively and the goal is no longer to regurgitate knowledge. Educational settings and partners must adapt and prepare children and young people with the skills necessary for the 21st Century – a key element of this is fostering independent learning and utilising technology to support this.

It must be accepted that the education of our children and young people is everyone's business.

¹ The Cyfarthfa Plan

Detailed Context

Social & Economic

As of 2018 the total population of Merthyr was approximately 60,000 made up of 37,500 people aged between 16 and 64, with just over 11,500 younger and around 11,000 older.

The average household income for the County Borough is below the Welsh average and 20.1% of households in Merthyr Tydfil are living in fuel poverty compared to a Welsh average of 16.8%.

Figures from the 2011 Census show that the percentage of economically inactive citizens in Merthyr Tydfil is over 1% above the Welsh average and whilst considerable effort has been made since then to improve the situation within the County Borough recent figures from the Department of Works and Pension indicate:

- Unemployment has continued to rise in Lockdown now stands at 7.4% and is now the second highest in Wales
- Unemployment for 18-24 year olds in March 2020 was 6.6%
- Unemployment for 18-24 year olds in April 2020 rose to 11% with 530 young people claiming benefit

There are 26,400 people living in the County Borough in employment.

- 24,200 are in paid employment;
- 2,500 self-employed; and
- 22.3% of those employed are currently furloughed.

Around 44% of the working population commute outside the County borough for work. The County Borough is over-reliant on employment in the public sector and lacking in private sector opportunities in higher value, higher wage employment.

In the single year 2017/2018, 15.6% of four to five-year olds in Merthyr were classed as obese; the highest percentage in Wales. Over the five-year period up to and including 2017/18, 16.4% of four to five-year olds were classed as obese with 5.1% being classed as severely obese – significantly higher than any other local authority in Wales.

The most recent Sports Wales survey of schools (2018) shows that 46% of the young people surveyed undertook physical exercise three times, two percentage points below the Welsh average. For adults, the figure stands at 22% (2018/19) significantly lower than the Welsh average of 32%.

Education

Over the last ten years education performance across the County Borough has been a cause for concern.

In 2012 the authority was placed in Special Measures following an inspection by Estyn. It was removed from this position in 2016 having been judged to have improved sufficiently during the intervening period. However, since then, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have declined.

Of the four secondary schools only one now performs consistently above the expected outcomes for schools within similar contexts. Challenging questions must be asked about the sustainable impact of the changes made during that time.

By 2016, three out of the four secondary schools had received Schools Challenge Cymru money. This together with significant investment from the local authority in terms of staff support; and time-limited targeted basic skills financial support, did impact positively on standards at the time, however as that support was withdrawn it has become evident that more fundamental changes were needed to make sustainable improvement.

Inspection outcomes since 2017 have been in the main positive with no school placed in a reported category and aspects of wellbeing and care, support and guidance being judged highly. However, of the primary schools inspected, teaching and learning was judged to be the weakest area across the board, an area that needs to be addressed if the ambition of this plan is to be realised.

There have been improvements in attendance over the past three years but compared to other local authorities' attendance for both primary and secondary schools is the lowest or close to the lowest with persistent absenteeism a significant area of challenge.

Whilst figures for permanent exclusions are the lowest in the region, the number of fixed-term short exclusions is the highest and the percentage of pupils moved in Year 10 to Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) is the highest in Wales.

Since the pandemic started, the number of pupils eligible for free school meals has risen by 18.5% (from 2026 pupils to 2401). As of the end of October the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals within the total school population now stands at 27% – the long-term impact of this is yet unknown and it may not be known for some years

Using the 2019 Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation, of the four secondary schools in Merthyr Tydfil one has over half of their pupils living within the 10% most deprived wards and another has over 40% of their pupils living in similar wards. Within the primary schools, three schools have over 75% of their pupils living within the 10% most deprived wards whilst a further eight have at least 25% of their pupils living within similar wards. This should not be seen as an excuse and the expectation must be that all schools perform at least in line with similar schools for all indicators. We have a small number of schools compared to other local authorities however, the small size of our local authority is also our best asset in that we can maximise this to bring about increased collaboration.

Further to this we recognise the ambitious National Mission for education presents an opportunity to shape education delivery over the life of this strategy and beyond. Schools are already working towards the Curriculum for Wales 2022 and this is an ideal time to engage with wider partners to develop innovative and exciting teaching and learning for the children and young people of Merthyr Tydfil. Such change also presents risks and is it vitally important that we work together to maximise these opportunities to strengthen education for all learners in MTBC.

Our aim is to support this commitment through the development of a clear, strategic approach to school organisation, school improvement and sustainability for schools, with a framework which rationalises the range of options which the new educational landscape in Wales provides us with and identifies how we maximise the benefit and impact of these.

Headteachers and partners will work together to establish the principles of effective learning organisations as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):-

- Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students
- Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff
- Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff
- Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration
- Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning
- Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system
- Modelling and growing learning leadership.

To realise the ambition of the plan, all stakeholders will support the rights of children and young people under the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC). All stakeholders will also ensure that the principles of the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards (Wales) are addressed in work undertaken.

Vision and Values

Success for every child – Llwyddiant i bob plentyn

The opportunity for all children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil to access high quality education so that they develop as ambitious capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethically informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives

We are committed to:

- Raising the aspirations of all our children and young people and our expectations of what they can achieve, irrespective of their background
- Promoting the emotional, mental and physical well-being of children, young people
- Promoting the emotional, mental and physical well-being of our education workforce
- Working collaboratively, especially in tackling the greatest challenges
- Engaging with families to recognise and develop their role as the first and fundamentally influential educators of their children
- Involving all our children and young people in the future developments for Merthyr Tydfil ensuring their ideas are listened to and form part of strategic plans – truly giving them a voice
- Celebrating the diverse cultural heritage of Merthyr Tydfil and promoting its future ambitions amongst our children and young people
- Facilitating the wider use of Welsh language both within schools and the wider community and championing the identity of Wales
- Respecting the natural environment in and around the County Borough and developing sustainable practises within education settings

Desired Outcomes

Throughout the lifetime of this strategy and beyond we aim to make Merthyr Tydfil a place where:

All children and young people:

- Have high aspirations and expectations for themselves
- Begin statutory education having experienced a good start to learning both at home and in pre-school education where appropriate
- Are provided with education experiences that excite them and inspire them to learn and achieve
- Are educated in settings that are relevant and appropriate to meeting the needs of a 21st century curriculum
- Leave primary schools' literate, numerate and digitally competent, ready to continue their education confidently and successfully
- Leave statutory schooling with the necessary attributes and life skills to enable them to make a successful transition to employment, education or training
- Feel safe and have strong emotional wellbeing
- Have a voice in plans that impact on their own future health and wellbeing and plans for future developments of their local environment.
- Have the skills to adapt to challenges and are able to work as independent and interdependent citizens.

Themes and Goals

Through discussion with stakeholder groups a number of goals were identified as being key to how we will accelerate educational achievement in Merthyr Tydfil and ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to succeed. We recognise that success with our goals will only be achieved through commitment to partnership and collaboration by all stakeholders. At the forefront of our work is the need to fully support the education community through both the pandemic and its aftermath

We propose therefore to look at this through two overarching themes supported by five underlying key goals.



Themes

THEME ✓

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

What we will aim for....

All children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil are supported by a forward thinking, collaborative and inclusive education system. A system in which everyone understands their roles and are partners to the wellbeing and achievement of all learners.

All those who ultimately benefit from a high quality education system – education settings, businesses, families, children and young people themselves work in partnership, to create the optimum conditions that give all learners the opportunity to thrive and ultimately achieve the very best they can.

Why this matters

It is only when the education community within Merthyr Tydfil, together with wider strategic partners take a shared and proactive responsibility for education, will we develop and sustain high quality learning opportunities for our children and young people. We are committed to supporting the key role of families as the primary educators of our children, but we must also grow an environment where everyone plays a part and where everyone contributes skills, knowledge and expertise to improving educational opportunities for all our learners. Understanding why this is important to not only the future life chances of our children and young people but also the future success of the economy within the County Borough will drive the need for dynamic and aspirational partnerships with a range of stakeholders.

Children and young people themselves play a vital role in moulding their future opportunities. They are our future generations. We are proud of the way we currently engage young people in our work and we will continue to develop wider engagement to encourage all to have a voice in decisions involving both improvements to education and the economic recovery of the County Borough.

Ambitious partnerships between schools, Merthyr College, higher education, the wider Council, other public services, businesses, the third sector and communities both locally, regionally, nationally and internationally must be developed in order to enrich learning experiences for all learners across the County Borough.

We need to ensure that all education settings aspire to and achieve excellence and develop a commitment to working together for the benefit of all learners from Early Years settings through to Post-16. Our regional school improvement partner Central South Consortium (CSC) is key in supporting our schools to develop a truly collaborative approach as we move towards a shared accountability for learner outcomes, encouraging openness and transparency in sharing best practice.

All partners have a key role to play in enabling our young people to take greater responsibility for their own learning beyond statutory education when they move into adulthood as informed citizens. The creation of this partnership as an integral theme to the overall strategy will ensure better cohesion and a collective ownership to outcomes.

THEME ✓

PANDEMIC RECOVERY

What we will aim for....

The damaging impacts of the pandemic will have been successfully overcome through positive action to support those learners and families hardest hit. This will include but not be limited to, digital investment in both schools and communities, an ongoing commitment to supporting wellbeing for all and increased opportunities for a range of physical activities. Strong partnerships between education settings, communities and wider agencies provide effective support for learners whose lives outside school make it harder for them to be successful learners in school. There is an ongoing focus amongst all partners on closing the achievement gap and minimising the impact of deprivation on attainment. Schools respond flexibly and innovatively to changing circumstances. Strong links between Merthyr College, employers and education settings ensure successful transition Post-16.

Why this matters

The pandemic and subsequent closure of schools took away from our children and young people routine, structure, friendship, opportunity, and freedom. Those in specific year groups will never regain those rites of passage – the last day in school, the school prom. These losses can trigger the emergence emotionally of anxiety, trauma and bereavement in any child not withstanding those that have lost close family members and friends because of the virus. The impact of these cannot be underestimated and combined with the ongoing situation of families under stress from loss of jobs and/or reduced income there is a risk it could cause a rapid erosion of the mental health state in our children.

As schools have worked to deliver distance learning we have become more than ever aware of the inequalities in pupils' home lives. This is not just about access to technology; it is about the time and confidence families have to read and engage with children and young people. Whilst some families have been able to draw on activities such as physical exercise, gardening, cooking to keep the children engaged, many others have simply not had the confidence, resources, knowledge skills or be in a financial position to support their children to engage in holistic learning activities.

Prior to the pandemic there was a wide gap of both achievement and out of school experiences between our children and young people. The pandemic will have exacerbated this, and schools must not simply return to a knowledge based, results driven curriculum without going some way to understanding how learners in their schools have been affected.

We need to ensure that schools are given the correct tools and support for our children and young people. We do not yet know the long-term effects of the pandemic on the wellbeing of our children and young people. Going forward there may be times when schools need to close again, therefore we need to support our schools to develop robust recovery curricula that support all learners and enable them to achieve their successful future.

Goals

→ GOAL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

What we will aim for....

All parties who contribute to education and learning in Merthyr Tydfil understand their role and accountabilities in relation to the system as whole. The delegated responsibilities of education settings including school governing bodies, are clearly understood, and effectively exercised. The Council, in its role as the Local Authority and key provider of services, provides clear strategic leadership, strong support and appropriate challenge to all education settings. There is a transparent process for evaluating the performance of all education settings, and the Local Authority's statutory powers to intervene are used where that is warranted. Data on learner performance is used well to provide intelligence which underpins evaluation and strategy development. Strengths in the system are recognised, valued, and disseminated.

Why this matters

Education across Merthyr Tydfil over the past ten years shows marked fluctuation in performance. Where weaknesses have been addressed action has not routinely resulted in sustainable ongoing improvement. Too much has been reactive and short term. There has been much discussion over the ongoing changes to assessment and accountability measures and not enough on how to improve standards for all learners. Without a strong governance system, the respective roles of the Local Authority, the Central South Consortium, and school and their governing bodies will not make a positive impact. Where performance has been in decline for a number of years performance management processes in the Council and the Consortium have not always ensured that corrective action has been taken early enough.

Commitments to action

We will:

- Raise aspirations and raise standards to ensure successful futures for all.
- Review and strengthen the Council's scrutiny of education settings and learning department activities
- Review and strengthen the role of early years settings and wider education partners to improve the quality of experience for all learners.
- Improve the management and use of data about the performance of learners through the further development and use of the Capita One system
- Review and revise the partnership between MTCBC and CSC to ensure that it delivers improvement and good value for money
- Embed and further develop the approach to tackling poverty across education settings
- Strengthen the process through which Local Authority Governors are recruited and appointed

- Attract more Governors, in particular seeking volunteers from business, FE, HE, and third sector organisations
- Review and strengthen the functioning of the Merthyr Tydfil School Budget Forum.
- Establish a Headteacher forum for consultation on all non-financial aspects of the school system and its future development.

Success Measures

- The reporting on system wide performance of education in Merthyr Tydfil is clear, well understood, and directly shapes future action to deliver improvement.
- There is a clear identification of need arising from better use of data to inform successful intervention & prevention strategies
- There is clear impact from the targeted action delivered by the Council and CSC to support improvement in underperforming schools
- School governance is consistently evaluated as good or better in Estyn inspections, and in validated self-evaluation.
- Qualitative responses by Headteachers and Chairs of Governors recognise that there is greater clarity and better alignment in the respective roles of the school, the CSC and the local authority.

→ GOAL

DEVELOPING THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE

What we will aim for....

All children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil are supported by highly effective, enthusiastic staff and other support teams across all education settings. Everyone involved in education is passionate about providing an exciting and aspirational education experience for all our children and young people and understand the drive for high attainment for all learners. Education staff are supported to deliver this and are given the tools and skills to achieve the ambition of this strategy.

Why this matters

The education workforce is our most valuable resource and has the biggest impact on learner outcomes. The need to achieve the highest possible outcomes for our children and young people is what drives the profession. We will not succeed in our ambition for all children and young people to do the very best they can, without the abilities, knowledge, passion commitment and enthusiasm of all our education workforce. Any professional learning offer for the education workforce will need to ensure this is delivered.

We support the ambition of ‘a million Welsh speakers by 2050’ and therefore must ensure that staff are given every opportunity to develop their skills in the Welsh language. We also need to ensure there is ongoing supply of Welsh speakers into the education profession as a whole.

Staff development is crucial, particularly in the post-pandemic climate which is already set in a climate of change for education. The wellbeing of all staff must be paramount, and staff must also be given every opportunity to adapt and upskill their pedagogy to deliver against the challenges of the Curriculum for Wales 2022, the Additional Learning Needs reform and pandemic recovery. This development is important not just for all teaching staff, but also support staff, early years and childcare professionals and those supporting and delivering education within the local authority.

Leadership development is an integral part of delivering on our ambition and we must ensure that we not only attract and retain the highest quality leaders to support capacity within our workforce but also provide them with opportunities for further growth.

Our Human Resources support for schools must be of the highest quality to support our leaders to develop a sustainable and high-quality workforce across all education settings.

We must also continue to enable governing bodies to support and challenge schools’ leaders to secure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people within their community. We need to work together to strengthen support for Governors and to further build collaboration between governing bodies to benefit the wider community.

Commitments to action

We will:

- Develop the capacity amongst the workforce to deliver a recovery curriculum that will focus on both health and positive wellbeing as well as key basic skills
- Develop the capacity amongst the workforce to deliver a hybrid approach to learning that is flexible to the current situation
- Establish a culture of education settings as 'learning organisations' ensuring all staff have the support and capacity to adapt and change within the expectation of securing positive wellbeing and outcomes for all learners
- Work with all partners to ensure education staff have access to the widest possible experiences to enhance their professional skills and support high quality learning experiences for children and young people
- Develop opportunities for current leaders and leaders of the future to widen their leadership skills utilising not only the opportunities within Merthyr Tydfil and the region but also with National Academy for Education Leadership (NAEL) and wider holistic leadership programmes
- Ensure HR support is effective in meeting the needs of the workforce
- Launch and maintain recruitment campaigns to attract teachers to Merthyr Tydfil promoting the benefits of living in the heart of the Heads of the Valley and its proximity to other areas of South and Mid Wales.
- Build on the current training programme to Governors, encouraging further collaboration between governing bodies, particularly within clusters but also specifically across secondary schools.
- Agree and implement a School Staff Wellbeing Charter.

Success measures

- External verification shows that there is an increase in schools and setting providing good or excellent learning experiences for children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil
- External verification shows that there is at least good leadership across all education settings within the County Borough.
- Staff surveys recognise the professional learning opportunities open for all staff
- External verification recognises high quality governance in all schools
- Evidence of successful collaboration between education workforces across the County Borough
- Improved wellbeing and attendance of staff
- Reduction in unfilled posts especially in shortage subject areas

→ GOAL

SUPPORTING LEARNERS' HEALTH AND WELLBEING

What we will aim for....

All children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil can easily access the necessary support to improve their emotional, mental and physical wellbeing and therefore are ready and able to learn.

All partners nurture the benefits of belonging, friendship, relationships, families and communities in the lives of our children and young people and all work together to ensure these are an integral part of a positive education experience.

Why this matters

Prior to the pandemic children and young people were increasingly vocal about the importance of wellbeing. This focus is now more important than ever and we must support our children and young people in relation to keeping safe, managing relationships and working their way through the challenges of growing up in an uncertain world which is looking to recover from the economic challenges the pandemic has brought.

As a local authority school attendance has been amongst the lowest in Wales for a number of years and despite the gap closing between other authorities, the percentage of persistent absenteeism remains too high.

We need to build on the work being undertaken as part of the Cwm Taf Together for Mental Health partnership, the development of Adverse Childhood Experience training and the impact of Active Merthyr to ensure the whole of the education system prioritises the mental and physical health and wellbeing of our young people. We must urgently develop a more integrated approach to education, health and care as we recover from the effects of the pandemic.

The work our Youth Cabinet have undertaken to support mental wellbeing through their toolkits for both primary and secondary age learners has been positively received but there is much more to do to incorporate learner wellbeing as an equal expectation to academic achievement. We have a responsibility to listen to views of our young people and develop better systems to support them to thrive.

The role of physical wellbeing must not be forgotten. Making physical activity a habit for life will improve the health of children and young people now and in the future and will lead to improved self-confidence, social skills and reduced anxiety and depression.

Commitments to action

We will:

- Develop and promote a clear roadmap of emotional and wellbeing support for families, children and young people, supported by all Local Authority services and wider partners including CTMUHB
- Ensure all settings provide effective professional learning opportunities to develop staff who are confident to deliver emotional literacy support to children and young people
- Introduce a wellbeing tool for children and young people to use to support their own emotional wellbeing
- Ensure the Early Help Hub is accessible to all, providing support at the earliest possible moment for those that need it
- Ensure opportunities from Families First activities benefit the widest range of families possible
- Improve the engagement of schools in both the Healthy Schools Offer and Active Merthyr thus improving opportunities for children and young people to be active and healthy
- Provide more opportunities for children, young people and their families to be more physically active through a range of partnerships both locally and further afield
- Maximise the opportunities for children to access outdoor play through ensuring there are safe outdoor, green spaces
- Provide young people with access to services and activities outside of school that support their development as individuals and members of their community

Success Measures

- An increase in school attendance across both primary and secondary schools
- A decrease in the number of exclusions across both primary and secondary schools
- The vulnerability toolkit is used successfully to support early intervention for identified learners
- Children and young people report their wellbeing is good, they feel supported in their learning, are happy, and are more ready to learn
- Fewer children develop serious mental health problems and any that do are given access to high quality effective support
- An increase in involvement in sporting activities in all education settings
- An increase in physical activity engagement outside school
- Further development of activities that support families in need during the holiday periods

→ GOAL

IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND PROGRESSION

What we will aim for....

All children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil, from early years through to post-16 have access to an inspiring, challenging, relevant and ambitious curriculum that equips them for a successful future.

The curriculum delivered offers all learners the opportunity to become ambitious capable learners, ethically informed citizens, enterprising and creative contributors and healthy and confident individuals. It is innovative and responds to the needs of all learners and ensures that all learners are literate, numerate and digitally competent and enabling them to secure their position in relevant education employment and training at the highest possible level.

All learners have the opportunity to engage in activities through the medium of Welsh and the links between partners such as, Mudiad Meithrin, Yr Urdd and Menter Iaith are evident across the work of education settings

A clear progression pathway from Early Years through to Post 16 is in place that challenges and supports all learners to achieve their very best. Transition between early years and primary schools and from primary schools to secondary schools is seamless. Each education setting will understand the role they play in both preparing children and young people for the next stage in formal learning but also respect and value the role played by the previous setting.

Why this matters

From September 2022, schools and funded non-maintained settings will be introducing the new Curriculum for Wales. As learners return to school learning and teaching will continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020/21 school year. The approaches taken by schools and settings will continue to evolve to provide learning both in school and elsewhere if the needs arise. The balance between learning in schools and settings and time spent learning elsewhere may well change at particular points in response to the pandemic. This challenge requires schools to adapt their curriculum planning to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances

Too many young people become disengaged with school during secondary education and require education other than at school (EOTAS). The curriculum must be developed to meet the needs of all young people so that they have every opportunity to achieve the very best they can.

However, the challenges for improving academic outcomes for children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil cannot be ignored. We must take full advantage of the resources available to support families and their children. We must develop a renewed focus on ensuring all our learners are supported to achieve the highest possible skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competency. These skills need to be developed through early years into maintained schooling and beyond, there should be clear and deliverable expectations for a successful transition between different phases of education.

We must see the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs Education Tribunal Act (ALNET) as an opportunity to ensure that the needs of all our children and young people are met. Through cohesive partnerships with other support agencies we must develop opportunities for learners of all abilities to thrive and progress.

We must work with our business partners to establish a curriculum that introduces learners from late primary age to the world of work. A curriculum that offers alternative pathways to further education, employment and training and one that encourages learners to engage at all levels. Partners and schools will work together to consider the possibilities which come with the new curriculum and develop new and engaging experiences for learners – business and education together.

We must work with third sector organisations and wider partners to ensure opportunities for children, young people and their families to engage in exciting and innovative experiences that encourage them to develop life-long skills of learning.

Commitments to action

We will:

- Ensure that all education settings are equipped to develop an innovative curriculum that can be adapted and delivered outside of settings should the need arise
- Ensure that all education settings are equipped to implement the Curriculum for Wales as it is introduced
- Ensure that all education settings are equipped to implement the ALNET Act as it is introduced
- Develop the strengths within existing settings to support academic achievement for our children and young people who are unable to access full mainstream opportunities
- Develop ambitious pathways which will support the development of high levels of literacy, numeracy and digital competency from Early Years through to Post-16
- Ensure the new Welsh in Education Strategic Plan articulates the ambition to further develop the use of Welsh language across the County Borough, supported by all partners
- Develop a Merthyr Tydfil Business and Education Together network that supports learners not just to engage with the world of work from the earliest opportunity but also enhances curriculum delivery and offers young people alternative pathways to future education employment and training

Success Measures

- By the end of the lifetime of this plan learner outcomes for Merthyr Tydfil in all settings will be at or above the expectations for similar settings across Wales
- All education settings understand their role in the future life chances of our children and young people and attainment is higher at each stage of learning
- More learners will be accessing further education and training as a higher level
- Opportunities for apprenticeship pathways will be well developed and will be adaptable to reflect the local and regional need for business growth
- Learner surveys show that the curriculum prepares learners for life and young people are more confident in making the transition to the world of work.
- Increased numbers of young people accessing higher level education, employment or training opportunities at both post 16 and post 18

→ GOAL

DEVELOPING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

What we will aim for....

There are appropriate, high quality teaching and learning environments providing school places for all children and young people. All schools deliver community focussed activities and are supported through a safe and inspirational environment for learning both indoors and out. The use of digital technologies enhances the opportunity to learn beyond the classroom.

Why this matters

There has been development into the school estate utilising Band A of the 21st Century Schools Programme via the refurbishment of Afon Taf High School and the ongoing development of Ysgol Y Graig Primary School. Within Band B of that programme, there are plans to build a 3-16 Faith school, the refurbishment of Pen y Dre High School and build a new school to replace Goetre Primary. There are also plans for a new Welsh medium primary school in the north of the Borough. Further plans must be considered in line with the Local Development Plan ² and the new Economic Growth Strategy to target investments that improve the overall quality of the whole education estate not just schools. This investment will go beyond the lifetime of this plan and will include opportunities to develop carbon neutral education settings and settings that are more energy efficient.

Education settings are an integral part of their local community and we must consider how they can be utilised more effectively to support the needs of their communities.

However, learning environments are not just school buildings and we need to ensure that our wider environment supports learning and can be adapted for the future. The Cyfarthfa Plan is just one way in which this can be delivered but we also need to focus on the learning that can already take place across the County Borough utilising outdoor spaces and also other providers.

The pandemic has shown us that there are high levels of digital exclusion across the County Borough and we must ensure that this is addressed through investment in digital infrastructure and developing the opportunity to utilise digital technology as often as possible.

Commitments to action

We will:

- Deliver the Band B 21st Century Schools programme and develop and seek commitment to a long-term plan for future estate improvements
- Review the current catchment area for schools and consider whether this is fit for purpose and need

² [Local Development Plan](#)

- Carry out robust evaluation of existing stock to ensure that plans for improvement are based on sound evidence of need
- Ensure property services are able to support the delivery of a purposeful maintenance programme
- Develop a Community Focussed Schools policy
- Ensure the Council's Digital Strategy supports the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales building and acting upon the knowledge of where there is most digital exclusion
- Provide greater opportunities for learning outside the classroom

Success measures

- Deliver an asset management programme that improves the condition of all education stock which leads to
 - a greater understanding of need and a plan to address any deficiencies
 - a ten-year programme of environmental change that delivers on time and transforms the educational opportunities for learners through new builds and capital improvements.
- Schools are used as accessible community assets
- The highest possible broadband width is available across the County Borough
 - schools access the highest quality technologies
- All education settings utilise outdoor learning as an integral part of their day-to-day activities

