

## WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 1:

*Raise educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain the qualifications and skills needed to lead positive lives*

### Investing in our schools....

Modern, safe, and inspiring school buildings contribute to better attendance, behaviour, and wellbeing, all of which are linked to higher academic achievement.

Throughout 2024/25, as part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly known as the 21st Century Schools Programme), we have committed approximately £15 million on new, extended and refurbished schools.

Our major projects for 2024/25, are as follows:

- \* Construction of a new net zero carbon emission school Maendy Primary.
- \* Construction of a new net zero carbon 50 place extension at Crownbridge School
- \* Design & build 3G pitch at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw

#### Maendy Primary



Construction of our new £17.1million, 420 place, Maendy Primary school, began in May 2024.

This will be our first net zero carbon free school and will see the capacity of the school rise from 231 to 420 with a 30-place nursery, providing capacity for the predicted growth in pupil numbers.

The development will include facilities for the wider community and an additional needs assessment centre, as well as new Childcare and Flying Start facilities.

The construction of the school is scheduled to be completed by July 2025, with community facilities scheduled to open in February 2026. Pupils will continue learning in existing school buildings until the new school is complete. The old school buildings will then be demolished, and the school grounds will be landscaped providing two new playgrounds, a forest school zone, play equipment and a grass sports pitch.

(The new facilities, built on the existing school site have been funded by both the Council and Welsh Government and is scheduled to be completed by July 2025).

#### Crownbridge School.

In March 2025, our £12.35 million, 50-place extension to Crownbridge School, was officially opened. The extension has been built on the current school site, in Croesyceiliog and will help meet increased demand for special education, within Torfaen.

The extension to the school, known as Mynydd, includes six new classrooms, a kitchen for pupils to use, course room, office spaces, a hall and a rebound room - which is a full-size floor level trampoline for pupils to undertake therapies. There is also a new multi-use games area with external play and learning areas.



As a result, the school has been able to admit new pupils and provide better facilities, in which to educate and nurture children with severe and profound learning difficulties.

The extension on Crownbridge represents the first completed scheme in our band B investment, which will further improve and expand our learning environments for our young people. The extension enables us to respond to the sharp growth in demand for special school places and the extension will enable another 50 children to be educated in the facilities at Crownbridge.

(The extension is 75% funded by Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme).

### **Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw - 3G Pitch**



Within 2024/25, we submitted a bid to secure funding to build a 3G pitch for Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw, through the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050' scheme. This scheme aims to increase the number of Welsh speakers to one million by 2050. Both the local authority, school and Welsh government saw this initiative as an opportunity to enhance sports education, whilst promoting the Welsh language.

Completed in November 2024, the new FIFA Quality and World Rugby 3G artificial grass pitch was constructed at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw.

This £1.4 million project encompasses not just a 3G pitch, but also a SAB-approved drainage system, access road, pathways, pedestrian lighting, retaining structures, rain garden, and landscaping. (This is a hybrid pitch that will serve as both an artificial football pitch and artificial rugby pitch).

Beyond benefiting our school students, the artificial grass pitch is available to hire by local sports clubs, providing a high-quality training and match venue for the wider community, providing a suitable pitch for sports and activities to take place within the school day, whilst bringing initiatives to grow the use of the Welsh language in the local community, outside of school hours.

### **Improving outcomes for our children and young people....**

Improving outcomes for young people is critically important because it shapes, not only their individual futures, but also the wellbeing and prosperity of society, as a whole.

#### **Children & Families Directorate Estyn Inspection**

During June 2024, Estyn inspectors revisited our Children and Families Directorate to conduct a monitoring visit, as a follow up to their core inspection, which took place in March 2022.

Out of the four recommendations made by Estyn in the June monitoring visit focused on recommendations two and three, which were:

- To strengthen performance management.
- To strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning processes and the link between them.

Since their last visit, Estyn recognised that improvements had been made to our leadership, performance management and evaluation processes, within our Education Service.

Early Autumn 2024, inspectors visited the service again, to assess our performance against the other two recommendations they previously made:

- Improve outcomes for learners, particularly in secondary schools.
- Improve strategic leadership of learning and ALN.

In November 2024 Estyn published their findings from the monitoring visits that they had conducted throughout the year. They confirmed that we made sufficient progress and could be removed from their list of Local Authorities causing 'significant concern'. Please click on link for [Estyn's full report](#).

In particular, Estyn inspectors recognised:

- Improved outcomes for learners, particularly in secondary schools
- Strengthened performance management
- Strengthen self-evaluation and improvements in planning processes
- Improved strategic leadership of learning and additional learning needs

Inspectors also highlighted a strong focus on improving pupils' attendance; effective work in identifying and supporting young people who are at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET); and improvements in how young people have helped informed the council's strategic direction.

The move out of the category is testament to the hard work and tenacious approach, not only from within the Children and Families Directorate, but across the council, and the outcome truly shows the impact of cross directorate working and corporate ownership to problem solving.

In February 2025, Estyn also published an 'effective practice' case study entitled 'Leaders securing improvement in a local authority'. This case study details how our Local Authority progressed recommendations from the last full Estyn inspection, including how "The local authority has worked pro-actively with all stakeholders and secured notable improvements in many aspects of their work". The case study can be viewed on the following link: [Estyn.gov.wales](https://www.estyn.gov.wales)

### Estyn Judgements and School Categories

Cwmbran High School has made sufficient progress in relation to Estyn's recommendations and therefore has been removed from Estyn's "special measures" category, in March 2025. As of March 2025, we now have no mainstream schools in an Estyn statutory category. Although we recognise this as solid progress, progress and support levels will continue to be monitored closely, via Wider Group and Team Around the School (TAS) meetings.

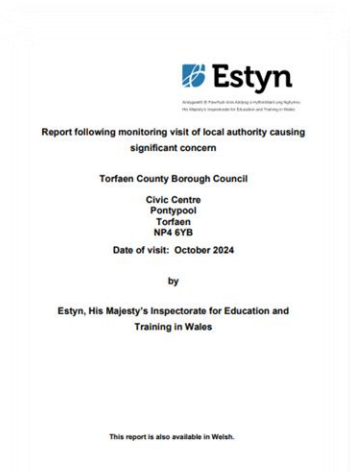
In December 2024, Estyn judged our Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in need of significant improvement. The quality of teaching and learning was found to be too variable and as a result, pupils are not always making the progress of which they are capable. We will now continue to support PRU leaders to build upon the positives of the leadership's strengths, the nurturing learning environment and strong working relationships, between staff and pupils to deliver the aims of the PRU Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP).

Although not a statutory category, additional support continues to be provided to Ysgol Bryn Onnen, as it remains in Estyn review. Suitable progress is however being made, against Estyn's recommendations.

The well-being objectives within our County Plan, and our longer-term approach as a 'Marmot council' will continue to ensure that our efforts focus on continuous improvement and strive to provide the best services and best possible outcomes for our children and young people.

### Raising attainment within our schools....

Examination results for the academic year 24/25 demonstrate that overall our schools performed above our modelled expectations. We recognise, however, that outcomes in a minority of schools, are still too low, particularly in mathematics and numeracy.



## Increasing our pupil's attendance with schools....

Increasing attendance rates in schools is crucial because regular attendance is one of the strongest predictors of educational success. Students who attend school consistently have more time to engage with the curriculum, participate in lessons, and complete assignments. This leads to better understanding, skill development, and ultimately, higher attainment.

Overall rates of attendance in Torfaen continue to improve, although they have still not yet recovered to pre-pandemic rates. This is evident across all Local Authority areas in Wales.

At the end of February 2025, Torfaen's overall attendance rate was 91.4%. This ranked our local authority in 6<sup>th</sup> place out of 22 Welsh local authorities.

### Monthly Attendance Analysis (percentage)

	Sept-March 2019	Sept-March 2025	Difference
<b>Primary</b>	93.8	93.1	-0.7
<b>Secondary</b>	92	89.1	-2.9

Primary school rates of attendance are higher than secondary school rates of attendance. If this particular rate of attendance is maintained going forward, we would expect to see further improvements in comparison, to previous years.

Our #NotInMissOut campaign has helped significantly in increasing attendance, particularly in reducing requests for authorised or unauthorised absences, for reasons other than illness or medical appointments.

In comparison to last year, our exclusion rates within schools have also improved but we are conscious that our figures still remain too high.

- Fixed-term exclusions ( $\leq 5$  days): down by 261 cases
- Days lost to exclusion: down by 931 days
- Permanent exclusions: reduced from 10 to 8

Research has shown a direct link between good attendance and academic achievement, so in supporting our children to attend school regularly, is central to our core objective of improving educational attainment.



## Reducing the numbers of our year 11 young people, classified as 'not in employment, education or training (NEET)....

Reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is vital for improving their long-term life chances, mental health, and economic prospects. Being NEET increases the risk of poverty, social exclusion, and poor wellbeing, while also limiting access to skills and qualifications needed for future success. Addressing this issue helps promote equality, reduce risky behaviours, and strengthen the economy by ensuring more young people are engaged, supported, and contributing positively to society.

Throughout 2024/25, we have continued with our commitment to provide: effective early intervention for our young people at risk of inactivity, or not in education, employment or training (NEET).

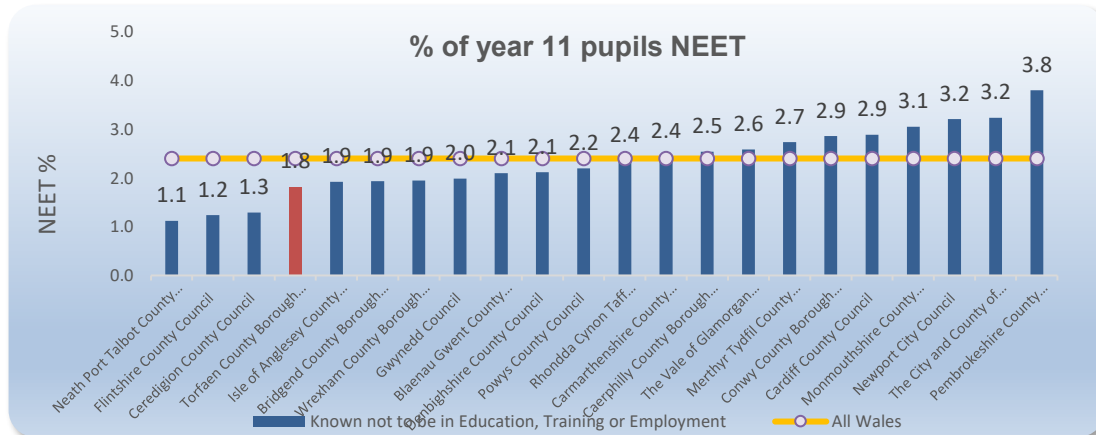
Work experience opportunities have been supported in various ways by our Inspire Team, who have set up



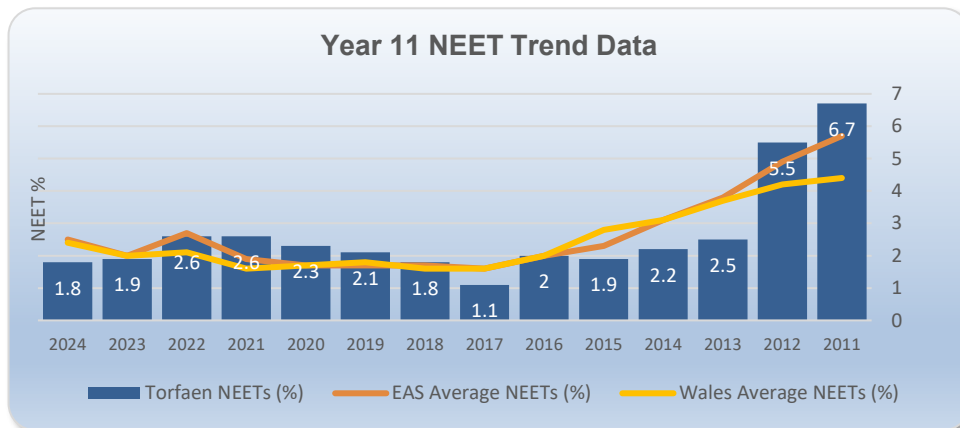
projects/opportunities such as: serving food in our new café within the Civic Centre and undertaking bike maintenance projects.

In addition, our Inspire project has also provided a range of qualifications and courses, as defined by the Qualifications and Credit Framework, targeting secondary-school aged young people, at risk.

In comparison to previous years, our NEET figures for young people leaving year 11 have slightly decreased and is now lower than the Welsh average. Whilst we recognise that the number of young people leaving school, not in employment, education and training is still too high, we remain committed to improving outcomes and monitoring/supporting all of our young people who are due to leave school each year.



**The % of year 11 pupils not in education, employment or training** has been confirmed as being 1.8% for Torfaen for 24/25, which ranks us 4th out of 22 LA's. This is an improvement on previous year's performance: 2.1 (19/20), 2.3 (20/21), 2.6 (21/22), 2.6 (22/23) and 1.9 (23/24)



\* Data obtained from Careers Wales website [Pupil destinations](#) | [Careers Wales](#)

## Increasing essential skills and employability among our adults....

Increasing essential skills and employability among adults is vital for building a resilient, inclusive, and productive society. It enables individuals to access better job opportunities, adapt to changing labour market demands, and contribute more effectively to the economy. For communities, it reduces unemployment, poverty, and reliance on public services, while promoting social mobility and wellbeing. Investing in adult skills also supports lifelong learning, boosts confidence, and helps people re-enter education or training, especially those who may have missed out earlier in life. Ultimately, it strengthens both individual prospects and collective prosperity.

Our essential skills courses within adult education focus on building fundamental skills that are necessary for work and everyday life. These courses typically cover English, numeracy, and digital literacy, helping individuals improve their reading, writing, math, and computer skills. They aim to enhance confidence, employability, and overall effectiveness in various settings.

Throughout 2024/25, we had 747 learners enrolled on to our Adult and Community Learning Essential Skills courses. These figures are roughly at the same level as last year, due to the Multiply programme delivering Numeracy Essential Skills, alongside our Adult and Community Learning courses.

(The Multiply programme in Wales is a UK-government funded initiative aimed at improving the numeracy skills of adults aged 19 and over. It provides free courses and support to help adults enhance their confidence

with numbers in everyday life, manage finances, and potentially boost career opportunities. The program is part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and is delivered locally by various organizations across Wales).

The number of residents enrolled with our Employability Services was 1,587 which is a decrease in comparison to 23/24 - 1,934 and falling short of our target set for 24/25 of 1,800. This has mainly been due to the closure of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) programme.

The number of qualifications achieved from our employability programmes did however exceed our target of 1,050 to 1,431, which is an increase on last year's figures of 235. The majority of these participants were supported to achieve an array of qualifications ranging from HGV, to IT qualifications.

At the end of 24/25, we have supported 402 Economically Inactive (EI) and Long Term Unemployed (LTU) people into employment, which is an increase on last year's figures of 231. Most have had to overcome multiple barriers to succeed and the support offered by Torfaen Works has helped with these barriers.

## Our Key Challenges...

### Education:

- **Improving learner outcomes in literacy and numeracy—and closing the attainment gap for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners**—is vital because these core skills are the foundation for success in education, work, and everyday life. This will be a challenge because disadvantaged learners often face barriers like poverty, lower early language exposure, and limited access to tailored support, which impact their ability to engage and progress in education. By focusing on those who face extra challenges, we will help ensure that every child has a fair chance to succeed, which strengthens communities and supports long-term wellbeing and equality.
- **Ensuring effective targeted and specialist provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)** will be a key challenge because these learners often require tailored support that goes beyond standard classroom teaching. Meeting their diverse needs, demands skilled staff, appropriate resources, and strong coordination across services. Without this support, learners with ALN may struggle to access education equally, which can affect their confidence, progress, and future opportunities. Providing the right help will ensure every learner can thrive, promotes inclusion, and helps close gaps in achievement and wellbeing.
- **Promoting learner wellbeing and encouraging community engagement** will require a joined-up approach across schools, families, and local services. When learners feel safe, supported, and mentally well, they are more likely to succeed academically and socially. Community engagement helps build strong support networks around learners, making education more inclusive and responsive to local needs. Addressing this challenge is essential to creating environments where all learners can thrive, especially those facing disadvantage or isolation.
- **Develop learner progression pathways to encourage lifelong learning** – will require clear, flexible routes that support individuals at every stage of their education and career. Many learners—especially those facing disadvantage—need tailored guidance and support to stay engaged and move forward confidently. It's important because lifelong learning helps people adapt to change, improve their skills, and access better opportunities throughout life. Strong progression pathways will ensure that learning doesn't stop at school, but continues in ways that promote personal growth, employability, and wellbeing.
- **Promote staff wellbeing** – will involve addressing a wide range of physical, emotional, and professional needs in a demanding and often high-pressure environment. When staff feel supported, healthy, and motivated, they are more productive, engaged, and better able to deliver high-quality services. Prioritising wellbeing will help us to attract and retain skilled professionals, reduces absence, and creates a positive workplace culture that benefits both employees and the communities they serve.
- **Develop the physical and digital environment for learning** – will require significant investment, long-term planning, and the ability to keep up with rapidly changing technology. Many schools and learning spaces may have outdated facilities or limited access to digital tools, which can create barriers to effective teaching and learning. It's important because

modern, accessible, and well-equipped environments—both physical and online will help create engaging, inclusive, and flexible learning experiences. This supports better outcomes for all learners and prepares them for the demands of a digital world.