

Well-being Objective 1

Enabling our children and young people to have the best possible start in life (Start Well)

Overview of Progress

Supporting our children and young people to have the best possible start in life provides a strong foundation on which to limit inequalities. What happens in these early years has a long-term effect on health and well-being outcomes, educational achievement, and economic status. With 34.6% of Carmarthenshire's children thought to be living in poverty, it is crucial that every child has access to the same the opportunities regardless of their background and that they receive the right support when and where they need it.

The Council is committed to doing its very best in this regard, with a focus on prevention and early intervention and a well-functioning education system which recognises that all children are individuals. An external inspection of our Education Services commended our clear vision and strong leadership which has a robust impact on improving education provision and learner outcomes. An identified culture of self-evaluation shows our commitment to continuously reviewing the service to ensure children and young people have the best start in life.

We continue our efforts to keep children at home with their families where possible, evidenced by the County's comparatively low rate for Children Looked After. We are also taking proactive steps to address the identified shortage of foster carers in the County. The number of children on the child protection register has increased, but the level is still significantly below the Welsh average. Strategic planning is focussed on prevention and joined up thinking, with a notable example being the Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy.

We recognise that the childcare offer in the County needs to improve, and appropriate steps continue to be implemented to address this. More areas will benefit from funded childcare places through the Flying Start childcare expansion and a Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan has been developed with a focus on increasing the offer generally coupled with a focus on strengthening the Welsh-medium offer.

Our education service delivers a well-rounded curriculum taking account of the individual needs of each learner. Pupils with additional learning needs are well supported through our strategic focus on providing an inclusive education offer and schools have responded well to reforms. Whilst attendance saw a dip following the Covid period we are seeing some signs of recovery; however, this is very much an ongoing priority to ensure further and sustained improvement. Attendance is closely monitored for whole school as well as for specific groups of pupils such as those entitled to Free School Meals and pupils with additional learning needs.

Teachers and pupils co-design a rounded curriculum that is based on the Curriculum for Wales. There is a focus on learning experiences which have raising educational standards at their core, effectively developing literacy, numeracy, and digital skills as well as bilingual Welsh and English skills. Areas for celebration and improvement were noted in a recent Estyn inspection which are reflected within this report.

Carmarthenshire has the highest childhood obesity levels in Wales with 30.5% of 4-5 year olds being overweight or obese. The Council's commitment to doing all it can to support in addressing this issue is evidenced by the range of Actif initiatives in place to ensure that children and young people have access to activities which improve their health and well-being. In addition, the roll out of the universal primary free school meals offer continues to progress well, ensuring that children are provided with nutritious and balanced meals which support their development.

In Summary

- The Council is committed to enabling children and young people to have a positive start in life, evidenced by the multifaceted approach to supporting the well-being and development of children and young people in the community.
- Whilst there has been an increase in the number of looked after children, our rates are comparably low in the context of other local authorities.
- The number of looked after children in foster placements has increased with the shortage of foster carers being a challenge, however, proactive efforts are being made to address this through collaboration with Foster Wales and a national recruitment campaign.
- In recognition of the importance of being active at a young age the 'Amser Actif' programme develops primary school children's confidence and physical skills, showing significant improvements in movement and manipulative skills among participants.
- Achievements have also been seen in school swimming, with a notable percentage of participants achieving the 'safe swimmer' standard.
- The Social Care and Health Protection team has worked to improve vaccination uptake among school pupils.
- Our key focus is on ensuring children are safe through our investing in prevention and early intervention as well as innovative approaches to safeguarding. We have a strong workforce who are trauma informed and work in an attachment aware model which keeps children and young people at the forefront of what we do using signs of safety keeping families together wherever possible.



How are we doing?

- We continue to have the lowest number of looked after children per 10,000 population under 18 years of age in Carmarthenshire compared to other authorities in Wales, and well below the Welsh average of 116.33. Our figure at the end of March 2023 was 51.80 per 10,000 population, this equates to 190 looked after children. At the end of March 2024 this increased to 259, a 36% increase. The comparative data for this per 10,000 population will not be available until late 2024, but we have been low in the context of other local authorities for many years.
- There were 209 looked after children in foster placements as at 31 March 2024, compared to 149 the previous year. There continues to be a shortage of foster carers both locally and nationally which impacts on placement stability. The department works collaboratively across the region with Foster Wales and a national foster carer recruitment campaign received significant media attention.



Outcome: Reducing the inequalities faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds which may affect their later life chances

Disability Service

The 0-25 Disability service has co-produced a Transition Guide with and for young people with disabilities and their families to support them to navigate through the transition process to adulthood. This dynamic electronic guide will be available via our website and other internet platforms following its launch.

Regional Adoption Service

Mid and West Wales Regional Adoption Service (MWAS) continues to develop its practice and over the last few months has been focusing on the Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) framework and around contact by achieving several placements where children have continued to have on-going direct contact with birth parents and siblings post adoption. Mid and West Wales Adoption continues to find adoptive placements within the region for children from the region. However, there is a general decline in enquiries in Wales from people who would like to adopt, and the number is down this year. A new marketing recruitment officer has been appointed and is working alongside the National Adoption Service with a focus on the recruitment of adopters especially for sibling groups.

Sport & Leisure Initiatives

'Amser Actif' aims to develop primary school children's confidence, motivation, and physical skills by engaging pupils in fun activities, particularly those who don't participate in sport and physical activity outside of school. Targeting schools with a high percentage of Free School Meals and low percentage of Hooked on Sport figures, 5 schools engaged with the 8-week programme, where an Actif Communities Coach delivered sessions and assessed 97 children on their development of which 17 were Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils. 51 sessions were delivered in total with 637 participations resulting in a dramatic improvement across skills. Pupils that took part in the sessions showed an increase in motivation and confidence when taking part.

In 2024, Actif Sport and Leisure received funding through the Rural Innovation Fund to recruit a "digital delivery" community sport and activity coach and offer 29 schools free access to Actif's 'Actif Anywhere for Schools' platform. These 29 schools were identified based on their rural locations, levels of economic deprivation and 'hooked on sport' data. The schools will be able to access a timetable of livestreamed sport and activity sessions as well as a bank of on-demand classes to enhance children's (and teachers') health and well-being. This is set to launch fully in September and will eventually be rolled out across all the County's schools, and beyond.

The 2022/2023 academic year (up to August 2023) saw 3,524 primary aged pupils taking part in the Actif Leisure's School Swimming Programme. 25% overall achieved the 'safe swimmer' standard. We continue to offer free swimming sessions at the weekend for those aged under 16, with additional sessions available during the school summer holidays. 2,377 took advantage of these sessions in 2023/24, a slight increase on the previous year (2,237).

Vaccination Uptake

The Social Care and Health Protection team worked in conjunction with education colleagues and school nurses to improve vaccination uptake in pupils in primary and secondary school. The Health Protection Support and Advice Officers contacted non-responders to increase vaccine uptake for the influenza vaccine. In total 773 phone calls were made by the team with 306 phone calls to non-responders in primary schools and 467 phone calls secondary school non-responders.

Outcome: Families from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to access health and well-being provision within their local areas.

Looked After Children

As previously noted, there is a shortage of foster carers both locally and nationally which impacts on placement stability. Development is continuing to increase the range and type of placements for children looked after through the department's residential strategy and fostering marketing and recruitment strategy.

We have been developing our supply of in-house supported and residential accommodation placements to aid the ambition to rebalance the market and take profit out of children's care. Two properties have been purchased and a third is being identified. Our in-house Supported Lodgings Scheme which supports young people post-16 has continued to develop, with 7 providers now established to offer placements. These developments will help children remain in their local communities and prevent the need for out of county placements. There is a need to develop further placements to increase the offer and link the support with the overall capacity for placements across Carmarthenshire.

Sport & Leisure Initiatives

Actif Sport & Leisure offer and facilitate a wide range of opportunities for children and families to access activity to improve their Health and Well-being. This includes our high value 'household membership' enabling up to 2 adults and 4 children to join under one membership achieving better value for money. The number of household memberships grew by 182 (11%) over the course of the year.

Actif have an excellent relationship with social services and provide opportunities for children under the care of social services to access its after-school and holiday activity programmes. 359 children have benefitted from this during 2023-24.

During 2023-24 Actif secured £435k of Shared Prosperity funding to roll out health, fitness, and children's activity to 8 of the County's community halls and across the Llanelli area.

Going Places

In 2023/24 Carmarthenshire Museum was selected to be part of an innovative 5-year collaboration with ArtFund and UK museums on Going Places, a community engagement and exhibition programme. During this first year, the partnership received £500k to build the case for national funding for sustainable touring exhibitions and pioneering new ways of working with communities to create museum activity programmes. The long-term nature of the project will be transformational in Carmarthenshire with the priority placed on co-designing services with young people, and cultural skills development for children and young people in rural communities.

Free-Swimming Initiative

In recognition that most people attending the free-swimming initiative sessions can already swim, those that cannot swim may feel excluded. Considering this we offered free swimming lessons to children who had been identified during their school swimming lessons as under-achieving and unlikely to achieve the 'safe swimmer' status by the time they leave primary school. 56 young people took part in these additional swimming lessons at Llanelli Leisure Centre during the school summer holidays. They were able to further develop their aquatic competence and confidence upon which they can build and continue to enjoy aquatic activities, including the free-swimming sessions.



Adoption Mid and West Wales

We had a stall at the Urdd Eisteddfod in Llandovery. The focus of the week was on the support we provide for families and more specifically about engaging with children. Children enjoyed playing with the many games and activities we had, which were designed for families to build closer attachments with their children.

We provided advice and support to many adoptive families from across the region and further afield, supported schools to better support adopted children in class, and spoke to a number of people who were thinking of adoption as a route to starting a family.

Youth Justice

'Outstanding' rating awarded to Carmarthenshire Youth Justice Team

HM Inspectorate of Probation have rated Carmarthenshire County Council's Youth Justice Team as 'Outstanding' in their inspection of youth offending services in Carmarthenshire, published in March 2024. The inspection covered three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service; the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts; and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Gill Adams, Principal Manager of Carmarthenshire Youth Justice Team wins the Butler Trust Annual Award presented at a ceremony in London on Tuesday, 19 March 2024 by HRH The Princess Royal (Princess Anne). Gill was recognised for her unstinting dedication to youth justice for many years and her wider role as Principal Manager of Youth Support Service in Carmarthenshire.

The Butler Trust Awards are the only UK-wide awards specifically for people working in custodial and community justice settings.



In order to ensure families can access the support they need at the right time, we will develop a multi-agency early help strategy. We will also introduce a policy for allocating resources to support disabled children and their families which is equitable and transparent.

To ensure a sufficient supply of in-house foster placements to meet the range of needs of children looked after in Carmarthenshire, we will increase the capacity of the fostering service to manage current and future demand, to improve recruitment and retention rates and support for Foster Carers. To meet the range of needs of children looked after in Carmarthenshire, we will implement a strategic programme for residential services including the acquisition, refurbishment, and development of three new children's homes.

Our Actif Club provision works closely with children's services to provide opportunities to engage with children during school holidays to give them a variety of physical activity opportunities. We have seen a significant increase in recent years of the number of children signposted to this service from children's services, so we need to maximise efforts to match that demand.

In Summary

- The preventative work conducted in Carmarthenshire and our ongoing commitment to keeping children at home with their families where possible is evidenced by our comparatively low rate for Children Looked After.
- Our Family Support Strategy is under review to become an Early Years Strategy, ensuring early intervention services meet the needs at the right time.
- The Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy has been launched, with local priorities for maternity and early years transformation being implemented.
- Flying Start childcare expansion is being rolled out to provide quality funded childcare to more areas, with a focus on promoting Welsh language and culture.
- In recognition of the importance of a sufficient childcare offer and the depleting number of childcare places in the County between 2022/23 and 2023/24, a Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan has been developed.
- Additionally, efforts are being made to ensure a stable workforce within children's services, with a re-alignment of the management team, implementation of an experienced practitioner progression framework, and recruitment of new social worker trainees.

How are we doing?

- 8.5% of children in care in Carmarthenshire during 2023/24 had to move 3 or more times during the year, this equates to 22 out of the 259 children, compared to 7.4% (14 out of the 190) in 2022/23. There was a 36% rise in the number of Children Looked After on 31 March 2024 to 259 compared to 190 the previous year.
- There are 213 registered childcare providers offering 4,214 childcare places delivered by childminders, day nurseries, cylchoedd meithrin, Flying Start, After School Clubs and Holiday Clubs. Our 5th Statutory Childcare Sufficiency Assessment summary report continues to be shared with prospective childcare providers and is also available on the Family Information Service website.
- 10,461 individuals were supported from the Families First programme, of which 6,234 (60%) were new individuals.
- 78.1% of child attendance at an allocated Flying Start free childcare placement for eligible 2-3-year-olds to prepare for school readiness which exceeded the target of 75%.
- 97% of families with additional social welfare needs linked to poverty, living in a Flying Start area receiving time specified interventions from the wider Flying Start Team.
- 1.5% of unauthorised absence at an allocated Flying Start free childcare placement for eligible 2-3-year-olds to prepare for school readiness. It is encouraging to see families reporting absence and engaging with childcare settings in reporting absence.



Outcome: Improved availability of early years education and childcare settings across the county, particularly in rural areas; with a particular focus on providing and strengthening Welsh-medium childcare.

We continue to promote Welsh language development opportunities for the childcare workforce and language support initiatives for parents such as Clwb Cwtch. Information and support is shared through various media, events, training programmes and other resources to try and increase Welsh childcare provision across the County. The Early Years Welsh Language Officer has collaborated with CWLWM's umbrella organisations to support providers and families with their Welsh language development, and many have shown interest/signed up for CWLWM's Welsh Promise programme of Delivering a bilingual integrated service that will ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families across Wales.



We currently have 81 registered childminders with a total of 660 childcare places. This has reduced from 90 childminders (717 places) last year. Long-term childminding recruitment and sustainability has been difficult during 2023-24 whilst every effort has been made at various events. The timeline to gain relevant qualification and registration at a time when living costs are impacting family household income has affected recruitment into the sector.

Flying Start Childcare

Flying Start childcare phased expansion has continued to be rolled out to provide quality funded childcare to more areas across Carmarthenshire. Over 1,170 post-codes have been added so far and 12 of the identified 13 areas are now fully enrolled into Flying Start. The aforementioned Early Years Welsh Language Officer has started working with all childcare providers across Flying Start promoting Welsh language and culture. Our Flying Start App is a success and has been refined making it easier for parents to access helpful information and advice and to find out what is happening in local communities.

Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan

The Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan for 2023-24 is in progress and was submitted to Welsh Government in June 2024.

Outcome: Keeping children at home with their families whenever possible.

Special Guardians

Preventative work is being undertaken so children have access to support at the right time, keeping families together where it is safe to do so and prevent the need to become looked after and despite numbers rising, we have one of the lowest rates in Wales. We have reviewed the support provided to Special Guardians to promote this as an alternative to becoming looked after with the support of families/friends. A standardised payment system to Special Guardianship Orders carers was initiated from April 2024.

Families First

Nine Families First projects continue to provide essential preventative support for children, young people, and families across the County. A range of interventions have been delivered including language and play, paediatric first aid, Star programme, parenting after trauma, life skills to mention but a few, as well as organised parties, food hampers, well-being packs, clothing, various trips, fun days, and activities.

Family Support Strategy

The Family Support Strategy is being reviewed and in its initial stages of development as an Early Years Strategy to ensure early intervention support services meet the needs of children, young people, and families at the right time utilising opportunities for integrating services.

Maternity & Early Years Strategy

A Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy has been launched and Carmarthenshire Operational Group has implemented local priorities for maternity and early years transformation.

Outcome: Families facing difficulties are supported to provide stable, safe and secure home environments for their children.

Families First projects continue to develop and build greater links within communities and maintain stronger working partnerships with other providers and local businesses including mental health services, health visitors, the police, fire service, schools, Hywel Dda University Health Board, Coleg Sir Gâr, Flying Start, Communities4Work.

Childcare Offer

The 30 hours Childcare Offer for Wales enables eligible working parents of 3–4 year-olds to access 30 hours a week of funded early education and childcare for 48 weeks a year. During 2023/24, 1,019 applications have been approved for Carmarthenshire and £2,400,840 payments to childcare providers which represents a considerable saving for many local working families who may have struggled to afford to pay for childcare. It has also helped sustain local childcare providers by providing a guaranteed regular income.



The Early Years Integration Team

The Early Years Integration Team is a joint project between Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) and Carmarthenshire County Council covering 11 electoral wards in the rural Cwm Gwendraeth area representing 1,250-1,300 children aged 0-5 years and around 1,020 families (based on health visitor caseloads). The multidisciplinary team is made up of Health Visitors and Midwives working in Cwm Gwendraeth, Family Support Workers, Play Worker, Preparation for Parenthood Support Worker, School Link Assistant, and a Community Connector who work to identify and maintain relationships with partner agencies and the community. It is underpinned by theories of transformation to strengthen the community by supporting families with young children so that they are informed, confident and able to access support when needed. As universal providers, the Health Visitors and Midwives have direct contact with all pregnant women and all families with at least one child under five years delivering the All-Wales programmes of care, identifying families in need of support. This support ranges from maternity care to health visiting, one-to-one support or easily accessible groups, in venues across the area, working closely with communities and third and public sector agencies, all of whom are vital to the work. Families are supported from the antenatal period through to seven years old, including the sometimes-tricky transition into school. Now entering its 4th year, having evolved from humble and uncertain beginnings at the height of the Covid lockdown to expanding and delivering a well received, well utilised service.



Food and Fun 2023

Food and Fun is an exciting school-based education programme run across 12 days during the school summer holidays funded by WLGA. It is delivered by school staff and partners along with support from Carmarthenshire County Council and health professionals. The programme provides food and nutrition, education, physical activity, enrichment sessions and healthy meals to children in areas of social deprivation. Food and Fun successfully ran in 6 schools within Carmarthenshire over the 2023 summer holidays in Ysgol Y Bedol, Ysgol Pontyberem, Ysgol Penrhos, Ysgol Betws, Ysgol Bro Banw and Ysgol Llandeilo. Approximately 200 children aged 3-11 years benefitted from attending the Food and Fun programme.



Quality Mark certificate is awarded which confirms a school as a Food and Fun facilitator. A bronze award is awarded to schools during their first year, silver award during their second year and gold for schemes that have ran for more than 3 years.

How can we do better?

We will be working towards addressing the gaps in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-27, including promoting and further developing Welsh Medium childcare. We shall also implement the phased expansion of Flying Start in line with Welsh Government guidance.

We will aim to implement key priorities in the Maternity and Early Years Operational plan and the Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy in partnership with Hywel Dda University Health Board and the Voluntary Sector, in order to move towards an integrated delivery model.

We will ensure an effective family support service that supports families to make the changes children need so that fewer children progress to a child protection pathway, and children can remain/return safely home. We want to improve early permanence arrangements by establishing parity of fees and allowances for Special Guardian (SGO) carers with foster carers to promote connected carers becoming SGOs; keeping children with their families and out of care.

We will be developing the dryside junior provision in our Actif Facilities to provide sustainable opportunities for children to be active, using insight to measure success. Also, we will support and develop 50 new community organisations to provide sustainable physical activity opportunities e.g. Us Girls, Disability, Youth Clubs.

In Summary

- Attendance has improved in 2023-24, and an Attendance Strategy is in the final stages of development, with further refinement and development of support resources for schools ongoing.
- Numbers of Year 11 and 13 leavers not in Education, Employment, or Training have increased during the year. The Youth Support Service has delivered post-16 transition youth work in line with the Welsh Government Youth Engagement and Progression Framework.
- We continue to strive to make sure that every child and young person is valued and valued equally and to deliver our ambitious priorities.
- As one Education and Children's Services team we have worked effectively to ensure that our children and young people were successfully supported to access their education and all the services they required.
- This was evidenced by the various inspections undertaken during 2023/24. Estyn's Inspection of our Local Authority Education services noted: 'Carmarthenshire's education services are led robustly by senior leaders and elected members, who share a clear vision for education within the authority. This is supported by an open and positive culture and self-evaluation and improvement planning processes that are rigorous, on the whole. Through this, leaders have a positive effect on improving education provision and learners' outcomes in most of their areas of responsibility and are able to set a clear direction for further improvement in the future...'

How are we doing?

- The Council maintains 1 nursery school, 94 primary schools, 12 secondary schools and 1 special school which provide education for over 27,000 pupils.
- Our 2023 residents survey received almost 4,000 respondents, with most agreeing that local schools provide children and young people with a good education with a score^[1] of 0.41. This is a slight decline on the 2022 score of 0.52 but continues to be an overall agreement.
- There is a significant increase in the number of Year 11 leavers not in Education, Employment or Training during 2023/24 with 2.3% (46 out of 1,987) compared to 1.9% (36 out of 1,914) the previous year.



[1] Average Index Score: A score below 0 indicates overall disagreement; a score between 0 and 1 indicates overall agreement, and a score between 1 and 2 indicates overall strong agreement.

Outcome: Pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are fully supported.

The Inclusion Service is an integral part of the Local Authority's front-line service to children and young people. It is a service which has statutory responsibilities and provides support and intervention where necessary.

The Authority has implemented the Welsh Government's ALN Transformation Programme to support a new ALN system that is person centred, and supports learners with personalised learning to achieve effective outcomes, however this is against a backdrop of austerity and covid recovery. The Council's central support team ensure that schools build capacity to identify needs early, make the correct provision and then monitor and review this provision. Schools have required significant support by the ALN Service to fulfil this expectation due to budgetary cuts and new expectations on ALN Coordinators and class teachers. Increased demand for specialist provision resulting from unforeseen demand for autistic placements necessitated the use of departmental resources identified for growth to respond in a timely manner to develop new specialist provision to fill identified gaps in Welsh medium ASD provision and secondary ASD specialist provision. This situation has meant that resources to support the building of capacity in our mainstream schools for meeting the needs of learners have had to be directed to specialist provision thus impacting the department's ability to meet targets for strengthening inclusive practices.

The Council's strategy on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) states that inclusive education means providing all children and young people with appropriate personalised curriculum and networks of support. We are committed to the belief that 'inclusive learning' is the best practice in teaching and learning. We place a strong emphasis on supporting schools within the following key areas:

- Accurate assessment of strengths and needs;
- Planning effectively to build on strengths and address areas of need;
- Adopting pedagogical approaches to optimise individual learning;
- Involving children in setting their learning goals and evaluating their progress towards agreed targets;
- Engaging with parents to inform them of their children's progress and to involve them in supporting their children's learning;
- Evaluating individual children's progress and the progress of groups and classes;
- Refining the approach to teaching and learning in light of evaluation;
- Maintaining systematic records to report progress and to enable reflective practice.

In the last year the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reforms and the new ALN system was embedded within schools and has been largely welcomed by schools, practitioners, stakeholders, parents, and carers. School Additional Learning Needs Coordinators are enthusiastic and committed to identifying needs at an early stage and making sure the correct interventions are in place to ensure pupils make the expected progress. Headteachers however feel that budgetary cuts are affecting their ability to make appropriate and timely provision for all learners.

Half termly clusters of schools meet to ensure steady progress in the monitoring and reviewing of provision to meet the requirements of the Code is being made by all schools as evidenced by the ALN sections of Estyn reports. The ALN Departments differentiated model of support requires considerable input and guidance by central officers, however this has to be balanced against the positive impact it has on our schools. Ongoing we recognise that the time allocated to support schools may impact the department's ability to monitor and review provision in schools as set out as a statutory function of the local authority in the ALNET Act and Code.

Carmarthenshire schools have worked hard to develop workforce capacity and to deliver transformation within the time set by Welsh Government. The schools undertake Person Centered Practice (PCP) approaches and identify needs early to make prompt and effective provision. They understand their responsibilities in relation to creating effective Individual Development Plans for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

For learners that no longer are identified with ALN, Carmarthenshire schools implement strategies to continue to meet their needs and provide ongoing progress monitoring as appropriate and they continue to receive suitable targeted support. As expressed above, this is challenging during times of austerity, budget cuts and increased expectations on the system delivery in schools.

The Central Inclusion Team supports with cluster working, school-to-school working, sharing of practices and specialist resources. ALN School Support Visits delivered by the ALN Advisory Team offer ongoing support with tracking and tailored school visits to address ALN transformation and quality assurance.

Through the support of central services, the close working relationship and guidance documentation has supported schools to apply the act and the code ensuring consistency in determining ALN and Additional Learning Provision.

The ALN Department has grown in capacity over recent years following growth allocation, however the Carmarthenshire ALN Department remains small in comparison to the ALN teams in other local authorities. Challenges arise when staffing is compromised which then leaves the department vulnerable in terms of meeting its statutory duties.

Carmarthenshire provides parity of provision in Welsh and English - resources, assessments, staffing and sufficiency of specialist provision and following the Estyn Inspection Carmarthenshire was successful in hosting the National Lead Programme for Welsh Government and is working with the Welsh Language Lead to develop Welsh language tools and resources.

Physical Literacy Programme

The Physical Literacy programme was extended to the Additional Learning Needs Unit in 2023 to ensure that every child within the County, regardless of their ability, has an opportunity to become more confident when taking part in physical activity and sport. With a whole school approach, staff from 3 units were given training on how they can adapt activities to suit the needs of their pupils, followed by ongoing support from the Active Young People Officer. There are a further 6 units on board with the programme for the summer term.

Schools were also invited to the first INSPORT Series Event, organised by Disability Sport Wales and supported by the Active Young People Team. The event provided inclusive sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled young people, with 57 pupils from across the County taking part.



Outcome: Increased school attendance rates and access to education for vulnerable pupils.

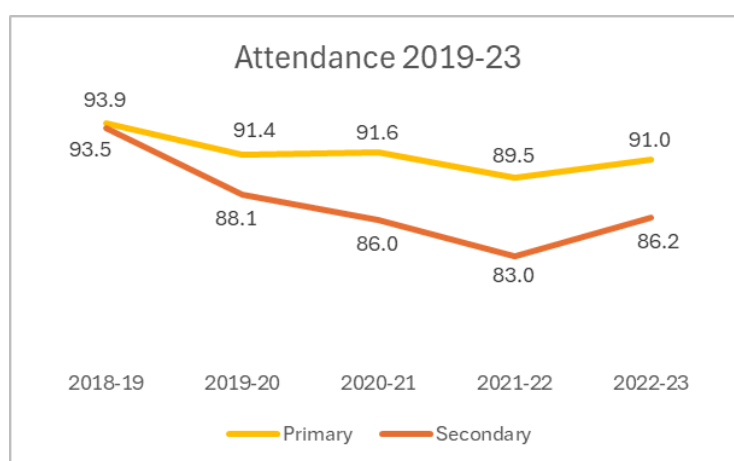
One of the recommendations of Estyn's Inspection of our Local Authority Education services was:

'To improve pupils' attendance in the authority's schools.'

Improving attendance is one of the new Cabinet's priorities. Although the authority has identified attendance as an important area that is in need of attention, improvements across schools have been varied. There has been strong progress in a minority of schools, although the authority's overall school attendance rates remain stubbornly low following the pandemic.'

Attendance improved in the last full academic year, 2022-23, compared to the previous year. However, it is recognised that further and sustained improvement will be needed in future years and, as such, this will remain an ongoing priority.

An attendance data dashboard has been developed to support monitoring of attendance in all schools, both for whole school as well as individual groups of pupils such as those entitled to free school meals and children with Additional Learning Needs. This has now become the main means of acquiring and sharing attendance data and all schools are provided with a county-wide data digest twice a year to benchmark their progress against similar schools and those in their clusters.



Training for school staff responsible for improving attendance has been established as an annual event to share good practice and to co-construct school-based strategies.

An attendance media campaign has been developed alongside the authority's Marketing and Media Department to communicate a positive message to parents and communities around attending school. A cross-department Attendance Strategy is being developed involving a range of key stakeholders including, School Improvement, Youth Service, Additional Learning Needs, Behaviour Support Service and Education Psychology Service and will be complete in academic year 2023-24. Further refinement and development of supporting resources for schools will take place on an ongoing basis through 2023-24.

The above graph shows the significant impact of the Covid pandemic on school attendance in Carmarthenshire as in all local authorities and demonstrates the gradual recovery since then. Our aim is to restore school attendance to at least 2019 levels and to improve from there.

Vulnerable Learners

The Education and Children's Services Department's Strategic Progress is to be operationally and strategically steered through a series of collaborative 'Focus Groups', aligning to the department's business plan. The Inclusion and Engagement Focus Group aims to ensure a proactive, inclusive education system for all including all vulnerable groups. The attendance of all vulnerable groups is monitored via the dashboard referred to above and reported to the Departmental Management Team and relevant Focus Group as above. Attendance of all groups of learners is a key focus area in discussions between the Education Support Team and schools.

Elective Home Education

Our Elective Home Education (EHE) team have strengthened our local procedures to ensure schools, families and learners are clear on their responsibilities when EHE is considered. A change to the 'exit form' allows us to better understand the reasons why parents are choosing this form of education, and information about the child prior to them becoming EHE.

- Carmarthenshire currently has 657 Elective Home Educated learners (this number fluctuates and tends to be higher at the end of the summer term).
- Staff have worked effectively with families and during 2023/24 - 79.25% of these children received an annual visit.
- Several young people have sat a range of GCSE's with attainment being good.
- The Elective Home Education grant provided by Welsh Government is used effectively to provide activities and resources to families so that the young people have a more enriched learning experience.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Carmarthenshire has produced a 'best practice' training and toolkit for schools and support agencies in respect of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). The toolkit project is developing the understanding of EBSA across schools, providing psychological input and around EBSA presenting needs. 11 (of 12) secondary schools engaged between January 2023 and March 2024. We are working on increasing awareness within schools and with other agencies through training and consultation support.

Secondary schools are showing a better understanding of EBSA-presenting behaviours and are working to support pupils where there are emerging EBSA needs rather than waiting for needs to become entrenched.

Minority Ethnic Achievement Team

The Minority Ethnic Achievement team continue to provide:

- Targeted guidance and support for schools with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Welsh as an Additional Language (WAL) learners.
- General pedagogical guidance for schools (training and resources).
- Specific advice for schools with refugee or asylum seeker families.
- Supporting induction process in schools for new arrivals.
- Providing first language support for new arrivals in Arabic, Polish and Ukrainian.
- Assist in home language GCSEs.
- Translation/interpretation for families.
- Developing links with local Ethnic Minority support organisations such as School of Sanctuary, Ethnic Youth Support Team, Show Racism the Red Card to raise awareness, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

The Gypsy, Romany Traveller Service

- We have developed close relationships with parents regarding the education of their children, support and advice given to them as well as signposting to other agencies.
- Providing support for Gypsy, Romany Traveller pupils in schools from Teaching Assistant.
- Close working relationships with other departments within the County to ensure Gypsy, Romany Traveller pupils have the support they need.
- Termly monitoring of attendance.

Trauma Informed Approach

This is becoming embedded across our schools where the approach sees the appointment of an 'emotionally available adult' from within the school to link with the child/young person and family which is making a difference in how supported families are feeling.

Outcome: Deliver a rounded curriculum raising educational standards.

The New Curriculum

Teachers and pupils co-design a learning curriculum that is based on the Curriculum for Wales. Learning experiences in our schools in Carmarthenshire are inclusive and purposeful, successfully aiming to reduce the impact of poverty.

Increasingly, learning experiences are purposefully linked to the local community, our Cynefin, ensuring that pupils develop a rich understanding of their locality and their heritage.

Our schools effectively support child and young people to become ambitious capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives, effectively developing their Welsh and English bilingual skills. A broad range of learning experiences ensure that our children and young people develop their enterprising skills and creative thinking, making sure that they are well informed about Wales and the world.

Engaging learning experiences and activities ensure that our children and young people develop as healthy confident individuals, maximising the opportunities to learn in school, outdoors and within our local environment.

The areas of learning and experience include a focus on languages literacy and communication, science and technology, mathematics and numeracy, expressive arts, humanities and health and well-being.

The curriculum also develops pupils' knowledge of human rights, developmentally appropriate relationships and sexuality, diversity, and respecting differences, as well as providing opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and knowledge of careers and the workplace.

Schools are well supported to strengthen their teaching practices and to ensure that the needs of all learners are met effectively. As a result, the quality of teaching is sound or better in many schools, ensuring that pupils' progress is in line with teachers' high expectations. Pupil progress and standards are monitored collaboratively, and support brokered to ensure that schools are well equipped to address their developmental priorities. Key areas of focus continue to be pupils' skill development in literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, including their application of these skills across a broad range of subject areas. The progress of individual pupils remains the key focus, with person centred planning underpinning the planning of learning experiences across many schools in Carmarthenshire. Most pupils, including those with Additional Learning Needs and in specific groups, achieve good progress in their early years' skills development, their numeracy, literacy, and digital skills over time.

Estyn Inspections

Summary of Estyn Outcomes 2017-2024



Since March 2022 there has been a new inspection framework and Estyn no longer provides summative judgements for individual inspection areas. Inspectors can still place a school into Estyn Review if they judge that the school would benefit from a short period of time to improve a few aspects of their work. The two statutory categories of follow-up remain unchanged. This is when schools need significant improvement or require special measures. We want to reduce the proportion of schools requiring follow-up activity following Estyn inspection.

Academic Year	Number of Inspections	No Follow Up	Estyn Review	Significant Improvement	Special Measures
2017-18	17	13	3	1	
2018-19	14	5	6		3
2019-20	13	7	6		
2020-21 (Covid)	No Inspections				
2021-22 (Inspections re-start New Framework)	13	11		1	1
2022-23	21	17	3		1
2023-March 24	13	10		1	2

Since Estyn re-started inspecting schools post Covid in March 2022, many of our schools have had no follow-up or a few in a category. In nearly all cases, there is close alignment between Estyn's outcomes and the department's understanding of the school's strengths and areas of improvement. Six good practice Case Studies were identified in our inspections from September 2023-March 2024. The school placed in Significant Improvement in March 2022 and the one placed in Special Measures in June 2022 were judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to their recommendations and were removed from the categories in December 2023.

Between September 2023 and March 2024 there were 13 inspections, 10 requiring no follow up, 1 Significant Improvement and 2 Special measures. The schools requiring follow up had been identified as schools causing concern, however, measures instigated had not ensured sufficient progress prior to the Estyn inspection.

Attainment

In general, GCSE and A-Level exam results were below the pre-pandemic level (Academic Year 2018/19). However, as we transition back to pre-pandemic assessment arrangements, some support remained in place for learners who sat exams in 2022/23. This support was in the form of advance information and a supportive approach to grading. Due to the varying examination arrangements in place since 2018/19, caution must be exercised when comparing outcomes between subsequent years. Most schools are ensuring effective pupil progress over time from initial starting points.

- In Carmarthenshire, 67.8% of all entries have been awarded an A*-C grade, with 21.7% of entries achieving an A*-A grade.
- A total of 96.6% of A-level students in Carmarthenshire achieved A*-E.
- Through a combination of exams and assessments, applicable to different courses, a total of 29.4% of A-level students across Carmarthenshire have received A or A* this year; whilst 88.7% of AS students in Carmarthenshire achieved A-E grades.



Physical Literacy Programme

In response to local and national insight data, the Actif Communities Team developed a 'Physical Literacy' programme to improve the quality of school sport and physical activity. This was achieved through a whole-school approach via a package of school staff training, mentoring and support. 62 Primary Schools received training for their entire staffing workforce as well as follow-up mentoring session to embed the learning and provide further support.

Feedback from school staff demonstrate an increase of 30% in confidence and competence levels with improved understanding of the importance of physical literacy. This in turn has had a positive impact on the pupil's physical development and confidence to inspire them to be Hooked on Sport for Life.



Young Sports Ambassador Programme

The Young Sports Ambassador Programme in both Primary and Secondary Schools continues to go from strength to strength. 330 Bronze Ambassadors from 90 primary schools and over 40 Silver and Gold Ambassadors from 9 secondary schools (in the 2023/24 academic year) have inspired and led the next generation to be more active. Young Ambassadors receive training, resources, and continued support to ensure they are competent and confident in delivering extra-curricular activities in their schools, with around 51,000 participations recorded in the Autumn and Spring terms.



Cycling Programme

Actif's cycling programme for schools ensures that children learn the skill of riding a bike confidently in a safe environment. As part of the offer, schools can access balance and peddle bikes on loan for a year, along with training and support from the team. In 2023/24, 15 schools accessed the programme, with just over 5,000 participations from extra-curricular sessions, where the children had the opportunity to learn to ride a bike and once successful, children are encouraged to continue to cycle outside of school.

Huge positive differences are being noted in staff confidence levels, ensuring sessions are delivered competently and of high quality.

All 12 secondary schools now have access to 20 bikes for their school, which are used in the summer term during curricular and extra-curricular time. Youth workers also use bikes for intervention groups.



Outcome: Nutritious free school meals for all primary school pupils.

The Catering Service is responsible for providing school meals in all Carmarthenshire schools including:

- Serving around 18,000 meals every day.
- Compliance with national standards including healthy eating, food hygiene and allergens.
- Free breakfast service in nearly all primary schools.

We offer a menu which is compliant to Welsh Government regulations and achieves the highest grade available for compliance and nutritional balance. Menus are nutritionally analysed using Saffron recipe development software.

We continue to work with parents, schools, and external stakeholders to manage special diets and allergies. This includes individual care plans for pupils, 1-1 meetings with parents and a robust system of work to ensure a healthy, safe dining environment. We go above current guidance and work to include pupils not currently covered by the groups identified by Welsh Government as being entitled to a special diet menu (i.e. Additional Learning Needs students, pupils with sensory issues etc.)

Free School Meals

The Welsh Government announcement regarding extending Free School Meals entitlement for all primary school children required a significant amount of planning, financing, and investment to build capacity and prepare for the implementation of the commitment. School meal provision for the Authority's 97 settings is provided via 3 central production kitchens, 85 production kitchens attached to settings as well as deliveries between production kitchens and 15 dining centres.

Universal Primary Free School Meals has been offered to Nursery and Reception pupils since September 2022; Year 1 since January 2023; Year 2 since April 2023; Years 3 & 4 since September 2023; Year 5 since February 2024; with Year 6 starting in April 2024.



Outcome: Increased bilingual and Welsh medium education.

Our vision is to ensure Welsh-medium progression right through statutory education to the world of work or further and higher education. We are increasing the proportion of each year group that receives Welsh-medium education in accordance with the Welsh Government's new designations. We have strengthened and expanded the provision for learners through Language Centres with specific provision for latecomers and improving standards. We ensure that learners with ALN have linguistic opportunities equal to their mainstream peers.

Our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and action plan are arranged under 7 main outcomes:

1. More nursery/three-year-olds educated through the medium of Welsh.
2. More reception class/five-year-olds being educated through the medium of Welsh.
3. More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one phase of their statutory education to another.
4. More learners studying for Welsh qualifications (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh.
5. More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts at school.
6. An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with Additional Learning Needs in accordance with the duties specified by legislation.
7. An increase in the number of teaching staff who can teach Welsh (as a subject) and through the medium of Welsh.

Linguistic Categorisation of Schools

We worked with schools to transition them to the new linguistic categorisation system. In line with guidance, we have taken the lead by identifying a category that best reflects the current linguistic situation of each school. We have also set each school an aspirational category which is the category to aspire to within 10 years. 80% of schools agree with their proposed category and a series of conversations and meetings with the schools who wanted more time to consider the situation was held.

Outcome: Schools for sustainable community learning that are fit for 21st Century.

School Building Conditions & the Modernising Education Programme

Due to investment 72% of Carmarthenshire schools are graded as "Good" or "Satisfactory" for school building condition, as compared to 63% in the previous year. However, further investment is challenging as the cost of upgrading or building new schools has escalated significantly placing increased pressure on a limited capital budget. It will be impossible to deliver all of the County Council's aspirations.

We are continuing to progress the Modernising Education Programme (MEP) Review which will result in a revised strategy to help manage our work programme, a prioritised list for investment and consultation, which will ensure that we continue to meet the needs of Education in the 21st Century. In addition, Welsh Government will also be undertaking decarbonisation assessments of the Local Authority's school estate. Assessments will include developing an outline strategy for decarbonisation of each school site. We will use this information to identify how we can make our schools more energy efficient. We have consulted on our draft MEP Strategy. We are currently considering the feedback.

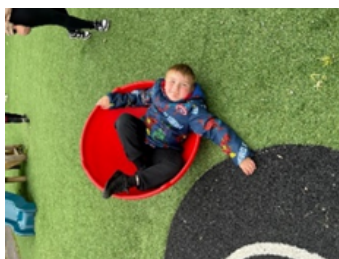
After successful completion of its extensive investigations, Carmarthenshire County Council can confirm that there are no traces of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) identified within any of our school settings. This focus confirms our commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of our learners and education staff.

We are currently undertaking a lessons learnt exercise from previous schemes and Covid to ensure that our schools for the future brief is relevant. We are also looking at carbon neutral principles and the teaching methodology that underpins the new curriculum.

In addition to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) works completed in 2022-2023, we have further developed ALN works in Model School and Glan-y-Môr School with the use of a second ALN grant received from Welsh Government. This has helped to enhance and develop the ASD provision that can be provided at both schools, through fit for purpose accommodation and facilities.

Is anyone better off?

Sensory Resources



"As a school, we are very thankful for the sensory resources. The red spinning cones are very popular, and the children love them".

Ysgol Y Felin



"The children enjoy exploring the textured mats and this has supported with their focus, attention and observational skills."

Ysgol Y Felin



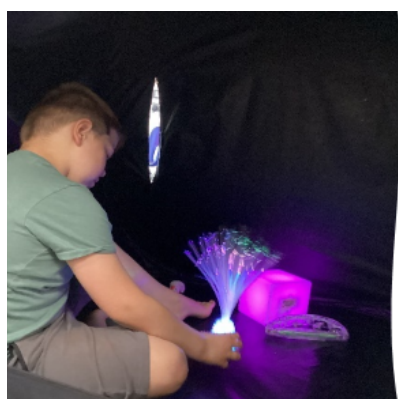
"The sensory cones help the children relax and they support our pupils with regulating their behaviour."

Ysgol Y Felin



"The surprise e-mail saying that we received some sensory resources helped us with our vision in making our centre a lot more pupil friendly for our more sensory learners."

Canolfan Bro Tywi



"Our pupils independently request to go into the dark den. They enjoy exploring the lights and objects and we now have some lovely intensive interaction activities happening in our dark den."

Ysgol Y Model



"One of our pupils' requests to go on the sensory mats each morning when she arrives at school. She enjoys the sensory feedback on her feet."

Ysgol Y Model



"We place a few sensory objects in their individual sensory boxes. Some pupils bring the resources to us to communicate that they would like to use them. The resources have supported staff in recognising what pupils like and enjoy and have helped us to build a deeper relationship with our pupils".

Ysgol Y Model

“The resources that were provided has inspired us to plan more sensory activities into our daily routine. The resources have already had a positive impact on our pupils’ wellbeing and their academic attainment.” **Canolfan Bro Tywi**

“As a centre, we have been able to create individualised sensory circuit plans for our pupils using the sensory resources”.

Balancing is fun. I like
playing with the toys.
It helps me to be
calm.



Children, teachers, and staff of Pembrey School returned from their half term break to a brand-new building on Tuesday, 20 February 2024.

The new primary school building, for learners aged 3-11, has a capacity for 270 primary pupils and 30 nursery places and has been delivered as part of Welsh Government and Carmarthenshire’s Modernising Education Programme, B and B investment.

Constructed on land adjacent to the old school site, the new school provides state-of-the-art facilities and accommodation for pupils and staff. The Flying Start facility, which was located in a separate mobile classroom on the former school premises, has been accommodated within the new school building under one roof.





An Estyn Inspection on Education Services in Carmarthenshire took place in July 2023, a Report was published in September 2023 with the following recommendations:

R1: Improve pupils' attendance in the authority's schools.

R2: Strengthen school improvement processes, particularly for secondary schools.

R3: Refine approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning.

We are addressing these recommendations by implementing an action plan.

We will implement our Attendance Strategy to work alongside schools to increase school attendance rates and improve access to education for vulnerable pupils. We will try to ensure that the standard of learning and teaching in our schools is of a high quality to support our learners to make appropriate progress. We will work with schools to deliver a full and rounded curriculum which aspires to raise educational standards and ensures that pupils understand and celebrate their local history, geography, and culture.

We shall review all school pupil admission dates and age-ranges across the County. We will also undertake a comprehensive review of post-16 provision including all stakeholders in order to achieve a learner centred provision in line with the Curriculum for Wales (CfW).