Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

BRIGHT FUTURES

EDUCATION STRATEGY 2026 - 2030

POB DYSGWR YN FFYNNU, POB YSGOL YN GRYF, POB CYMUNED YN YMGYSTLLTU
EVERY LEARNER THRIVING, EVERY SCHOOL STRONG, EVERY COMMUNITY ENGAGED

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to present **Bright Futures** as our shared commitment to achieving the very best for the children and young people of Merthyr Tydfil. This strategy recognises that the outcomes our learners achieve are shaped not only by what happens in school, but also by the strength of their families, communities, and the wider systems that support them. It reflects our collective belief that every child and young person in Merthyr Tydfil is entitled to the highest aspirations, the richest opportunities, and the strongest support to become confident, capable, and successful adults.

Across our education community, we share a long-held commitment to improving life chances by ensuring every learner has access to high-quality learning experiences. We understand that when learners are inspired, supported, and encouraged to reach their full potential, they flourish not only in their academic work, but also socially, emotionally, and personally.

While we take pride in the progress and successes achieved across many of our schools through the previous *Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards (RARS)* strategy, we also recognise the ongoing need to strengthen and refine our educational provision. Building on this foundation, we remain focused on improving attendance, engagement, life skills, and academic achievement for all learners.

We are also clear about the challenges ahead. Rising levels of need, ongoing recruitment pressures, and the wider social and economic context all place additional demands on our schools and services. Yet we remain confident that, by working together, we can meet these challenges with ambition and determination. Partnership between schools, families, services, and communities will be essential in realising the aspirations set out in this strategy.

Bright Futures is more than an education strategy. It is a commitment to work together with unwavering ambition, fairness and belief in our children and young people, and a promise to create the conditions in which every learner in Merthyr Tydfil can flourish at school, in the community, and throughout their lives, to have the very brightest futures!

Cllr Gareth Lewis
Cabinet Member for Education, Culture & Welsh Language

Mr Ryan Morgan
Director of Education



LOCAL CONTEXT

Merthyr Tydfil's educational landscape is shaped by a distinctive combination of social, economic, and health factors that influence how learners experience school and how the Local Authority and its partners design support. The area has a long industrial heritage and a strong sense of community identity, but it also faces persistent challenges linked to deprivation, health inequalities, and economic transition. These factors create a context in which education plays a critical role in improving life chances and supporting long-term community wellbeing.



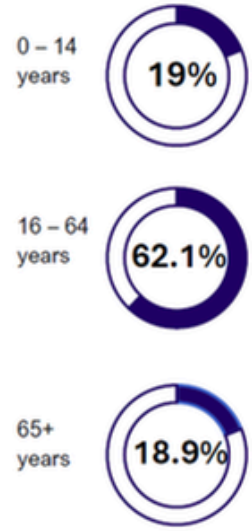
About Merthyr Tydfil

Located in the Heads of the Valleys area approximately 20 miles from the Welsh capital, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough is the smallest Welsh Council and sits within the Cardiff Capital Region. The UK Census 2021 shows us the following facts and figures about Merthyr Tydfil:

Total Population

58,839

Population by Age Group:



Source: Census 2021

Health:



Source: Census 2021

Ethnicity:

Source: Census 2021

91.7% 57,140 people	Identify as White
0.9% 510 people	Identify as mixed / multiple ethnic group
1.5% 871 people	Identify as Asian / Asian British
0.2% 91 people	Identify as Black African / Caribbean / British
0.4% 227 people	Identify as other ethnic groups

Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Local Development Plan (LDP) shows us that the main town of Merthyr Tydfil has a highest concentration of population (approximately 43,000). It is the main retail and service centre in the Heads of the Valleys; fulfilling a key strategic role in the region. Merthyr Tydfil has some of the most deprived areas in Wales.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation identified Merthyr Tydfil as having high levels of deprivation; with 28 of its 36 Lower Super Output Areas recorded as being in the top 50% most deprived areas in Wales. To address this, the Council has and ambition to tackling poverty.

At the same time, the local authority continues to operate within significant financial pressures, driven by rising demand, inflationary costs, and constrained public-sector funding settlements. These pressures are further compounded in our schools by increasing levels of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and increasingly complex learner needs, ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified staff across key education and support services, and declining birth rates which have contributed to falling pupil numbers and growing surplus capacity within schools. Despite these challenges, maintaining a strong focus on educational improvement, inclusion and workforce skills remains essential in improving outcomes for children and young people, thereby reducing inequalities, and supporting the long-term sustainability and resilience of both schools and local communities.

What this means for the Bright Futures strategy

This context reinforces why a place-based vision is essential. Social and economic pressures, combined with health inequalities, mean that education must do more than deliver academic outcomes. It must support wellbeing, build resilience, and open pathways to lifelong learning. Schools, families, services, and communities need to work together to address barriers, raise expectations, and create opportunities that help every learner thrive. The **Bright Futures** strategy is designed to respond directly to these local realities, ensuring that improvement is rooted in the needs, strengths, and aspirations of Merthyr Tydfil's communities.



VISION AND VALUES

Bright Futures sets out a bold, place-based vision for education in Merthyr Tydfil—one in which:

Every learner is thriving
Every school is strong
Every community is engaged

It reflects a shared belief that the children and young people of Merthyr Tydfil deserve the highest aspirations, the richest opportunities, and the strongest support to realise their potential. This vision recognises that education is central to the Borough's future: it shapes wellbeing, strengthens communities, and drives long-term social and economic prosperity.

To guide this next phase of improvement, **Bright Futures** is underpinned by four core 'pillars' that define the values, behaviours, and expectations of the whole system.

Pillar 1 - Equity

Equity commits the education system in Merthyr Tydfil to fairness, inclusion, and the removal of barriers that prevent learners from accessing high-quality provision. It means recognising that some learners need more support than others and ensuring that resources, expertise, and opportunities are distributed in ways that enable every learner, regardless of background, need, or circumstance, to succeed. Equity is about closing gaps in attainment, engagement, and experience, and ensuring that all learners feel valued and supported throughout their educational journey.

Pillar 2 - Excellence

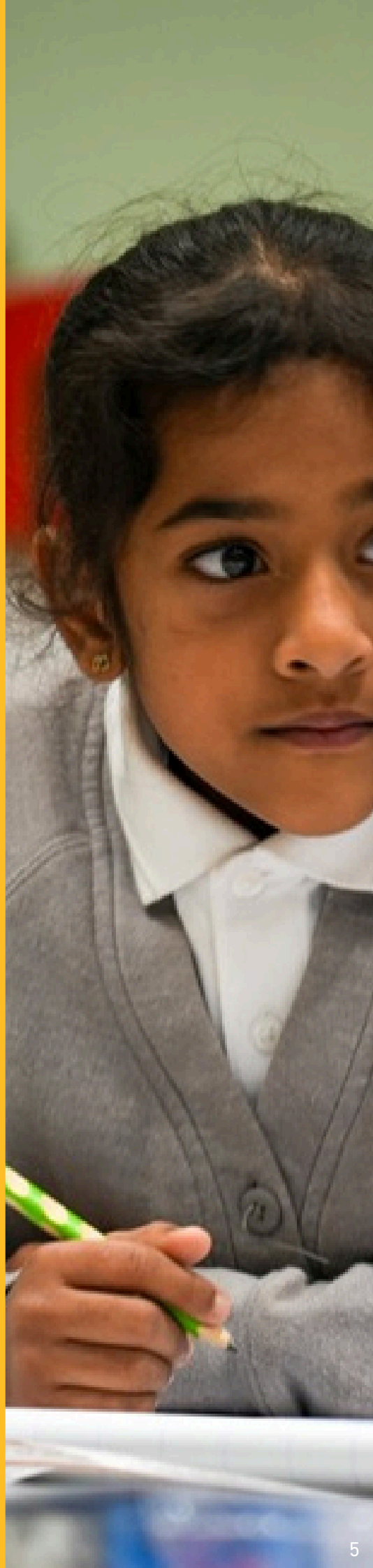
Excellence reflects the ambition for consistently high standards in teaching, leadership, and curriculum across all schools. It is rooted in the belief that every learner should experience inspiring teaching, a rich and engaging curriculum, and high expectations that stretch and challenge them. Excellence is not about perfection; it is about continuous improvement, professional curiosity, and a commitment to evidence-informed practice. It requires a strong, confident workforce supported through high-quality professional learning and collaborative development.

Pillar 3 - Belonging

Belonging emphasises the importance of relationships, identity, and inclusion. It recognises that learners thrive when they feel safe, respected, and connected to their school and community. Belonging means creating environments where every child feels they matter, where diversity is celebrated, and where learners can see themselves reflected in the curriculum, culture, and values of their school. It also highlights the importance of attendance, engagement, and wellbeing as foundations for learning and long-term success.

Pillar 4 - Partnership

Partnership recognises that strong educational outcomes emerge when schools, families, services, and communities work together with a shared sense of purpose, and when education is understood as a collective responsibility that extends far beyond the school gates. It reflects a commitment to system-wide collaboration, where schools support one another, agencies align their work around the needs of learners, and communities play an active role in shaping and sustaining educational success. Partnership also embraces the wider role of education in community life, supporting residents of all ages to access learning, develop new skills, and participate in opportunities that strengthen wellbeing, employability, and social connection. This includes a shared commitment to promoting the Welsh language and culture as a unifying feature of Merthyr Tydfil's identity. Through partnership, we will build a coherent, connected education system that supports lifelong learning, sustains improvement, and ensures that success is shared across the whole community.





THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Education in Merthyr Tydfil stands at an important moment of renewal. Over recent years, the *Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards* (RARS) strategy has provided a strong foundation for improvement; strengthening our schools, raising expectations, and helping more of our learners to succeed. As the landscape around us continues to evolve it is the right time to build on that progress with a strategy that is broader, more collaborative, and firmly rooted in the lived experience of our learners, families, and professionals.

Bright Futures sets out that next phase. It is an ambitious, place-based vision for education in Merthyr Tydfil where every learner is thriving, every school is strong, and every community engaged. This vision is underpinned by four core 'pillars' — *Equity*, *Excellence*, *Belonging*, and *Partnership*, which together reflect our commitment to removing barriers, delivering high-quality teaching and leadership, strengthening community connections, and ensuring that improvement is a shared responsibility across the whole system. This means removing barriers, tackling disadvantage, supporting wellbeing and inclusion, and placing schools at the heart of their communities, while maintaining a relentless focus on high-quality outcomes.

The strategy has been shaped through genuine collaboration and co-construction, bringing together the views of headteachers, school staff, governors, learners, local authority services, regional partners, elected members, businesses and residents. This collective ownership is essential; it ensures that our priorities reflect real local need and that the responsibility for improvement is shared, transparent, and aligned.

What stakeholders told us...

As part of developing the new **Bright Futures** strategy, a comprehensive programme of consultation was undertaken to gather views and inform the direction of future priorities. This engagement involved a wide range of stakeholders, including elected members, governors, school staff, pupils, parents, local residents and businesses. The purpose of this process was to ensure that the strategy was shaped by the experiences, insights and aspirations of those most directly connected to education and community life, and to clearly identify the key areas where focused action and improvement are needed going forward.

While responses covered a broad range of the Local Authority's work required in delivering high-quality education, a number of consistent themes emerged through the consultation process. These highlighted clear priorities to inform the development of the goals within the **Bright Futures** strategy:

- **High-quality teaching and learning should be central** – A strong emphasis on consistently high-quality classroom practice, underpinned by effective teaching to improve outcomes for all learners. Strengthening approaches so that assessment and feedback are purposeful, and ensuring that curriculum engagement supports sustained learner progress and attendance.
- **Meeting the needs of all learners** – Ensuring support is responsive to a full range of needs, including those with additional learning needs, while also stretching and supporting the most able to aspire and achieve.
- **Strong focus on wellbeing and engagement** – Prioritising mental health and wellbeing, recognising their direct impact on attendance, participation and outcomes.
- **Inclusive practice** – Embedding approaches that identify barriers early and ensure all learners can access, participate and succeed.
- **Digital development** – Continued development of digital skills, infrastructure and practice to enhance learning, accessibility and future readiness.
- **Quality of provision across all settings** – Ensuring consistency and high standards across schools and services.
- **Effective leadership and governance** – Strengthening leadership at all levels, alongside effective governance, to drive improvement, challenge and accountability.
- **Stronger links to families, skills and lifelong aspirations** – Expanding opportunities that connect families to learning, employment and skills pathways, supporting longer-term outcomes.
- **Strengthened partnership working** – Building deeper collaboration across schools and partners, with shared responsibility for improvement.
- **Continued investment in school buildings** - Ensuring buildings are fit for purpose and provide inspiring environments for children and young people to learn in and from.
- **Targeted action to reduce inequality** - Focusing resources and interventions where need is greatest to improve outcomes and narrow gaps.

Following consultation and stakeholder feedback, the strategy has been shaped around four ambitious goals that will guide improvement over the next five years. Together, these goals set out the long-term outcomes we want to achieve for children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil and are supported by a series of key commitments that will drive delivery and measure progress. The four goals are:



Inspiring teaching, engaged learners who attend regularly and achieve their aspirational outcomes



Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes in all schools where staff are upskilled and learners are supported to maximise their potential



Strong leadership at all levels which secures **strong schools** and quality provision



Connected Partners, Thriving Learners where place-based approaches overcome barriers to engagement

These goals align directly with the Merthyr Tydfil Corporate Wellbeing Plan and wider strategic drivers, including raising attainment, improving wellbeing, supporting regeneration, and ensuring sustainability.

To ensure effective delivery, the strategy will be supported by a *Bright Futures Delivery Plan*, updated annually, providing clarity, transparency, and rigour across all improvement activity. This will set out clear expectations, strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning, and promote a balanced approach that both supports challenge and recognises progress. To strengthen accountability, we will introduce our *Bright Futures Annual Review* to provide an annual update of progress with key stakeholders and to publicly update residents on our progress and achievements. We will also establish regular *School Performance & Support Review* meetings to ensure regular monitoring of how schools across the Local Authority are progressing.

Bright Futures is more than a strategy: it is a shared commitment to the children, young people, and families of Merthyr Tydfil. It recognises the strengths of our schools and communities, acknowledges the challenges we face, and sets out a clear, collective path towards a stronger, fairer, and more ambitious education system.

Together, we will ensure that every learner in Merthyr Tydfil has the opportunity to thrive, giving them all they need to achieve the very brightest futures!



THE BRIGHT FUTURES STRATEGY



STRATEGY OVERVIEW

Bright Futures presents Merthyr Tydfil's ambitious, place-based vision for education from 2026–2030. It sets out a shared commitment to ensuring that every learner is thriving, every school is strong, and every community is engaged. Rooted in the values of *Equity, Excellence, Belonging, and Partnership*, the strategy responds directly to Merthyr Tydfil's unique context, where educational ambition, community resilience, and persistent inequalities intersect, and outlines a coherent, collective approach to improving life chances for all children and young people.

The strategy builds on the achievements of the previous education strategy - *Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards (RARS)* - while addressing the evolving landscape shaped by curriculum reform, digital change, workforce pressures, and growing levels of need. Developed through co-construction with schools, learners, governors, services, partners, and the community, **Bright Futures** represents a whole-system commitment to sustained improvement, local collaboration, and long-term impact.

To achieve its vision, the strategy is structured around four strategic goals, each with its own set of specific commitments to action. These goals are to secure:-

- ***Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners -*** Ensuring every learner experiences high-quality teaching and a rich, relevant curriculum that raises aspirations, strengthens core skills, and prepares young people for further education, employment, and active citizenship.
- ***Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes*** - Putting belonging, wellbeing, early identification, and equitable access at the heart of the system so every learner is valued, supported, and able to participate fully and confidently in school life.
- ***Strong Leadership, Strong Schools*** - Strengthening leadership capacity and governance across all schools, ensuring leaders and governing bodies have the clarity, support, and strategic direction needed to deliver high-quality learning and continuous improvement every day, and ensuring access to high-quality learning environments and resources.
- ***Connected Partners, Thriving Learners -*** Extending education beyond the classroom through strong partnerships and multi-agency collaboration, promoting cultural enrichment, identity and a strong sense of belonging. This includes supporting learner pathways into employment, training and apprenticeships, while ensuring families can access local opportunities for adult learning, employability and financial wellbeing.

The strategy is firmly aligned with the vision and aspirations of the Curriculum for Wales and will promote the development of ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethical, informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals. Through its four strategic goals and associated commitments, the strategy seeks to create the conditions for every child and young person to thrive academically, socially and emotionally, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, values and confidence needed to succeed in education, contribute positively to their communities, and navigate an increasingly complex and changing world. By strengthening teaching, inclusion, leadership and partnership working across the Borough, the strategy will support schools to realise the four purposes for all learners.

Together, these goals align with the Marmot Nation Framework, the Corporate Wellbeing Plan, Wellbeing for Future Generations Act, Curriculum for Wales, Cymraeg 2050, and national education and equality priorities, ensuring that education contributes to a fairer, healthier, more sustainable future for Merthyr Tydfil.

Bright Futures is also strengthened by several cross-cutting strategic aspects designed to ensure the strategy is both ambitious and deliverable:

- *A financial and resource commitment that ensures investment is prioritised where it has the greatest impact, supported by transparent, needs-led allocation principles.*
- *Strengthened partnership governance, clarifying shared accountability, data sharing, and system-wide responsibility across education, health, social care, early help, and community partners.*
- *A commitment to learner and family voice, ensuring that children, young people, and parents shape ongoing implementation and future direction.*
- *A system-wide workforce ambition, supporting recruitment, retention, wellbeing, career pathways, and the development of a stable, expert, values-driven workforce.*
- *A progression and transition focus, ensuring smooth, well-supported journeys from Early Years through to post-16 pathways, employment, and lifelong learning.*
- *A strong monitoring and review model, with clear data cycles, regular scrutiny, and transparent progress reporting.*
- *Explicit alignment with Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Racist Wales commitments, ensuring fairness, representation, and identity-affirming experiences for every learner.*
- *A clear sustainability commitment, ensuring that the school estate, teaching practices, and learning experiences contribute to environmentally responsible and sustainable, healthy futures.*
- *A strategic approach to risk, recognising system pressures and outlining how Merthyr Tydfil will respond with resilience, collaboration, and targeted support.*

The Desired Outcomes of the strategy define the long-term impact: improved achievement, stronger wellbeing, reduced inequalities, high-quality learning environments, confident digital capability, a skilled workforce, enriched community connections, a thriving Welsh language, and better life chances for every child and young person.

Bright Futures is more than an education strategy - it is a collective commitment. A commitment to work together with unwavering ambition, fairness, and belief in our children and young people. A promise to create the conditions in which every learner in Merthyr Tydfil can flourish in school, in the community, and throughout their lives - to have the very brightest futures!



INSPIRING TEACHING, ENGAGED LEARNERS



The '*Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners*' goal within the Bright Futures strategy aims to ensure that every learner in Merthyr Tydfil benefits from high-quality, inclusive teaching and a rich, engaging curriculum that motivates, challenges, and supports them to thrive, while guaranteeing equitable access so all pupils, regardless of background, need, or circumstance, can participate fully in school life, attend regularly, and make the most of their learning.

Central to this ambition is a collaborative and high-performing education system where professional learning, innovation and partnership work strengthen teaching and learning across all schools. By supporting learners to become confident in literacy, numeracy and digital skills, promoting the Welsh language as an integral part of everyday learning, and providing targeted support to schools where it is needed most, we will enhance the quality of education and enrich learners' experiences to ensure that every child and young person in Merthyr Tydfil has the opportunity to thrive.

What this means for learners in Merthyr Tydfil...

This goal focuses on creating learning experiences that are consistent, ambitious, and engaging, so that learners can develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed for their future success. It connects directly to the Curriculum for Wales which emphasises a more flexible, learner-centred approach.

Key outcomes include:

- ***High-quality, inspiring teaching*** **-** Learners benefit from teachers who use effective, evidence-based practice, adapt to individual needs, and create classrooms where curiosity, ambition and independence are encouraged.
- ***A curriculum that engages and motivates*** **-** The curriculum on offer in our schools is designed to be relevant to learners' lives, rooted in real-world contexts, and flexible enough to support different pathways; academic, vocational, and skills-based. This helps learners see purpose in their learning and stay engaged.
- ***Raising aspirations and improving outcomes*** - Merthyr Tydfil's **Bright Futures** strategy emphasises that all children and young people deserve the best possible life chances. Strong foundations in literacy and numeracy remain essential to this ambition, ensuring every child develops the skills, confidence, and understanding needed to thrive in learning and in life.
- ***Digitally enabled learners for a changing world*** **-** Learners develop the digital knowledge, skills, confidence, and creativity needed to participate, learn, and thrive in an increasingly digital society. Through meaningful use of technology across the curriculum, learners are equipped to make informed choices, solve problems, communicate effectively, and prepare for future education, employment, and life.
- ***Supporting progression and future readiness*** **-** The aim is not only to improve day-to-day learning but to prepare young people for further education, apprenticeships, employment, and active citizenship. Alongside strong academic and vocational pathways, learners will develop the communication, creativity and problem-solving skills required to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy and society.

Why this matters to our learners...

By focusing on securing '*Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners*', the **Bright Futures** strategy seeks to:

- Reduce inequalities in learner experience and achievement, echoing the wider commitment to reducing health and social inequalities from early childhood.
- Build a culture of high expectations across all schools, ensuring every learner is enabled to develop their capabilities and aspirations, regardless of background.
- Ensure learners feel valued, supported, and challenged, supporting the principle of strengthening individuals' control over their lives.
- Strengthen the link between education, long-term wellbeing, employability, and community prosperity aligning with the Marmot Nation focus on creating fair employment, sustainable communities, and opportunities for all young people.





What We Will Commit To...

In order to achieve this goal we will work with our schools and partners to:

Commitment 1

Develop and sustain consistently high-quality, inclusive teaching and learning across all schools through collaboration, professional learning and evidence-informed practice.

Commitment 2

Support schools in their delivery of an ambitious and engaging Curriculum that reflects local context, promotes Welsh language and culture, and equips learners for future opportunities.

Commitment 3

Promote learners' literacy, numeracy and digital skills, including the effective use of AI and emerging technologies, to support lifelong learning, achievement and future employability.

What Success Looks Like...

For Learners

Learners are engaged, ambitious and confident individuals who enjoy learning, make strong progress, and achieve improved outcomes. They benefit from consistently high-quality educational experiences, develop strong literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and become responsible, creative users of technology. Supported by high expectations and a culture of challenge and encouragement, learners increasingly take ownership of their learning and are well prepared for future education, employment and life.

For Schools

Schools deliver consistently high-quality, inclusive and ambitious learning experiences that enable all learners to make strong progress and achieve their potential. Through effective teaching, a broad and relevant curriculum, and strong collaboration between professionals, schools create environments where learners are inspired, supported and challenged, regardless of their background or circumstances.

For the Local Authority

The Local Authority secures a more consistent and self-improving education system, with stronger outcomes across all schools, improved literacy, numeracy and digital competence, and reduced disparities for vulnerable learners. Through effective quality assurance, collaboration and shared practice, schools continually strengthen teaching and curriculum provision, leading to higher levels of learner engagement, attendance, aspiration and achievement across the Borough.

For Parents, Carers and the Wider Community

Parents, carers and the wider community are active partners in education, with confidence in local schools and shared responsibility for supporting children and young people to succeed. Strong collaboration between schools, families, employers and community organisations enriches learning, raises aspirations and helps young people develop the skills needed for future success, contributing to stronger communities, reduced inequalities and improved wellbeing across Merthyr Tydfil.

INCLUSIVE PROVISION, EQUITABLE OUTCOMES



The *'Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes'* goal of the Bright Futures strategy is founded on the belief that every learner matters and every learner can succeed. Whether a learner is more able, has additional learning needs, or requires support at any point in their educational journey, they should feel valued, included and able to participate fully in school life. The goal places inclusion at the heart of all decision-making, ensuring that barriers to learning, participation and achievement are identified early and addressed proactively.

For learners, this means equitable access to high-quality teaching, consistent support across all schools, and high expectations that recognise and respond to individual strengths, needs and aspirations. It fosters positive wellbeing, strong relationships and a sense of belonging, enabling learners to engage fully in their education and make sustained progress.

What this means for learners in Merthyr Tydfil...

This goal sets a clear expectation that every learner in Merthyr Tydfil experiences an education system built on belonging, equity, and high-aspiration. It positions inclusion not as a specialist intervention for the few, but as the driving principle that shapes leadership, teaching, support, and partnership working across all schools and settings.

For learners, this means that their individual identities, needs, and circumstances are recognised early and responded to through consistent, relationship-centred practice that removes barriers to engagement and enables them to participate fully in school life. It ensures that wellbeing, fairness, and access to high-quality learning are central to their daily experience, and that ambition for their progress remains high regardless of background or starting point.

Key outcomes include:

- ***Belonging and emotional security*** - Learners experience safe, respectful environments where positive relationships and a strong sense of being known underpin engagement and readiness to learn.
- ***Equitable access to high-quality teaching*** - Support is proactive, flexible, and needs-led, ensuring that all learners can access ambitious learning without reliance on formal thresholds or labels.
- ***High expectations and ambition*** - Every learner is supported to meet aspirational goals through appropriate scaffolding, consistent encouragement, and a culture that believes in their potential.
- ***Consistency across schools and settings*** - Learners benefit from coherent, aligned approaches to inclusion that reduce variability in experience and ensure fairness across the system.
- ***Learner voice*** - Children and young people contribute meaningfully to decisions about their learning, support, and wider school experience.
- ***Improved engagement, wellbeing, and outcomes*** - Stronger attendance, reduced exclusions, improved emotional wellbeing, and enhanced attainment arise from inclusive, relationship-centred approaches.

Why this matters

By focusing on securing *'Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes'*, the **Bright Futures** strategy seeks to:

- Address inequalities by ensuring learners facing the greatest barriers receive timely, needs-led support, reflecting universalism and early intervention.
- Strengthen system coherence and fairness, supporting the aim of equitable access to high-quality services.
- Enhance learner engagement and wellbeing, aligning with the principle of creating the conditions for children and young people to develop their capabilities and thrive.
- Underpin ambitious outcomes for all learners, ensuring high expectations, equitable access to excellent teaching, and responsive support, mirroring the aim to enable all children and young people to maximise their potential.
- Build a more inclusive and sustainable education system, ensuring that provision is responsive to the diverse needs of learners, families and communities.





What We Will Commit To...
In order to achieve this goal we will work with our schools and partners to:

Commitment 4
Strengthen approaches to inclusion and equity across all schools and services while developing a skilled, confident workforce capable of meeting the diverse needs of learners.

Commitment 5
Improve learner attendance, participation and engagement by removing barriers to learning and working collaboratively with families and partners to help all learners achieve and thrive.

Commitment 6
Promote inclusion and equity through early identification, timely intervention and effective multi-agency support for learners and families.

What Success Looks Like...

For Learners
More learners attend school regularly, remain engaged in education, and participate fully in learning. Schools provide safe, inclusive and supportive environments where learners feel valued, develop a strong sense of belonging, and experience reduced disruption to their education. Through early identification of needs and appropriate support, challenge and intervention, barriers to learning are removed and strengths are nurtured, enabling all learners to make strong progress and achieve their potential. Learners benefit from improved wellbeing, positive relationships and confidence in accessing support, while developing the resilience, confidence and independence needed to succeed in school and beyond.

For Schools
Schools provide inclusive, nurturing environments where every learner receives the support, challenge and opportunities needed to succeed. Through high-quality teaching, effective intervention and strong partnerships with families and other agencies, learners are supported to attend regularly, engage fully in education and achieve their potential. Inclusive approaches to behaviour and wellbeing help create safe, positive school communities, reducing exclusions and ensuring learners feel supported, valued and able to thrive.

For the Local Authority
An increasingly inclusive and equitable education system where learners' needs are identified and supported at the earliest opportunity, resulting in more consistent provision across the Borough, improved attendance, reduced exclusions and part-time timetables, and stronger engagement in learning. Inclusive, preventative and relationship-based approaches are embedded across all schools, ensuring that every learner, regardless of their background, ability or additional learning needs, can participate fully, achieve positive outcomes and thrive.

For Parents, Carers and the Wider Community
Families, schools and partner organisations work together to ensure children and young people receive timely, effective support and remain engaged in learning. Strong partnerships help identify and address needs early, improve attendance, wellbeing and inclusion, and reduce barriers to success. As a result, all learners are supported to thrive, leading to improved life chances, stronger community wellbeing and reduced inequalities across Merthyr Tydfil.

STRONG LEADERSHIP, STRONG SCHOOLS



The '*Strong Leadership, Strong Schools*' goal within the Bright Futures strategy aims to ensure that every school in Merthyr Tydfil is led by confident, well-supported leaders and governing bodies who have the capacity and clarity to focus on delivering the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Leadership is strengthened through coherent support and clear expectations, building leadership capacity at every level to create a self-improving and sustainable education system

'Strong schools' are defined by high-quality teaching and learning, aspirational practice, and a relentless focus on improving outcomes and life chances for all learners. This goal brings together leadership development, effective governance, system-wide support, and investment in sustainable learning environments to create the conditions for excellence, consistency and continuous improvement across schools.

What this means for learners in Merthyr Tydfil...

This goal ensures that learners experience schools where strong, well-supported leadership creates the conditions for high-quality learning every day. When leaders have the operational capacity and clarity they need, more time and focus can be directed toward excellent teaching, rich learning experiences, and the wellbeing of children and young people.

Key outcomes include:

- ***Consistently high-quality provision -*** Learners benefit from schools where leadership is confident, supported, and able to prioritise teaching, wellbeing, and continuous improvement.
- ***Higher aspirations and better outcomes -*** Empowered leadership drives ambition for every learner, reducing variability in outcomes and ensuring that all children and young people can achieve their potential.
- ***Schools equipped for the future -*** Investment in leadership, professional learning, and system-wide improvement and support ensures that schools are continually improving and that learners are prepared for further education, employment, and active citizenship.

Why this matters...

By focusing on *'Strong Leadership, Strong Schools'*, the **Bright Futures** strategy seeks to:

- Create the conditions for consistently high-quality learning by ensuring leaders have the support, capacity, and confidence to prioritise teaching, wellbeing, and continuous improvement.
- Secure consistently high standards across all schools through strong, effective leadership, clear expectations, and robust governance, ensuring that all learners benefit from high-quality teaching and provision.
- Build leadership capacity at every level to create a self-improving and sustainable education system
- Reduce inequalities in learner experience and outcomes through strong leadership, high expectations, and consistent provision across all schools, aligning with principles of proportionate universalism and fair access to high-quality education.
- Strengthen leadership, professional learning and school improvement support to ensure all learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed in further education, employment and life.
- Invest in and modernise the school estate, creating high-quality, sustainable and future-ready learning environments that support wellbeing, inclusion and educational excellence.





What We Will Commit To...

In order to achieve this goal we will work with our schools and partners to:

Commitment 7

Develop strong leadership, governance and accountability at all levels to secure improved outcomes for all learners.

Commitment 8

Drive continuous school improvement through collaboration, shared accountability, and proportionate challenge and support.

Commitment 9

Ensure the efficient and sustainable use of financial, physical and digital resources to maintain high-quality provision, maximise educational impact and improve learner outcomes.

What Success Looks Like...

For Learners

Learners benefit from strong and stable leadership, high-quality teaching, and a culture of high expectations that supports both achievement and wellbeing. A skilled and committed workforce, working collaboratively across schools, ensures greater consistency in educational provision and access to expertise, opportunities and support. Together, these strengths enable all learners to make strong progress and realise their potential.

For Schools

Schools are led by confident and effective leaders who work collaboratively to drive improvement, maintain high standards and improve learner outcomes. Staff are supported through high-quality professional learning, wellbeing support and career development opportunities, creating a skilled and motivated workforce. Strong governance, partnership working and succession planning help ensure schools have the leadership capacity, expertise and stability needed to sustain excellence and continuous improvement across the Borough.

For the Local Authority

Merthyr Tydfil has a strong, sustainable and collaborative education system, underpinned by effective leadership, clear communication, workforce stability and shared responsibility for improvement. Leadership capacity is developed and distributed across schools, with strong succession planning, professional networks and a culture of peer support driving continuous improvement. Staff feel supported and valued, governors and elected members provide effective challenge and accountability, and schools benefit from modern, inclusive and digitally enabled learning environments that meet the evolving needs of learners and communities.

For Parents, Carers and the Wider Community

Parents, carers and communities have confidence in their local schools, supported by strong leadership, effective governance and high-quality educational provision. Stable and collaborative school leadership helps create consistent learning experiences, strengthens local opportunities and improves outcomes for learners. Through active engagement from governors, elected members and community representatives, the education system becomes more resilient, sustainable and focused on delivering long-term success for children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil.

CONNECTED PARTNERS, THRIVING LEARNERS



The *'Connected Partners, Thriving Learners'* goal recognises that achieving the best outcomes for children and young people requires strong partnerships, shared responsibility and coordinated action across the whole system. It brings together schools, families, Local Authority services, health partners, community organisations, employers, regional partners and the third sector around a common ambition, ensuring every learner has the support, opportunities and experiences needed to thrive.

This goal promotes a collaborative, place-based approach where schools are not isolated institutions but integral parts of their communities, working alongside a range of partners to improve learning, wellbeing and life chances. It seeks to strengthen family and community engagement, improve access to support services, and create smoother pathways through education and into further learning and employment.

What this means for learners in Merthyr Tydfil...

Learners, families and communities benefit from a more connected and collaborative system, where schools, local services, community organisations and wider partners work together to support children and young people to thrive. By strengthening relationships, improving access to opportunities and coordinating support around the needs of learners, this goal helps ensure that every child and young person feels connected, supported and able to achieve their potential.

Key outcomes include:

- **Stronger partnerships around every learner** – Schools, families, Local Authority services, health partners, community organisations and employers work together to provide coordinated support, helping learners overcome barriers and access the opportunities they need to succeed.
- **Greater family and community engagement** – Parents, carers and communities play an active role in supporting learning and wellbeing, strengthening relationships between schools and the communities they serve.
- **Improved access to opportunities and support** – Learners benefit from a wider range of enrichment activities, cultural experiences, wellbeing services, careers education and community-based learning opportunities that broaden horizons and raise aspirations.
- **A stronger sense of belonging and connection** – Through a place-based approach, learners develop stronger connections to their schools, communities and local area, supporting wellbeing, participation and positive identity.
- **Better outcomes and life chances** – By aligning the efforts of schools, families and partners, the system is better able to reduce inequalities, improve wellbeing and achievement, and ensure every learner has the support, experiences and pathways needed to flourish in education, employment and life.

Why this matters...

By focusing on *'Connected Partners, Thriving Learners'*, the **Bright Futures** strategy seeks to:

- Reduce inequalities in access to opportunities, support and experiences by ensuring all learners, regardless of background, need or circumstance, can benefit from coordinated support, enrichment opportunities and services that help them thrive.
- Strengthen partnerships around every learner by bringing together schools, families, Local Authority services, health, community organisations, employers, regional partners and the third sector to provide joined-up support and shared responsibility for learner success.
- Improve wellbeing, engagement and attendance through coordinated early intervention, effective multi-agency working and stronger relationships that help remove barriers to learning and participation.
- Create a more connected and cohesive local system where partners work collaboratively around the needs of children, young people and families, ensuring support is accessible, responsive and aligned to local priorities.





What We Will Commit To...

In order to achieve this goal we will work with our schools and partners to:

Commitment 10

Strengthen partnerships, multi-agency collaboration and shared accountability to improve wellbeing, attendance and outcomes for children, young people and families.

Commitment 11

Create stronger pathways into further education, training, employment and lifelong learning through collaboration with employers, partners and community organisations.

Commitment 12

Maximise the contribution of community resources, cultural opportunities and learning environments to strengthen belonging, participation and life chances.

What Success Looks Like...

For Learners

Learners benefit from strong connections between schools, families, communities and partner organisations, helping them feel included, supported and engaged in learning. Through access to enrichment opportunities, cultural experiences and coordinated support services, learners broaden their horizons, raise their aspirations and develop the confidence and skills needed for future success. Strong partnerships promote wellbeing, attendance and belonging, while strengthening learners' connection to Welsh language, culture and their local community, preparing them for further learning, employment and active citizenship.

For Schools

Schools work in partnership with families, communities and external agencies to provide coordinated support and enriched learning experiences for all learners. Strong community links, cultural opportunities and employer engagement help broaden aspirations, strengthen learner engagement and connect learning to the real world. Through the promotion of Welsh language and culture, inclusive practice and investment in future-focused provision, schools create high-quality learning environments that respond to the evolving needs of learners and communities.

For the Local Authority

Strong partnerships across education, health, community organisations, employers and other agencies provide coordinated support that helps children and young people thrive. Learners have greater access to enrichment, cultural and employer-linked opportunities, widening participation and aspirations while reducing inequalities in access. Effective multi-agency working improves wellbeing, attendance and outcomes, supported by inclusive and safe learning environments.

For Parents, Carers and the Wider Community

Parents, carers and communities play an active role in supporting children and young people to succeed, working alongside schools and partner organisations to provide coordinated support and opportunities. Strong partnerships help families access the assistance they need, strengthen learning and wellbeing, and increase participation in community and lifelong learning. Together, these collective efforts build aspiration, resilience and community cohesion, helping to reduce inequalities and improve life chances across Merthyr Tydfil.



DELIVERY OF STRATEGY

Delivering the **Bright Futures** strategy requires a clear, coherent and system-wide approach to roles, responsibilities and accountability. This model sets out how the Local Authority, schools and partners will work collectively to translate strategic priorities into meaningful impact for learners, while ensuring that ownership of delivery sits at the most appropriate level. It reflects a shift towards a school-led model of implementation, underpinned by strong strategic leadership from the Local Authority, effective partnership working, and robust monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

Through this approach, the strategy ensures that delivery is both locally responsive and systemically consistent, with clear lines of accountability, transparent reporting, and a sustained focus on improving outcomes, wellbeing and life chances for all learners.

1. System Design

The **Bright Futures** system design provides the structure for how schools, services and partners work together to deliver the strategy. It establishes clear roles, responsibilities and relationships across the system, ensuring that planning, delivery and accountability are aligned. Through strong collaboration, effective leadership and continuous evaluation, the system design supports collective responsibility and improvement to achieve better outcomes for all learners.

Local Authority (*Strategic Leadership & Assurance*)

The Local Authority sets the strategic direction for education across the Borough by establishing clear goals, commitments and outcomes. It provides both challenge and support to schools through a proportionate school improvement model, including the deployment of School Collaboration Partners. The Authority also leads system-wide coordination across education, health, social care and wider partners to ensure a joined-up approach to supporting children and young people. In addition, it is responsible for ensuring compliance with statutory duties and Welsh Government expectations, while overseeing performance monitoring, evaluation and reporting to drive continuous improvement and accountability across the education system.

Schools (*Primary Delivery & Implementation*)

Schools are responsible for leading the delivery of teaching and learning, inclusion, curriculum implementation, and community engagement activities within their local context. They will embed the priorities of the **Bright Futures** strategy within their School Development Plans, ensuring that improvement activity is aligned with Borough-wide ambitions while responding to the specific needs of their learners and communities. Schools will use their resources effectively to address local priorities, challenges and opportunities, and will actively participate in peer collaboration, review and system improvement activities to strengthen practice and contribute to the collective success of the education system across Merthyr Tydfil.

Partnerships (*System Integration & Wider Impact*)

Through multi-agency collaboration, including arrangements such as the *Learning & Futures Partnership,* partners across education, health, social care, employability and the voluntary sector will work together to align services and resources around shared priorities. This includes strengthening early help and prevention, supporting learner wellbeing, improving attendance and engagement (*including support for learners in EOTAS provision and those at risk of becoming NEET*), and developing effective post-16 pathways. By working collectively, partners will provide coordinated, joined-up support for children, young people, families and communities, ensuring that needs are identified early and that support is delivered in a coherent and effective way.

2. Accountability Framework

The accountability framework for **Bright Futures** ensures that there are clear, transparent and proportionate arrangements for oversight, challenge and support across the education system. It defines how responsibility for delivery is shared between the Local Authority, schools and partners, while maintaining strong lines of accountability for outcomes. The framework is underpinned by regular monitoring, performance review and public reporting, ensuring that progress is consistently evaluated, strengths are built upon, and timely intervention is provided where needed. Through this approach, the framework supports a culture of high expectations, collective responsibility and continuous improvement across all schools and services.

Elected Members / Scrutiny Committee

Elected Members will provide challenge, oversight and democratic accountability for the delivery of the **Bright Futures** strategy through regular performance updates and scrutiny of progress against agreed priorities and outcomes. An Annual *Bright Futures Report* will provide a comprehensive assessment of impact and delivery, while wider education reports presented to Cabinet, Scrutiny and other governance forums will clearly highlight their contribution to the strategy's objectives. This approach will ensure that progress remains transparent, aligned to strategic priorities, and subject to appropriate review and accountability throughout the life of the strategy.

Director of Education & Leadership Team

The Director of Education and Leadership Team are accountable for the overall delivery of the **Bright Futures** strategy and for securing continuous improvement in education outcomes across the Borough. They provide strategic leadership for system performance, ensuring that priorities are translated into effective action and measurable impact. This includes leading the School Performance and Support Review process to provide support, challenge and assurance, overseeing system-wide evaluation of progress and outcomes, and coordinating intervention and improvement activity where required. Through this role, they ensure that the education system remains focused on delivering high-quality provision, addressing emerging challenges, and achieving the ambitions set out within the strategy.

School Leaders & Governing Bodies

School Leaders and Governing Bodies are accountable for the quality of education and outcomes achieved within their schools, ensuring that all learners are supported to succeed and thrive. They are responsible for delivering school improvement priorities in line with the ambitions of the **Bright Futures** strategy, using robust self-evaluation processes to identify strengths and areas for development. Through effective improvement planning, informed decision-making and active participation in peer partnership and challenge arrangements, school leaders and governors will drive continuous improvement, strengthen professional practice and contribute to the collective success of the education system across Merthyr Tydfil.

Education Partnership Forum (EPF)

The Education Partnership Forum (EPF) plays a key role in providing strategic oversight and collective ownership of the **Bright Futures** strategy. It is responsible for challenging progress against agreed priorities and outcomes, supporting the effective implementation of strategic actions, and scrutinising the impact of improvement activity across the education system. Through regular review and constructive challenge, the EPF will help identify strengths, address emerging issues, and determine the next steps required to sustain momentum and secure continuous improvement for children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil.

3. Measuring Success and Evaluating Impact

The **Bright Futures** Strategy will be supported by a detailed delivery plan that sets out clear actions, milestones and measures of success. While the strategy establishes the long-term vision for education in Merthyr Tydfil, the delivery plan will ensure that progress can be monitored effectively, achievements celebrated and areas for improvement identified.

A balanced suite of performance measures will be used to evaluate the impact of the strategy over its lifetime. These measures will focus not only on educational attainment, but also on inclusion, wellbeing, workforce sustainability and the overall effectiveness of the education system. Key indicators will include:

- Attendance rates and improvements in learner engagement.
- Persistent absence levels, particularly among vulnerable learners and groups.
- Assessment and attainment outcomes across all phases of education.
- Exclusion rates and behaviour indicators to monitor inclusion and learner wellbeing.
- ALN placement sufficiency, including the ability to meet learner needs within local provision.
- Participation and progression in Welsh language education, supporting the Borough's Welsh language ambitions.
- Leadership pipeline measures, including succession planning, leadership development and progression into leadership roles.
- Recruitment and retention indicators, ensuring schools and services can attract, develop and retain a high-quality workforce.

These measures will be complemented by qualitative evidence gathered from learners, families, schools, governors, staff and partners to ensure that progress is assessed through both outcomes and lived experience. Regular reporting and review arrangements will provide transparency and accountability, enabling the Local Authority and its partners to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, respond to emerging challenges and ensure that the ambitions set out within **Bright Futures** translate into meaningful and sustained improvements for children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil.

4. Principles Underpinning Delivery

Within the delivery of **Bright Futures**, there are a set of core principles that underpin its delivery.

- **Subsidiarity**: *Decisions made at the closest level to learners (schools)*
- **Equity**: *Resources directed based on need*
- **Collaboration**: *Schools and partners work as a connected system*
- **Accountability**: *Clear roles, transparent reporting, and regular scrutiny*
- **Sustainability**: *Funding and delivery models are long-term and scalable*

In practice, this model means;

- The Local Authority is strategic, with the strategy forming the golden thread through its work (see *Self Evaluation Framework* below)
- Schools are empowered and accountable for delivery
- Partnerships are coordinated and purposeful
- Funding is aligned, monitored, and used effectively
- Progress is regularly reviewed, challenged, and refined

5. Financial & Resource Approach

The delivery of **Bright Futures** will be underpinned by a clear and sustainable approach to the use of financial and human resources, ensuring that investment is directed to where it will have the greatest impact on learners. Within a context of ongoing financial pressure, the strategy prioritises a shift towards a school-led model, with resources increasingly devolved to schools to enable locally responsive delivery, aligned to their individual contexts and needs.

The role of the Local Authority is to provide strategic oversight, coordination and assurance, ensuring that funding is used effectively, transparently, and in line with grant requirements and statutory expectations. Through existing teams, as well as targeted future capacity where required, the Local Authority will strengthen oversight of external funding streams, support schools to maximise opportunities, and ensure that funding is aligned to strategic priorities and monitored for impact.

This approach supports equity, sustainability and value for money, reduces duplication, and ensures that funding is used to improve outcomes, strengthen provision, and enhance life chances for all learners.



DESIRED OUTCOMES

The **Bright Futures** strategy is driven by a clear ambition to improve outcomes and life chances for children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil. To help monitor progress and evaluate the impact of the strategy, a range of indicators and measures of success will be used throughout its lifetime. These measures provide an important means of assessing whether the actions and commitments within the strategy are delivering the intended improvements and will support accountability, transparency and continuous improvement across the education system. Together, the desired outcomes set out below describe the changes we expect to see by 2030 and provide a clear picture of what success will look like if our vision is realised.



Goal 1 - Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners

- Future school-based Estyn inspections identify the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment practices across our schools.
- Future school-based Estyn inspections identify the effectiveness of pupils' skill development and independence.
- Most schools (80% or more) do not have a recommendation for skills development when inspected by Estyn.
- Nearly all (95% or more) of schools are not in a statutory category or require enhanced support.
- Most (80% or more) schools requiring enhanced support (and not in a statutory category) no longer require support following two terms of intervention.
- Most schools (90% or more) show improvement across all Key Stage 4 outcome measures.
- The gap between Merthyr Tydfil and all Wales Key Stage 4 outcomes shows improvement across most measures, including vulnerable groups (e.g. eFSM, ALN, looked after children).
- Most schools (90% or more) demonstrate strong teaching, learning and assessment practices through Estyn inspections and external evaluation.
- Participation in Welsh-medium education increases over the life of the strategy.
- Learners increasingly participate in enrichment, cultural and wider learning opportunities that broaden aspirations and support personal development.

Goal 2 - Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes

- 15% reduction in the number of incidents of fixed term exclusions per 1,000 learners.
- 10% reduction in the number of permanent exclusions.
- 15% reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions for vulnerable groups of learners.
- 3% improvement in primary school attendance rates.
- 5% improvement in secondary school attendance rates.
- 7% reduction in the number of learners displaying persistent absence from school.
- The gap between eFSM and non-eFSM learner attendance at secondary schools is reduced by 3%.
- The gap between Merthyr Tydfil and all Wales attendance data shows improvement across most measures, including vulnerable groups (e.g. eFSM, ALN, looked after children).
- A sufficient supply of special school and learning support class places to meet need.
- The number of learners not in Education, Training or Employment is reduced.
- Most schools (90% or more) have a dedicated or shared family engagement officer.
- Many schools (70% or more) engage in family learning activity at least once a term.
- The rates of EHE learners per 1,000 is below the national average for Wales.

Goal 3 - Strong Leadership, Strong Schools

- Effective leadership and governance are evident in most schools (90% or more)
- Governor vacancies are reduced (by at least 15%).
- Nearly all schools (95% or more) are involved in collaborative school improvement activity with other schools and can demonstrate impact.
- Most (90% or more) school leaders either strongly agree or agree that the regional professional learning and curriculum support services is good or excellent.
- Nearly all (95% or more) schools are not in a statutory category or require enhanced support.
- The % of year 1 learners attending Welsh medium education is increased by at least 3.5% over a five-year period.
- Transition rates across all key transition points in Welsh medium education show improvement year on year across all PIs.
- Nearly all (95% or more) schools do not require support via the Planned Licence Deficit process

Goal 4 - Connected Partners, Thriving Learners

- Family, community and multi-agency partnerships are strengthened across all school communities.
- Most schools (90% or more) have access to dedicated or shared family engagement capacity.
- Many schools (70% or more) engage families in learning activities at least once each term.
- Sustainable Communities for Learning projects are delivered on time and within budget.
- School modernisation programmes deliver improved learning environments, increased Welsh-medium and additional learning needs capacity, and reduced surplus places.
- Family, community and muti-agency partnerships and access to school facilities are significantly improved and meet community needs and aspirations.
- Learners report stronger feelings of belonging, connection and participation within their schools and communities.
  Many schools demonstrate effective and sustained engagement with families and community partners.
  Learners benefit from stronger progression pathways into further education, training, employment and lifelong learning.

What Bright Futures really means for the children and young people of Merthyr Tydfil

While the strategy has identified a range of measures and indicators that will help us monitor progress, evaluate impact and hold ourselves accountable, these measures are only one part of the picture. The true success of **Bright Futures** will not simply be reflected in performance data, inspection outcomes or statistical improvements. It will be seen in the day-to-day experiences, opportunities and achievements of children, young people and families across Merthyr Tydfil.

Ultimately, **Bright Futures** is about creating an education system where every learner feels valued, supported and inspired to achieve their potential, where schools provide high-quality learning experiences and promote wellbeing, belonging and aspiration, and where families, communities and partners work together to help children and young people thrive. Success will mean more learners attending regularly, enjoying learning, feeling safe and included, and making strong progress regardless of their background, needs or circumstances. It will mean more young people leaving education with the knowledge, skills, confidence and ambition needed to progress successfully into further education, training, employment and fulfilling adult lives.

For families, success will mean having confidence that their child is receiving the support, challenge and opportunities they need to flourish. It will mean stronger relationships between schools, families and services, easier access to support when it is needed, and greater opportunities to participate in learning, wellbeing and community life.

The long-term ambition of **Bright Futures** is therefore not simply to improve performance measures, but to improve life chances. By working together to ensure every learner is thriving, every school is strong and every community is engaged, we will create the conditions for children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil to flourish now and in the future. This means creating a future where there is:

- **Improved learner achievement and progress** – learners make strong and sustained progress, outcomes continue to improve, and attainment gaps narrow so that all children and young people have equitable opportunities to succeed.
- **An ambitious, engaging and relevant curriculum** – learning is meaningful, inspiring and connected to learners' lives, aspirations and future pathways, helping every child develop the knowledge, skills and confidence needed for success.
- **Inclusive provision that reduces inequality and removes barriers** – learners' needs are identified early, support is timely and effective, and every child and young person can participate fully, feel a sense of belonging and achieve their potential.
- **High-quality learning environments** – schools are safe, welcoming, inclusive and well-resourced places that support learning, wellbeing, participation and community engagement.
- **A confident, skilled and supported workforce** – teachers, leaders and support staff are empowered through professional learning, collaboration and career development to deliver the very best outcomes for learners.
- **Growth of the Welsh language and culture** – learners develop confidence in using Welsh, benefit from high-quality Welsh-medium and bilingual opportunities, and gain a stronger understanding of their culture, identity and heritage.
- **Improved life chances and long-term outcomes** – every child and young person is equipped with the knowledge, skills, qualifications, resilience and aspirations needed to lead healthy, successful and fulfilling lives.



LINKS TO WIDER STRATEGIES & PLANS

SUPPORTING THE CORPORATE WELLBEING PLAN

The Bright Futures education strategy aligns strongly with and actively supports the Merthyr Tydfil CBC Corporate Wellbeing Plan 2023–2028, while also contributing meaningfully to the Council's wider ambitions for health, prosperity, safety, and sustainability. Education is positioned as a foundational service that enables long-term wellbeing, reduces inequality, and strengthens community resilience.

By embedding inclusion, wellbeing, digital access, strong leadership, and community partnership into everyday school practice, **Bright Futures** operationalises the Council's commitment to prevention, collaboration, and long-term thinking. Schools become hubs of learning, wellbeing, and opportunity, supporting healthier lives, developing skills for a resilient local economy, and contributing to sustainable, cohesive communities.

Corporate Wellbeing Objective	How Bright Futures Supports This Objective
An Aspirational Merthyr Tydfil	**Bright Futures** is the primary delivery mechanism for this objective. Through *Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners* it raises aspirations, strengthens literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and ensures clear progression pathways from early years through post-16 and into employment and lifelong learning.
A Healthier Merthyr Tydfil	The *Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes* goal embeds wellbeing, early identification, attendance, and ongoing professional development across all schools. *Connected Partners, Thriving Learners,* promotes strong multi-agency working and community-based support to promote emotional resilience, prevention, and healthier outcomes for children, young people, and families.
A Safe & Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil	**Bright Futures** develops future-ready skills, employability, and digital competence, contributing to long-term economic resilience. Pathways into Further Education, apprenticeships and work, employer engagement, and supported leadership help prepare learners for safe participation in learning, work, and civic life.
A Clean & Green Merthyr Tydfil	Through focusing on *Strong leadership, Strong Schools* and *Connected Partners, Thriving Learners*, the strategy contributes to sustainable, modern learning environments and encourages community-based links that make effective use of local assets. Digital approaches, place-based delivery, and estate modernisation support long-term sustainability aims.



WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

Education in Merthyr Tydfil plays a central role in realising the Welsh Government's ambition for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, and cohesive Wales. Through high-quality teaching, inclusive practice, and strong partnerships with families, communities, and services, education is a key driver of long-term wellbeing for current and future generations. Schools are not only places of learning: they are anchors within their communities, supporting wellbeing, developing skills, strengthening identity, and helping to break cycles of disadvantage.

The **Bright Futures** strategy sets out Merthyr Tydfil's shared, place-based vision for education from 2026–2030. Rooted in the values of *Equity, Excellence, Belonging, and Partnership*, the strategy aligns firmly with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act by promoting prevention, collaboration, long-term thinking, and involvement. It recognises that improving educational outcomes is inseparable from improving health, wellbeing, community connection, and economic opportunity. Through its four strategic goals **Bright Futures** makes a direct and meaningful contribution to each of the seven Well-being Goals.



1. A Prosperous Wales

Bright Futures contributes to a prosperous Wales by raising aspirations, strengthening core skills, and preparing learners for further education, employment, and lifelong learning. Through high-quality teaching, a skills-rich Curriculum for Wales, strong digital competence, and clear progression pathways, education in Merthyr Tydfil equips young people with the capability, confidence, and adaptability required for a changing economy, supporting future employability and economic resilience.



2. A Resilient Wales

The strategy supports resilience by promoting sustainable learning environments, modernising the school estate, and embedding digital approaches that future-proof education delivery. By strengthening local capacity, investing in leadership and workforce development, and using community assets creatively, **Bright Futures** helps build systems that can adapt to change while continuing to meet learners' needs over the long term.



3. A Healthier Wales

Education is a powerful determinant of physical and mental health. **Bright Futures** places wellbeing, belonging, and early intervention at the heart of the system through its *Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes* goal. Whole-school wellbeing approaches, trauma-informed practice, strong attendance support, and multi-agency collaboration through the *Connected Partners, Thriving Learners* goal, contribute to improved emotional wellbeing, healthier behaviours, and earlier identification of need, supporting children and young people to thrive both in and beyond school.



4. A More Equal Wales

Reducing inequality is a core purpose of **Bright Futures**. The strategy commits to removing barriers linked to poverty, additional learning needs, digital exclusion, and wider disadvantage. Through proportionate, needs-led support; equitable access to high-quality teaching and resources and consistent inclusion practice across all schools, education in Merthyr Tydfil actively works to narrow gaps in experience, engagement, and outcomes.

5. A Wales of Cohesive Communities

The *Connected Partners, Thriving Learners* goal adopts a place-based approach that recognises schools as part of a wider network of community assets, services and opportunities. By bringing together schools, families, community assets, local organisations, health services and wider partners around a shared vision for children and young people, **Bright Futures** seeks to create stronger, more connected communities where learning, wellbeing and opportunity are woven into everyday life. Through coordinated support, shared responsibility and a strong sense of place, learners develop a deeper sense of belonging, communities become more resilient and cohesive, and local services work together to improve outcomes for all.



6. A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

Bright Futures actively supports cultural identity and the Welsh language through curriculum design, community partnerships, and expanded Welsh-medium and Welsh-enhanced provision. By promoting Cymraeg 2050 ambitions and celebrating Merthyr Tydfil's heritage, culture, and identity, the strategy ensures that learners develop pride in who they are and where they come from, while participating confidently in Wales' living culture.



7. A Globally Responsible Wales

Through digital literacy, sustainability considerations in estate planning, and inclusive, future-focused education, **Bright Futures** helps learners understand their role in a connected world. Ethical digital participation, environmental awareness, and social responsibility are embedded in learning experiences that encourage curiosity, critical thinking, and active citizenship, supporting learners to contribute positively at local, national, and global levels.



MARMOT NATION PRINCIPLES



Merthyr Tydfil is proud to be working towards formal recognition as a Marmot Nation Local Authority, placing health equity at the heart of all strategic decision-making. As a Council, we have committed to ensuring that our policies, programmes, and long-term planning are aligned with the Marmot Nation Framework, which sets out eight evidence-based principles for reducing health inequalities and improving the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Although Bright Futures is an education strategy, it aligns closely with these principles by addressing key social determinants of health such as early childhood development, access to high-quality education, effective community links, pathways into fair employment, and the wellbeing of children, young people, and families. Through this alignment, Merthyr Tydfil is ensuring that its education system plays a central role in building a fairer, healthier, and more equitable future for all residents.

Principle 1:- Give every child the best start in life

Bright Futures makes the "*best start*" tangible by centring early identification, inclusion, and consistent high-quality teaching as system expectations rather than discretionary extras. Its '*Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes*' goal establishes early, proportionate assessment pathways and whole-school relational practice so that needs are spotted and addressed before they escalate, while the goal of '*Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners*' commits to evidence-informed pedagogy and a motivating, locally relevant curriculum from the earliest phase, conditions known to underpin child development and later life outcomes. By coupling early help with coherent multi-agency collaboration (*social, health, youth, early-help services*) and tracking attendance/engagement data for timely intervention, **Bright Futures** aligns directly with Marmot's call to invest in education as the foundation of health equity.

Principle 2:- Enable children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives

The strategy's *Equity* and *Excellence* pillars aim to grow capability and agency through a curriculum that is ambitious, skills-rich, and connected to real-world progression routes, while the *'Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners'* goal guarantees equitable access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy, critical to exercising control in contemporary life. Professional learning for staff and leadership development create a confident workforce able to deliver adaptive teaching, strengthen learner voice, and scaffold independence, mirroring Marmot's emphasis on capability building across the life course. The focus on progression (*to FE, apprenticeships, and employment*) and on learner voice in planning and support further operationalises "*control over their lives*" in daily school practice.

Principle 3:- Create fair employment and good work for all

Though **Bright Futures** is an education strategy, it contributes to fair work in two ways: (i) it enhances learners' future employability via strong literacy and numeracy skills, digital competence, problem-solving, creativity, and authentic employer-linked learning (*e.g. partnership with businesses and community organisations*), and (ii) it invests in education workforce quality of work through succession planning, leadership pathways, mentoring/coaching approaches, and a commitment to staff wellbeing. This dual focus aligns with Marmot's principle that fair work is a major health determinant: preparing young people for skilled, meaningful jobs while ensuring current staff experience manageable workloads, professional growth, and supportive leadership cultures.

Principle 4:- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all

While education cannot directly raise household incomes, the aim of **Bright Futures** is to reduce structural barriers that compound low living standards by committing to equitable access to resources, digital devices, connectivity, and assistive technologies, and by using data-led early help to protect attendance and engagement (*both predictive of long-term earnings and health*). Through the '*Connected Partners, Thriving Learners*' goal, the strategy links families with adult & community learning opportunities, coordinated access to libraries and museums, and services that widen access to cultural capital, employability and practical support, complementing Marmot's call to act on the conditions that enable a healthy life. In short, **Bright Futures** targets the education-mediated levers of skills, access, engagement, and pathways, all of which underpin economic security over time.

Principle 5:- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities

Bright Futures embraces a place-based model where schools are framed as hubs within a wider ecosystem, so learning, wellbeing, and enrichment are accessible in the community, not just behind school gates. The '*Strong Leadership, Strong Schools*' goal commits to a modern, inclusive, digitally ready estate and to learner-informed improvements of spaces, tying environmental quality to daily learning and social connection. This coheres with Marmot's emphasis on healthy, sustainable places. **Bright Futures** strengthens belonging, identity, and pride in place while improving the physical environments where children learn and socialise, factors consistently linked to health and life chances.



Principle 6:- Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention

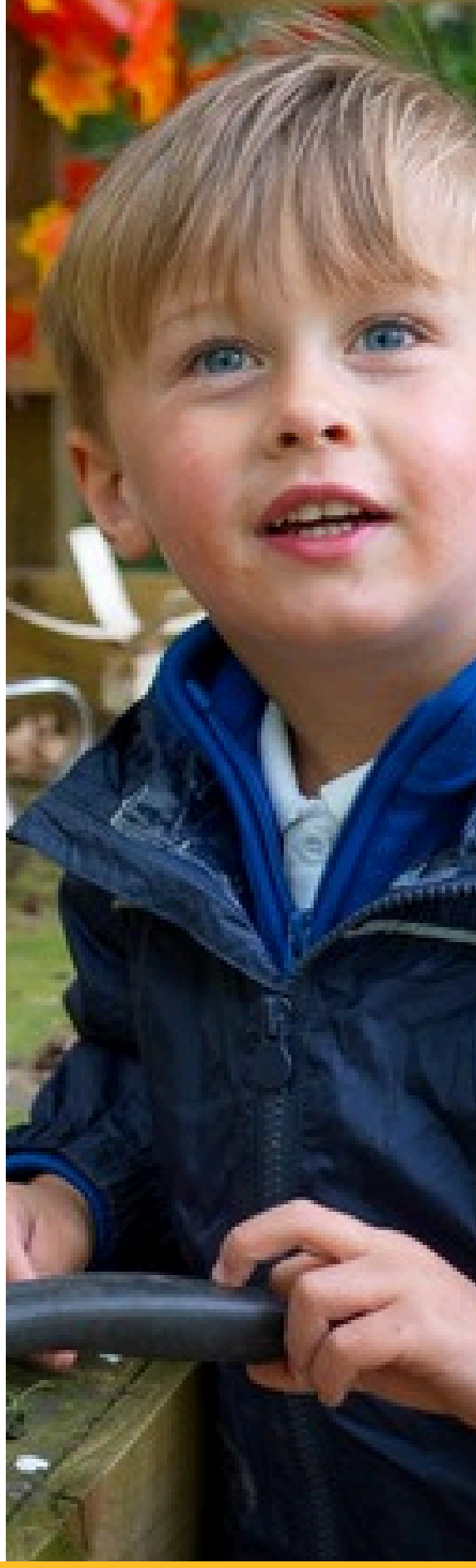
The strategy shifts from crisis response to prevention and early intervention. Whole-school wellbeing approaches, counselling, therapeutic support, and timely multi-agency pathways are embedded within both the *'Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes'* and '*Connected Partners, Thriving Learners*' goals, with explicit expectations that all settings adopt consistent, relationship-centred practice and monitor impact on attendance, engagement, and wellbeing. By normalising prevention in everyday school systems, and by ensuring staff are trained in trauma-informed, inclusive pedagogy, **Bright Futures** advances Marmot's preventive agenda, recognising that schools are pivotal sites for early mental-health support, resilience-building, and the cultivation of lifelong protective factors.

Principle 7:- Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes

While the strategy does not badge an "anti-racism programme" explicitly, its *Equity* and *Belonging* pillars operationalise anti-discrimination through system standards that remove barriers linked to background, identity, or circumstance, ensure consistent inclusive practice across schools and centre learner identity, respect, and representation in curriculum and culture. Governance oversight of learner experience and inclusion is tightened, and Welsh language and culture are celebrated as unifying features, approached inclusively to strengthen belonging for all. These moves reflect Marmot's position that tackling discrimination (*and its social/health consequences*) requires structural fairness and day-to-day practices that ensure every child is seen, valued, and safe.

Principle 8:- Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together

Bright Futures contributes by modernising the school estate with a focus on suitability, accessibility, and long-term sustainability, and by designing connected, local learning that leverages existing community assets, reducing travel barriers and widening equitable access to cultural and wellbeing opportunities close to home. The digital focus also promotes more sustainable, future-proof systems and skills, aligning with Marmot's call to integrate environmental sustainability with health equity. Whilst not primarily a climate plan, the strategy's estate planning, inclusive access to learning resources, and community-embedded delivery combine to advance fair access to healthy, enabling environments.





YOUTH SERVICE STRATEGY

Bright Futures is a place-based strategy that recognises that improving outcomes for children and young people requires collective action across the whole community. While schools play a central role, lasting improvement depends on strong collaboration between education providers, Local Authority services, health, third-sector organisations, employers, community groups and other partners. The strategy has therefore been developed through extensive engagement and co-construction, ensuring that priorities are aligned across services and that the contribution of all partners is recognised. This shared approach reflects a commitment to working together to support children and young people at every stage of their journey, creating the conditions for them to thrive in learning, wellbeing and life.

One of the most important partnerships within this place-based approach is with Youth Services, whose work makes a significant contribution to supporting young people across Merthyr Tydfil. Through a wide range of programmes, interventions and opportunities, Youth Services help young people to develop the skills, confidence, resilience and aspirations needed to succeed in education, employment and life. Their work extends beyond formal learning, supporting wellbeing, participation, personal development, community engagement and the development of positive relationships. These wider experiences play a vital role in shaping outcomes for young people and align closely with the ambitions of the **Bright Futures** strategy. Recognising this shared commitment, the strategy has been developed alongside colleagues from Youth Services to ensure strong alignment between priorities, outcomes and delivery, enabling a coordinated approach to helping all young people achieve their full potential.

The Youth Service Strategic Plan is built around seven key objectives that collectively support the personal, social, emotional and educational development of young people across Merthyr Tydfil. These are:-

- **Objective 1: Early Intervention and Inclusion** focuses on engaging vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented young people at the earliest opportunity. Through targeted outreach, preventative support and inclusive provision, the objective seeks to reduce social isolation, increase participation and ensure that all young people, including those with additional learning needs or those who are harder to reach, can access meaningful opportunities and support.
- **Objective 2: Youth Work Curriculum and Workforce Development** aims to support young people's wellbeing, confidence, resilience and personal growth through high-quality youth work delivered by a skilled and well-trained workforce. The objective promotes trusted relationships, wellbeing support, digital youth work, skills development, Welsh language provision and ongoing professional learning to ensure young people receive effective and relevant support.
- **Objective 3: Safe Spaces and Community Safety** recognises the importance of providing safe, supportive environments where young people can develop positively and reduce exposure to harm. Through youth clubs, community-based provision and targeted programmes, the objective seeks to address issues such as anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, exploitation, unhealthy relationships and other risks, while promoting positive social development and community engagement.
- **Objective 4: Education, Skills and Future Opportunities** focuses on supporting young people to remain engaged in learning and successfully transition into further education, training or employment. The objective promotes attendance, aspiration, skills development, qualifications and positive pathways, whilst strengthening support for those at risk of becoming disengaged from education, employment or training.
- **Objective 5: Information, Advice and Digital Approaches** seeks to improve young people's awareness of and access to services, support and opportunities. Through improved communication, digital engagement and effective signposting, the objective aims to help young people navigate available support, overcome barriers to participation and develop the knowledge and skills needed to engage safely and positively in an increasingly digital world.
- **Objective 6: Youth Voice and Participation** places young people at the centre of decision-making by ensuring their views, experiences and aspirations influence the design, delivery and evaluation of services. The objective promotes meaningful participation, co-production and inclusive engagement, enabling young people to play an active role in shaping the services and opportunities available to them.
- **Objective 7: Sustainable Partnerships** focuses on strengthening collaboration between the Youth Service and a wide range of partners to maximise resources, improve referral pathways and enhance support for young people. Through effective partnership working, joint planning and shared delivery, the objective aims to create a more coordinated and sustainable system of support that responds to the needs of young people across the borough.

Collectively, these seven objectives provide a strong foundation for delivering high-quality youth work and demonstrate significant alignment with the aspirations of the **Bright Futures** Education Strategy.

There are many opportunities within both **Bright Futures** and the Youth Service Strategic Plan to strengthen and enhance one another, ensuring a coordinated and holistic approach to supporting young people across Merthyr Tydfil. While each strategy has its own specific priorities and responsibilities, they share a common ambition to improve outcomes, wellbeing, inclusion, engagement, and future opportunities for young people.

By aligning programmes, resources, partnerships, and targeted interventions, both strategies can maximise their impact and provide seamless support throughout a young person's journey. The close relationship between the two plans helps to ensure that young people benefit from a connected system of support that recognises their educational, social, emotional, and personal development needs. The overview below highlights how the objectives of the Youth Service Strategic Plan contribute to, and are supported by, the aspirations of the **Bright Futures** Education Strategy, creating a strong foundation for positive outcomes for all young people.

Bright Futures	How this links to the Youth Service Strategic Plan
Goal 1:- **Inspiring Teaching, Engaged Learners**	Youth work approaches support learner engagement, attendance, motivation, confidence and aspiration. Through informal learning, personal development opportunities, leadership programmes and wider enrichment activities, the Youth Service helps young people develop the skills, resilience and confidence needed to participate fully in education, training and employment. This directly supports **Bright Futures'** focus on attendance, engagement, participation and preparing young people for active citizenship.
Goal 2:- **Inclusive Provision, Equitable Outcomes**	The Youth Service provides targeted support to vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, helping to reduce barriers to participation and ensuring that young people feel valued, included and supported. Its emphasis on wellbeing, inclusion, early intervention and supporting those most at risk of disengagement closely aligns with **Bright Futures** commitment to belonging, equitable access and coordinated support.
Goal 3:- **Strong Leadership, Strong Schools**	The Youth Service contributes to a stronger whole-system workforce through professional collaboration, partnership working and the development of young leaders. By working alongside schools, services and partners, it strengthens collective capacity to respond to local needs and deliver positive outcomes for young people. This reflects **Bright Futures** commitment to workforce development, collaboration and continuous improvement.
Goal 4:- **Connected Partners, Thriving Learners**	This is where the strongest alignment exists. The Youth Service is fundamentally partnership-driven, working with schools, families, community organisations, employers and support services. It provides opportunities for young people to engage in their communities, develop a sense of belonging, access progression pathways and influence decisions that affect them. This directly supports **Bright Futures** commitment to extending education beyond the classroom through community engagement, multi-agency working and stronger learner pathways.

