



EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 20TH JUNE 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor T. Parry - Chair

Councillors:

C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, A. Farina-Childs, A. Gair, C. Gordon, B. Miles, L. Phipps, M. Powell, K. Woodland.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors C. Andrews (Education and Communities)

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Head of Transformation), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), Dr P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), S. Ellis (Lead for Inclusion and ALN), R. Evans (Head of Provision for Vulnerable Learners), K. Honey (Principal Educational Psychologist), L. Pine (Lead Education Welfare Officer), A. West (21st Century Schools Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer), R. Barrett (Minute Taker).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#) Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E.M. Aldworth, M.P. James, J. Rao (Vice Chair), J.E. Roberts and J. Winslade, together with Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education) and Mrs P. Ireland (NEU).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 15TH MAY 2023

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th May 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 9 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education Scrutiny Committee held on 15th May 2023 (minute nos. 1 – 10) be approved as a correct record.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) presented the report, which outlined details of the Education Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period June 2023 to March 2024.

Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet work programme and suggest any changes prior to publication on the Council's website. Members were reminded of the changes to the scrutiny committee structure from September 2023, with it noted that new FWPs are currently being drafted which will be brought to the first meeting of the new committee for approval, and therefore the items listed may be subject to change.

It was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 11 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. PUPIL ATTENDANCE

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities presented the report, which provided an overview of the strategies currently being deployed to improve pupil attendance following the Covid-19 pandemic. This has been identified as a main priority for improvement in the 'Pursuing Excellence Together' education strategy.

It was noted that following improvements to school attendance during 2018 and 2019, attendance has been negatively affected by the pandemic, in line with other authorities across Wales, and therefore, is a priority for all schools and education settings across

Caerphilly. The current attendance figure up to the end of March 2023 is slightly below the national average (89.1% v 89.5%).

Dr Paul Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement) provided an overview of this national issue, the measures used to examine trends in attendance and the strategies that have been put in place across Caerphilly CBC to support schools to improve pupil attendance. A strategic approach is applied to all schools, including regular workshops for teachers and pastoral leads to provide training and advice. The Authority provides data to schools on a monthly basis so that they can view their own performance and compare this with other schools where attendance is improving in order to create networks of good practice. The Authority works with the police on schemes such as truancy patrols in town centres to decrease persistent absenteeism. Targeted interventions have also been undertaken in secondary schools, whereby the Authority will work with a particular school and target a particular cluster where attendance is under-performing to carry out some intensive work in this area.

It is recognised that one solution does not fit all, and so the Authority is increasingly taking a bespoke approach to work with individual families to build strong partnerships and support a return to satisfactory attendance. The Authority are also constantly reflecting and evaluating practices to ensure they are maximising the best use of resources in relation to this challenging issue.

Dr Warren placed on record his thanks to schools who are working incredibly hard to improve pupil attendance and acknowledged the value of the support given to schools by Education Welfare Officers and colleagues across other departments, such as Inclusion Services, together with the support from governing bodies and other stakeholders and the collaborative work being undertaken to address this issue. He explained that the Authority are also looking to increasingly work with other partners and have made use of Welsh Government funding to create the Community Focused Schools initiative to target attendance in the areas of highest deprivation.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the report and in response to a Member's query, Dr Warren provided clarification on the link between lower attendance and those pupils in receipt of free school meals, and outlined the range of measures introduced by the local authority to support this national challenging issue, with the key aim being to support these children to encourage them to attend school and receive a positive learning experience.

In response to a Member's query regarding the impact of pupil illness on attendance, Dr Warren confirmed that factors that have contributed to high levels of illness include Covid-19, seasonal flu, and more recently, uncertainty and anxiety around Strep A and Scarlet Fever, which saw a large dip in attendance in December 2022. In such cases, the local authority and schools will work with families and children to provide reassurance around such outbreaks to encourage continued pupil attendance.

Dr Warren responded to queries regarding the use of fixed penalty notices to address poor attendance, explaining that it is within the gift of each school governing body to apply a FPN policy, and emphasised that these only are applied as a last resort where every other avenue has been explored and all other means of support have failed. Clarification was provided on the number of FPNs issued during 2022/23, the level of charge, the enforcement process, and the discretions available to the local authority in terms of withdrawing FPNs.

In response to a Member's query, Dr Warren outlined the multi-disciplinary approach in terms of managing attendance, involving conversations between the school and

Education Welfare Officer and referrals to the Inclusion Team, Education Psychology Service and Youth Service where appropriate. He also confirmed that the strategies apply to both primary and secondary school pupils and emphasised that the actions that are taken will be dependent on the circumstances and the age of the child, together with the location of the school. Above all, the local authority will always undertake a person-centred approach to engage the pupil and their family as soon as possible to recognise the value of attendance.

A query was received around DDA compliance as a means of encouraging attendance, and Officers confirmed that whilst work is currently being carried out with one secondary school in this regard, the local authority has monies available to make reasonable amendments to any school where the need arises.

A Member made reference to an equation which calculates the amount of pupil learning lost for each period of absence and the projected attainment of that pupil. Dr Warren confirmed that a letter along similar lines which compares pupil attendance and attainment had been sent out to parents at the start of the academic year to highlight the importance of regular attendance, and he would make arrangements to forward this information to the Member following the meeting.

A query was received around the number of Education Welfare Officers (EWO) and Family Liaison Officers in post and whether these positions would be impacted if there is a loss of WG funding. Dr Warren explained that CCBC maximises WG funding to the best of its ability and are able to provide one EWO per cluster school which provides stability around the relationships that are built with pupils and their families. There are 2 Family Liaison officers working alongside the Education Welfare team, together with a further 4 officers employed through the Community Focused Schools initiative, which focuses on areas of deprivation across the authority, with the current focus on the Idris Davies cluster, together with schools across the St James', Lansbury Park and Graig-y-Rhacca clusters. The local authority is always seeking further funding opportunities and have been able to access Shared Prosperity Funding which lasts for 2 years and has enabled another 12 support officers (equating to one per secondary school) to focus on Key Stage 3 pupils and work with specific groups of learners.

Following consideration of the report, and having had the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification and offer views, the Education Scrutiny Committee noted the update on the impact of strategies to improve pupil attendance.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL OF TUITION SUPPORT

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities presented the report, which provided information to Members regarding the current model of home tuition and sought their support for proposals for changes to existing delivery.

Members were advised that the current model facilitates access to a tutor for a time limited period each day, facilitated by the local authority, and this model can also facilitate support being provided to pupils excluded for 15 days or more, in line with Welsh Government guidance. The proposed changes would enable schools to retain direct control over decision making, funding and provision for pupils on role in their school, and therefore ensure a consistent approach to meeting needs. Each school will either receive funding to support this model or existing contracted staff will transfer to a secondary school. This model has already been trialled in several schools and consultation on these changes has been carried out with existing tutors, the agency

sourcing the tutors for the local authority, and families of children receiving home tuition, with further details set out in the report. These proposals align with responsibilities linked to The Education Act, The ALN Act, the EOTAS Framework for Action, and Exclusions from Schools and Pupil Referral Units guidance.

The Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report and during the ensuing discussion, clarification was sought on whether this approach would negatively impact the number of exclusions, together with any measures in place to prevent this from happening. A Member also asked if tutors will be provided with additional training on managing difficult emotional behaviours and any family concerns. Officers explained that it is intended for this model to improve the situation regarding exclusions and that placing this resource directly with the schools will enable them to work closely with young people and have a positive effect in reducing exclusions. In terms of training, tutors working directly with schools will be based in the school community which will benefit their professional learning.

A Member asked if there was a risk of this model leading to more pupils seeking home schooling, and if this could result in extra pressure on teaching staff. The Scrutiny Committee were advised that this scenario had been taken into consideration by Officers when developing the model, who are mindful of the responsibility amongst professional educators to encourage pupil socialisation, with multi-agency panels meeting regularly to find the appropriate provision to meet the young person's needs. This also takes place at school level where a rigorous process of referral is in place to ensure the correct people access this service and can thrive. Members were assured that this model is not intended to add to teaching pressures, and that teachers are not being asked to deliver more lessons, but the use of technology means that resources already delivered in the classroom can be used by tutors, who can also access curriculum content.

Clarification was sought on whether this approach would help to reduce school absences. Officers confirmed that the Education Welfare Service are already working closely with EOTAS colleagues to see where tuition can re-engage pupils, and schools will be supported with this extra resource to reach out to pupils with this offer, with a view to eventually bringing them back to mainstream education.

A Member asked if the current level of tutors was sufficient to meet pupil needs and Officers confirmed that under the new model, some schools will be allocated a tutor and others will be supported financially to source their own tutor, through a formula to ensure schools are treated fairly and meaning that the 12 school clusters will be equally supported.

A Member highlighted a variance in suitable resources for tutors and students and asked how this can become more consistent. Officers explained that there are slightly different approaches by schools in terms of curriculum resources, depending on circumstances and the subjects, and there is also a variability in terms of the experience of tutors. Therefore, schools across cluster areas have discussed working together, for example matching a tutor with more expertise in science with another tutor with more expertise in literacy to support students from each other's respective clusters.

In response to a Member's query, Officers gave assurances that parents, families and students have been consulted in the development of this model. A Member also asked how exams are supported for pupils using this model and were advised that there is strong collaboration between tutors, examination officers and parents. The appropriateness of what examinations they will be entered into is considered carefully,

and the examination location (at Pentrebane Street or a community setting) will be facilitated to ensure that the proper invigilation and exam board requirements are followed.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 10 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and that the Education Scrutiny Committee endorse the proposal to implement a revised model of supporting pupils who have received tuition in order that they can be supported via the school.

8. OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities presented the report, which provided an overview of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) model of service delivery and how the work of the Service has evolved following the implementation of the ALN Reform. The report also included examples of the interventions and support offered by the EPS and outlined the range of work that the EPS is involved in both with schools and the local authority, in order to provide a better understanding of the breadth of the EP role in both supporting schools, the local authority and their partners in health and social care.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the report and in response to a Member's query, Officers provided clarification on the qualifications and experience requirements to become an Assistant Education Psychologist within CCBC. It was noted that the authority receives a large pool of applicants in response to vacancies and are able to ensure that they hire staff with a high range of skills and expertise. In response to further queries, Officers explained that the EPS combines a person-centred approach and educational psychology model of service delivery to inform their consultation practice. It was also confirmed that in cases where children and young people present with a range of emotional behaviour and social difficulties, in addition to difficulties linked to their learning, the EPS works holistically to assess the needs of the young person to ascertain whether it is the school setting, home setting, or both that is impacting on these needs, and determine how the EPS can best support them.

In response to a query on the number of staff across the EPS, Officers confirmed that there are currently 9.2 FTE EPs in post, with one part-time senior EP leaving the EPS at the end of Summer 2022 and a Welsh-speaking EP joining the service in September 2022. The EPS has capacity for 11.2 FTE core-funded EPs, and it was acknowledged that staffing, recruitment and retention is a Wales-wide issue and not specific to CCBC. The Authority is about to commence another recruitment drive in terms of Assistant EPs. There are currently 8.9 FTE staff across this section of the service, one of whom is core-funded and the remainder through WG grant schemes, and although there are 4 staff due to leave the service, this is seen as a huge success and credit to the work of the EPS as the staff are leaving to take up doctoral psychology training opportunities.

A Member referred to the Vulnerable Learners Matrix (VLM) being piloted by the EPS and asked when this would be rolled out to all schools. Officers explained that the EPS will be looking to evaluate the pilot at the end of the summer term and will be asking for feedback from schools. Anecdotal feedback in the meantime indicates that schools are very positive about the VLM and have stated that the matrix provides a valuable range of interventions that are bespoke to the individual's range of

vulnerability. A query was also received around take-up levels in holistic therapies such as music and art that have been introduced through WG funding. Officers confirmed that the EPS have seen particular success with music therapy and that having an eclectic range of therapy on offer means that the service is able to take into account pupils' needs and views in terms of the approach that they would prefer. In response to a further query, Officers also provided an overview of the Circles of Vulnerability activity, which is a tool that EPs use to identify which individuals (comprising both school staff and pupils) are most likely to be impacted following a critical incident or sad event that has impacted on the school, and enables the EPS to support schools in devising an action plan to support these individuals moving forward.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 11 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) the Education Scrutiny Committee considered the information contained in the report and offered views and comments;
- (iii) the Education Scrutiny Committee endorse the approach taken by the EPS to support schools, other education professionals and parents to better understand pupil needs and deliver timely interventions to bring about positive change in children and young people's lives.

9. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING BAND B PROGRAMME - PHASE 3 PROPOSAL

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities presented the report, which provided an update on the next phase of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B programme and sought Members' endorsement to proceed to Outline Business Case stage with Welsh Government (WG) for the relocation of Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School to a shared facilities site.

It was noted that the two schools will continue to provide both Welsh and English Medium Primary education and remain as separate entities, situated within the new dual-purpose building. The project is in the early developmental stage and Officers will ensure that Members are updated on a regular basis in relation to all aspects of the proposal e.g., financial, business case, consultation process etc, in line with the requirements of the School Organisation Code 2018 and the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

Sue Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Head of Transformation) advised Members that the proposal had been discussed in principle with the headteachers and chair of governors of both schools, who were in full support of the proposals. The relevant ward members have also been briefed and confirmed their support for the proposal. It was explained that subject to Cabinet approval, the next step would be to submit an outline business case to Welsh Government. Should WG approve the outline business case, then CCBC will undertake a full and comprehensive consultation exercise with all stakeholders, including the Scrutiny

Committee, and with a detailed consultation report being brought to Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn Term for consideration.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the report and a Member asked if parking would be considered as part of the proposal, as this is an issue with a number of schools in the county borough and can impact significantly upon surrounding residential areas. Members were advised that if taken forward, the proposal would be subject to a full pre-consultation period and planning application, for which parking would be included as part of this process.

A Member asked why there had been no prior consultation on this proposal and were advised that this is at an early developmental stage and requires an outline business case to be approved by Welsh Government before the detailed proposals are developed and then consulted upon. Clarification was sought on whether this proposal was included in previous discussions with Members on the wider Band B proposals and were assured that a new school for Upper Rhymney Primary and an alternative site for Ysgol y Lawnt were included in discussions held in 2017 as part of the Strategic Outline Plan submitted to WG at that time to secure £78m of funding.

Concerns were expressed regarding the proposal to develop a dual site as it was felt that pupils being taught in Welsh need to be immersed in the language and a dual site might be distracting to their learning. The Scrutiny Committee was advised the proposal is for two schools on the same site with shared facilities available for community use. However, each school will be distinct and run separately. An example was provided to illustrate this of a much larger school hall that will be divided into two for each school to use separately but which can be opened up into one room for use by the community. There are examples of this model in other local authorities, and it was suggested that if these proposals proceed, that a visit could be arranged for Scrutiny Committee Members to see similar examples.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 9 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) the proposal to proceed with the proposed project outlined in Section 2.2 of the report to submit an outline business case to Welsh Government be endorsed.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Before closing the meeting, and with this being the last meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee in its current format, the Chair thanked Education Officers for their diligence in producing their reports and for their commitment in ensuring the best outcome for learners across the Authority.

The Chair also highlighted the recent achievement of Nant-y-Parc Primary School in attaining the World Class Schools Quality Mark, and who are the first and only primary school in Wales to be awarded this prestigious recognition. This has been achieved by the dedicated hard work of the staff and their headteacher, with the school very well

known for its strong leadership and a track record in delivering excellent outcomes for all their pupils.

The meeting closed at 7.00 p.m.