



EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5TH JULY 2022

SUBJECT: SHARED AMBITIONS STRATEGY 2019-2022

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present Scrutiny with the outcome of the report completed on progress since the Peer Review in 2018.
- 1.2 The progress report was completed in February 2022 and references the Shared Ambitions Strategy and interviews with a range of stakeholders.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 A Peer Review, led by Aled Evans, former Director of Education, Neath Port Talbot County Council, was conducted in December 2018. The team consisted of three Directors of Education, one Assistant Director and Welsh Local Government Association representatives. The review highlighted the priorities within the draft 'Shared Ambitions Strategy', which had been introduced earlier that term.
- 2.2 The Local Authority (LA) requested that Mr. Evans review the impact of the Strategy and the progress made since January 2019. This progress is captured in the Executive Summary report (Appendix 1).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members review the attached document (Appendix 1) and discuss, challenge, and scrutinise the information contained within.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Scrutiny members are involved in the self-evaluation process by scrutinising the information in all external reports.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The review conducted between November 2021 and February 2022 included a documentation review and interviews with stakeholders.
- 5.2 Findings from the review will be shared with Corporate Management Team, Education Scrutiny, Cabinet and Estyn. Actions arising from these discussions will be agreed and included in future strategic plans.
- 5.3 The 'Shared Ambitions' Strategy was implemented in September, 2018 and was an effective platform for partnership working and articulating our vision for the next three years. From 2020-2022, education has experienced unprecedented levels of disruption and those partnerships have been tested and found to be fundamental in maintaining continued effective delivery of services and development of new ways of working for school communities. The principles embedded in the strategy kept all stakeholders on track and enabled successful navigation of complex issues.
- 5.4 As the LA prepares for a new 5 year strategy for September 2022, it has been important to capture the learning from the past 3 years and to take time to consult and reflect on the priorities and actions for the next strategic plan. In order to support this self-evaluation, Mr. Evans was invited to review the progress made and to identify any areas of developments.
- 5.5 Many stakeholders were interviewed, as indicated below, and discussions focussed on the impact of 'Shared Ambitions' and current need, particularly in the shadow of Covid.

Headteachers - (Secondary, Primary, Special / PRU)
Representative Chairs of Governors
Leader
Cabinet Member
Corporate Director, Education and Corporate Services
Education Achievement Service
Education Senior Management Team

5.6 Conclusion

The report highlights many positive features and also identifies areas for development. These findings confirm outcomes of the LA's own self-evaluation activities and reflections. Actions will now be agreed and included in forthcoming plans. This process has been a very powerful instrument in the self-evaluation process and offers confirmation of internal judgements.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no assumptions thought to be required within this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report is for information only and on this basis an integrated impact assessment is not required

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no financial implications within this report.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no personnel implications within this report.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 Any consultation responses have been included with in this report.

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Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Care and Housing
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Councillor Teresa Parry, Chair of Education Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Jo Rao, Vice Chair of Education Scrutiny Committee
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning & Strategy
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Jane Southcombe, Financial Services Manager
Sarah Mutch, Early Years Manager
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Debbie Harteveld, Managing Director, EAS
Rob Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Executive Summary of progress made since January 2019.

Shared Ambitions – a review, December 2021

The Shared Ambitions document, as published in March 2019, provides a coherent strategy framework for identifying areas of priority and for delivering improvements for learners of all ages and abilities across the county borough.

The strategy has a three year span and will come to its conclusion in March 2022. Its content is well known and understood by key stakeholders, particularly senior school leaders and lead officers within the local authority's education services.

School leaders report that the strategy has framed local priorities effectively and has guided actions into tangible outcomes. Headteachers feel that the strategy provides consistency of approach and a strong sense of the educational community working together to deliver common aims. It has been a coalescing influence. All senior school leaders and officers feel that the #TeamCaerphilly brand provides a powerful and meaningful umbrella term that unifies the educational community across the local authority. The strategy articulates an ambitious vision that stakeholders relate to and feel ownership of. However, governors were less convinced of the significance of the brand and feel less involved in its compass.

Many reported that the strategy provides a sense of togetherness that has been particularly powerful and beneficial during the pandemic period. On that point, it must be emphasised that the Covid-19 pandemic has cut across the strategy in a devastating way. However, at the same time, senior leaders within schools were keen to acknowledge the heroic and tireless support they have received during the past 18 months as they have battled to keep schools open, to maintain learning online and to support the needs of all learners and staff.

There is a very high level of praise and respect for the way the local authority has provided leadership and support during the pandemic. A review of the Shared Ambitions strategy cannot be understood without reference to the pandemic. It has, understandably, impacted obstructively on how actions have been progressed. However, actions have been progressed, and it is to the local authority's credit that this has happened.

Senior school leaders in partnership with local authority staff have devised new and innovative ways of securing and promoting transition across key stages, particularly where this involves moving from one school to another. Much of this practice, it is reported, will be maintained to the future as it has resulted in effective and efficient use of digital resources.

The pandemic has also focused activities around supporting vulnerable learners and also in being more specific in identifying their needs. The investment in technology has resulted in pupils being able to engage and manage their own learning in a more proactive and interactive way.

Again governors' training has been delivered digitally and it is reported that this has been well received and effective.

Support for self-evaluation, improvement planning and resource management has been provided well through targeted meetings including consortium staff, senior local authority officers and in some cases, peer leaders. Headteachers report that this is beneficial and constructive. The focus on developing leadership and aspiring leaders is good. New headteachers report an effective induction programme.

Headteachers felt that there was strong support for the Welsh-medium sector in the authority.

Relationships across the educational community in Caerphilly are reported to be very strong. It is fair to note that they are, in my view, unprecedentedly strong. During the interviews, I also took an opportunity to canvass people's views of what the future could look like in Caerphilly as regards learning and learners.

There are some emerging themes and messages that have a consistency that needs to be heeded.

Politically and corporately, there is a clear commitment to support the wellbeing of learners and staff; to ensure that every setting develops a learning environment that is inspiring and ambitious to each individual pupil or student; that is inclusive and supports the holistic needs of all learners; that delivers equality. There is a vision for how schools and education relates to economic growth and prosperity.

Senior leaders in schools, senior officers, politicians and governors all share a view that accountability needs to be understood and articulated in a broader, more sophisticated, more inclusive and more intelligent way. School leaders emphasised the need for a holistic approach, where the learning journeys of individual, representative pupils are articulated and examined. There is a significant will to develop these processes into a self-evaluation and accountability framework that provides a more coherent and secure understanding of a school's location on an improvement continuum. Leaders believe that quantitative data remains an important source of information, but should not be the dominant source. They are of a view that steps should be taken to ensure even greater consistency in the quality of engagement from school improvement officers. Currently, the local authority does not have independent access to the information and intelligence on the performance and management of schools held by the consortium. This is a risk.

The local authority is developing a vulnerability assessment toolkit (VAT) and will seek to ensure that all elements are aligned. The Early Years team has developed a model that identifies children's emerging developmental needs. It is intended that this will interface with the wider VAT.

Senior leaders refer to *Cwmpawd* as being an effective part of a wider inclusion strategy that is providing increasing clarity in how vulnerable pupils will be provided for within the authority. However, some felt that transition arrangements in reference to more vulnerable pupils could be improved.

Pupil participation plays an integral part in the management of education services in Caerphilly. Senior officers refer to instances, particularly in relation to the 21st

Century Schools Programme, where pupils have been consulted effectively on proposed developments. Equally, school leaders believe that pupil voice is given a prominent role in their settings. However, many feel that more could be done to engage with marginalised learners and those who are not necessarily represented on standard forums such as school councils and junior and youth forums.

It is clear that education services in Caerphilly seek to improve from a position of considerable strength. Schools and services operate in an environment of significant commitment and trust. Based on the interviews undertaken there is a strong sense of shared values and vision. There is a clear sense of ambition and school leaders feel inspired by the way corporate officers prioritise the needs of children and young people. Whilst the knowledge base could be enhanced, it is currently sound. This places the local authority in a good position to lead the delivery of national reform priorities at Caerphilly.

A reset of the Shared Ambitions strategy should have these priorities at its core and should seek to ensure that they are delivered in a cohesive and integrated way, providing clarity to schools on how they complement and fuse with each other. The effectiveness of Caerphilly's Education Services will not be measured by how well it implements the national reform agenda, but rather by the impact of the agenda on learners and their lives in the authority. Recovery will be different to anything else we have experienced in education. It requires intense thought and consideration, consultation and reflection. Recovery needs to be informed from classroom level upwards and enabled by strong political and strategic leadership that is agile and decisive.

Finally, it is inevitable that any resetting of the Shared Ambitions strategy will focus exclusively on Covid recovery. This should be articulated in terms of key actions that will directly improve the lives (wellbeing) and the learning of children and young people. Whilst aspects such as leadership, governance and planning have a resonance in this regard, I am firmly of the view that the key actions should only pertain to matters that will relate to learners, eg zero NEETS, home access to digital learning etc.

Caerphilly Education Services are in safe hands. This is not a view that I have conjured, it is a view articulated very coherently and honestly by all stakeholders interviewed. Building on this respect and trust, the following areas are ones that surfaced most prominently and evocatively during the interviews as ones that should be considered for further development.

They are not recommendations, but serve as starting points for further discussion.

- In order to become more effective commissioners, the local authority needs to ask itself to what extent it is equipped with the information, intelligence and data it needs to carry out this key responsibility
- The local authority needs to review its understanding and use of data particularly in order that it is able to track and map the provision for vulnerable learners.. Data analysis is an extremely important element of planning and delivering services. It needs to be diagnostic and dynamic in order that it informs the progress of current cohorts of pupils.

- Whilst data remains a key aspect of information and intelligence gathering, pupil participation is more important in ensuring that schools deliver learning experiences that are relevant to the needs of all learners. The local authority needs to consider how it will support pupils' views and voices to be heard and reflected in its strategies. It needs to consider how this process becomes genuinely representative of all pupils across the authority.
- The local authority should consider how well these aspects contribute to its self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.
- The local authority should consider setting a zero NEETs target. However, the target must not be approached in an arbitrary way, and would need to be understood in a broader context that supports, amongst other things, destination retention, support on destination movement and access to learning at different points for 19-25 year olds.
- An effective local authority creates an environment that allows pupils and staff to thrive in its schools and removes hazards and drags that hinder effective teaching and learning. In order to support recovery, the local authority should consider establishing a structure that facilitates a system of active peer learning networks that provide opportunities to think through problems with peers and to share practice and innovation.

Aled Evans

24.02.22