



CABINET - 30TH NOVEMBER 2022

SUBJECT: EDUCATION STRATEGY

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the revised Education Strategy 2022-2025 building on the successes of the Shared Ambitions Strategy which shifted decision-making from short-term to long-term and school improvement approaches from 'challenge' to 'support'.
- 1.2 To seek Cabinet approval to formally adopt and subsequently launch the new Education strategy.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report introduces the new Education Strategy 2022-25 which is attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The Education Strategy redefines the vision for all children, young people and adults accessing education in Caerphilly County Borough council. 'Pursuing excellence together' will further develop the culture of trust, strong working relationships and a passion for making a difference that have underpinned our collective response to the recent challenges. While learner aspiration can sometimes be constrained by circumstance, they should never be defined by it. Our new vision is a public commitment to continuously seek out, promote and share excellence throughout our education system in order to deliver sustained improvement over the coming years.
- 2.3 The Education Strategy reasserts the Local Authority's approach in identifying and resetting priorities based on high expectations and ambition for all learners (standards, progress, provision, wellbeing). It sets out to ensure that all stakeholders engage and adopt the vision, agreeing a common approach towards addressing the priorities identified in the strategy.
- 2.4 The Education Strategy seeks to reach agreement on a set of principles around how we work together to maximise efficiency and productivity. It also outlines a clear approach to the principles of Evaluation and Improvement.
- 2.5 Rigorous self-evaluation over the past year has led to the identification of twelve key

objectives for improvement over the next three years. These are set out in section eight of the attached Education Strategy.

- 2.6 In the Curriculum for Wales, Welsh Government sets out to establish a new kind of learning journey for children, pupils and young people. The Education Strategy sets out how this will be taken forward across all the stages of learning from 0 to 25 and beyond across Caerphilly.
- 2.7 The Education Strategy explores the roles and responsibilities of schools, and the key partnerships with the Education Achievement Service, local and regional services, schools, child-care settings and other educational settings, emphasising the importance of working together to understand and support the needs of all children and young people and the commitment to those who are most vulnerable.
- 2.8 The Education Strategy has been developed in consultation with Local Authority staff (education and cross-directorate), schools, parents and carers, pupils (mainstream, looked after, educated other than at school), young people 11-25, Trade Unions, governors, further education colleges, Careers Wales, social services and the Education Achievement Service. The key issues identified by each of these consultee groups are represented in the strategy.
- 2.9 The Education Strategy does not exist in isolation. It is shaped and supported by a range of internal strategies that complements and supports the ambition contained in this strategy. These form a complex network of interwoven strands and relationships that unify to achieve the main areas for development. These key strategies are described in section ten of the Education Strategy.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Cabinet approve the publication of the new Education Strategy 2022-2025.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Shared Ambitions Strategy set the foundations for sustainable improvement across Caerphilly's education system as well as embedding a set of behaviours that would support that development. As that Strategy draws to its natural conclusion, the new Education Strategy should rightly provide the platform for the next three years and with it our commitment to pursue excellence together.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The new Education Strategy 2022-25 sets out to identify and re-set the educational priorities for Caerphilly post Covid-19 and for the next three years.
- 5.2 The Education Strategy also outlines how we will know if we are making a difference to children and young people, through a set of principles for evaluation and improvement both at school and Local Authority level.
- 5.3 The approach fits coherently with the responsibilities linked to:
 - the Curriculum for Wales,
 - the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Tribunal Act (2018),

- the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act,
 - Welsh Government Renew and Reform post-Covid-19,
 - the Tertiary Education Bill,
 - the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme,
 - Children’s Rights in Wales,
 - Flying Start and Childcare,
 - Parenting & Inequality strategy and the universal offer of free school meals for primary pupils.
- 5.4 The strategy recognises the cost-of-living pressures being faced by families across the County Borough and it will seek to alleviate those and reduce the impact of poverty and disadvantage on the educational achievement of affected learners.

Conclusion

- 5.5 The LA is committed and ambitious in its approach to transforming the lives of children, young people and adults. This new Education Strategy for 2022-25 brings together the principles and values underpinning this ambition and keeps the progress of pupils and young people firmly at the centre. The approach reinforces the need for partnership working and a proactive approach to supporting all children, ensuring they are included and can achieve. The strategy renews the emphasis on support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and cost of living crisis.
- 5.6 This inclusive approach will continue to develop the excellent working relationships between the Local Authority, schools and other stakeholders and support the focus on raising standards for all.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 No assumptions have been felt to be necessary in this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The approach being developed keeps children at the centre, promotes equality of opportunity, and reinforces the importance of partnership working to achieve our ambition.
- 7.2 The information gathered and reviewed as part of the Integrated Impact Assessment and through the consultation process supports the benefits of developing the approach to supporting children in this way.
- 7.3 Therefore, Members are asked to consider this Integrated Impact Assessment alongside this Report in support of progressing to implementation from the Autumn Term 2022.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The purpose of this report is to present a strategy that identifies the key priorities for the education service, our schools and our partners for the next three years. This will ensure that all financial spend appropriately supports activities and resources, resulting in an improvement in the performance measures outlined in appendix 1 of the strategy.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no specific staffing implications linked to this approach.

10. CONSULTATIONS

Education Scrutiny Committee 19th October 2022

- 10.1 Members stated that the report refers to a summary of roles and responsibilities of schools and key partnerships, including EAS and asked is it working effectively. Members were advised that it is working well at the moment, they are adapting practices and as a region looking at joint initiatives post covid. There are EAS monthly meetings and officers will use these to get the best possible support for Caerphilly. There are benefits to working as a region and there are challenges, but ultimately the responsibility lies with the LA to ensure that Caerphilly schools have the support they need.
- 10.2 Members discussed pupil attendance and the practice of sending letters to parents regarding attendance and asked if consideration been given to one-to-one discussion with parents to explain the importance of attendance and uncover any barriers. The committee were advised that attendance strategies are under constant review and previous work had put Caerphilly as 6th in Wales for best attendance. Overall schools want to get children into school, letters can work but in some situations may not be suitable. Education Welfare will look at some individual cases where pupils may have specific vulnerabilities.
- 10.3 Members asked what is the local context in terms of Youth service, as there is no mention of non-maintained youth provision which offers excellent drop in service. Officers acknowledged this point.
- 10.4 The scrutiny committee commented on the provision for 14 upwards and noted there is lots of excellent practice across Caerphilly, and the need to ensure it is shared.
- 10.5 In terms of Shared Ambitions members asked what guarantees are there around the expectation to track and map provision for vulnerable learners. Officers advised that when a strategy is devised it may not 100% reflect what is happening at the time and the aim is to support schools through a lot of changes and they want to see every school succeed.
- 10.6 Members asked if the 0% NEETS target is possible? The revised strategy includes ambition to reduce the number of NEET pupils in year 11. Officers have looked at the data and identified who can support the children at risk of becoming NEET. This includes Education Welfare, Community Learning and Youth service. Funding has been used to target key stage 3 pupils who are most at risk of becoming NEET.

- 10.7 Members stated that it is good to see the engagement with children and their requested learning, but will it include things like civic responsibilities, voting, politics etc. The committee were advised it is important to reflect the feedback from pupils and other stakeholders in terms of building the curriculum. The next stage is to hold events with schools to discuss the feedback.
- 10.8 Members queried the priorities and the lack of figures in appendix 1 of the strategy – what does good look like, would we need to have pre and post covid baselines. The scrutiny committee were advised that Welsh Government does not want data to be aggregated or used for accountability but there will be both qualitative and case studies to illustrate how the strategy is working.
- 10.9 Safeguarding – assurance was sought that where children are exposed to incidents of domestic violence that social services will report to schools so that teachers can ensure that children are supported. Members were assured that professionals have responsibilities under safeguarding to put the welfare of the child first.
- 10.10 The committee asked how we monitor the children who are educated outside mainstream schools. Members were advised that these number have risen since covid, we have employed elective home education advisory teacher whose role is to visit families and check on the education. We have reports back and keep in touch with the ongoing challenges they face but also offering a way back to schools. We have also provided some virtual learning for those who are educated off school sites and until the building is complete they are spread out across Caerphilly.
- 10.11 Members asked under Areas for Development – Healthy Food Choices, how will this be done and will it include teaching cooking skills. The committee were advised that the healthy schools team are proactive in this area and work to improve attitudes to food choices and getting physically active. The Health Research Network survey will focus on a range of issues related to well-being including food and fitness.
- 10.12 Members sought clarification on the expansion of Flying start and queried when the stages will be implemented and how long each stage will last. The committee were advised that the expansion will be phase one and will include the five communities of New Tredegar, to start from Monday next week. For phase 2, Officers advised they have received the guidance and the delivery plan and are currently waiting on Welsh Government to provide data on the numbers which will be needed to identify the areas. Phase two will not be the full flying start programme and will be purely the funded childcare provision, it was noted that in Caerphilly we have flexed the grants to make sure that all families can access the early intervention when they need it. The hope is that from March/April next year we will have more childcare provision rolled out. It was also explained that that we do not know yet how many stages there will be stage two will last until March 2024. We will start Stage three planning with Welsh Government, but there may be changes after the next Welsh Government elections. Overall it is envisaged to have a service for all areas in the next 5 years.
- 10.13 The scrutiny committee were glad to see the Learning Journey for adults and asked if there is funding. Members were assured that there is funding for the adult communities for learning, a bid has also been submitted to the Shared Prosperity Fund. We have Families First funding for essential skills, there are also training linked to regeneration projects and the employment team have funding from Welsh Government.

- 10.14 Members asked if children given the opportunity to have critical thinking/bias teaching so that they know to research different sources. Officer advised that this is more prevalent in the new curriculum with an emphasis on skills levels.
- 10.15 In terms of staff training, the scrutiny committee asked if consideration been given to resilience of staff cover, and also overcoming issues where some ALN children may prefer to be assisted by particular staff and this cannot be avoided during absences and training etc. Members were advised that the Act looks to offer more training but this needs to be balanced against not overloading staff, the aim is to offer tools to staff in a measured approach. The committee were informed that within early years they have flexed the grant funding to be borough wide from April last year, so they were able to put some provision in place but the numbers are still considerable. More children are being found with developmental delays which may be due to covid as well, from lack social interactions of parent toddler groups etc. The team is working with health and connecting with schools to try to mitigate the impact upon them.
- 10.16 Members asked if Early Years and ALN have had an increase in referrals post covid. It was confirmed that numbers are increasing and ideally early intervention would help children catch up. Unfortunately health visitor teams are carrying large vacancies and although there are lots of clinics including Saturdays there are a lot of pressure on assessments. There are waiting times for Paediatrics, for Speech and Language therapy, occupational therapy etc, all of these services are under pressure.
- 10.17 The committee asked if in order to help with exam stress, have there been opportunities for meditation or mindfulness at schools particularly during exam preparation. Members were advised that schools have counsellors who can offer these types of schemes including mindfulness.
- 10.18 Members asked what is being done to address the length of time for assessments post-covid. They were advised that there is a new assessment system with lots of changes, this means there is no longer a requirement for this to be carried out by Education Psychologists, which should mean improvement in the length of time.
- 10.19 Members asked if Welsh School participants have access to qualified youth workers who are Welsh speakers. Do we have numbers? It is confirmed that we don't have exact numbers but there has been a push to encourage Welsh learning in the team and there are targets in the service plan. Members also expressed concern that Welsh learners don't have local dialect. Officers acknowledged that many of these issues are difficulties and challenges that we are having in delivering the Welsh Strategic Plan.
- 10.20 The scrutiny committee expressed concern over low registration for Free School Meals and the potential impact upon family finances. Officers advised that they would like to see around 80% and there are plans to carry out some promotion to aim to increase numbers.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Education Act 1996
Equality Act 2010
United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child
Inclusion and Pupil Support Guidance Welsh Government 2016
Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal Act (2018)

Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021
Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Education Strategy 2022-25