



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 13TH JANUARY 2015

SUBJECT: SCHOOLS CHALLENGE CYMRU

REPORT BY: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Welsh Government (WG) strategy to improve educational outcomes for pupils under the Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) programme.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 One of the Government's key priorities in education is to break the link between poverty and educational attainment. SCC sets out to do that in schools in Wales that face significant challenges, both in terms of their circumstances and stage of development in a way that stimulates wider improvement in the education system. Schools Challenge Cymru is about recognising that some schools face unique challenges and that these require more intensive, additional support, above and beyond that which is provided as a matter of course.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The SCC programme complements the Local Authority's Single Integrated Plan and Service Improvement Plan. It also links to the Education Achievement Service's (EAS) business plan.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 SCC is an acceleration and concentration of WG's school improvement efforts, focussed on secondary schools in Wales that face the largest challenge in terms of circumstance and stage of development. It will also involve their cluster primaries. WG wants to do far more to break the link between poverty and attainment. The current commitment is for 2 years. However, during this time, the programme will be evaluated and consideration given to whether the programme should be extended.
- 4.2 Within the overall strategy for school improvement set out in the National Model for Regional Working, Schools Challenge Cymru involves schools that have been in lower Bands over the past three years and where there are particularly high levels of pupils eligible for Free School Meals. Wherever possible, data over three years was used in order to get a clear picture of each school together with the local knowledge of Regional Education Consortia to determine whether they should be included in the programme. The Challenge aims to empower and equip these Pathways to Success Schools to be able to achieve continuous self-improvement by building on existing good practise, mobilising additional support and monitoring the impact of their efforts.

- 4.3 Five secondary schools in Caerphilly have been identified as Pathways to Success Schools under the SCC programme:-
- Bedwas High School
 - Blackwood Comprehensive
 - Heolddu Comprehensive
 - St Cenydd School
 - St Martin's School
- 4.4 Schools in the Challenge have four core entitlements:-
- a 'school on a page' template that provides a snapshot of where their school is on its improvement journey and what its strengths and areas for improvement are;
 - a committed, experienced Adviser to support and challenge the school on how it can improve, and to help broker support;
 - a Single School Development Plan, showing how the schools efforts for improvement are drawn together, including an entitlement to draw on additional resource, as needed; and
 - an Accelerated Improvement Board to support the school's leadership through its improvement journey.
- 4.5 Each school will be assigned a Schools Challenge Cymru Adviser (SCCA) who will take an active role in each school's improvement process, with an expected commitment of up to 25 days of support to each school per annum. The Advisers will be employed by the Regional Educational Consortia and funded by Schools Challenge Cymru and accountable to the Minister. They will report regularly to the Champions Group on their work with the schools. The Advisers are experienced individuals, each with a proven track record of achieving school improvement and transforming education for children and young people. They will provide support and challenge in preparing their plans for improvement. They will work with senior staff in analysing the school context, providing them with support in formulating appropriate and effective improvement strategies. In so doing, they will be in a position to locate and broker additional support from other schools and external agencies that will strengthen these improvement efforts – acting as a gatekeeper to ensure improvement efforts are fully aligned and effective.
- 4.6 The EAS advise on the deployment of the Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers within the Pathways to Success Schools. EAS will also have a direct link to the Welsh Government Schools Challenge Cymru Core Team who will provide policy advice and support and allocate programme funding. They will ensure that there is sufficient engagement between the Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers and the Challenge Advisers working as part of the National Model for School Improvement.
- 4.7 Schools Challenge Cymru Adviser will support the school in drafting a Single School Development Plan – a comprehensive map of the next stage of the school's improvement journey, with stretching targets for success. These were completed by the end of the Summer Term (July 2014). The Plans set out the targets the school has set itself for improvement, demonstrating how it intends to achieve these. It will define how additional resources provided through Schools Challenge Cymru will be used to support rapid improvement. The Schools Development Plan should identify any additional resources that may be required in terms of infrastructure investment. In identifying capital investment need it is imperative that it is specifically targeted and of appropriate scale to support rapid improvement in schools. The Single School Development Plan have been submitted to WG for approval and, following required amendments, have now all been approved.

- 4.8 Each participating school's efforts will be supported by an Accelerated Improvement Board, to be convened and chaired by the Headteacher. The membership of this Board will be the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, a representative of the Local Authority, a Headteacher of a cluster primary, and the SCC Adviser. The Accelerated Improvement Board will meet monthly. The main task is to ensure that the improvement strategies are being implemented effectively and that rapid progress is being made.
- 4.9 There are four main themes for the Challenge, drawing on the experiences of the London and Greater Manchester Challenges. These are leadership, learning and teaching, the pupil, and the school and the community – including parents or carers.
- 4.10 Given the Challenge's focus on breaking the link between deprivation and attainment, its overall success will be measured in how effectively attainment is raised by pupils eligible for Free School Meals – most obviously measured by the Level 2 attainment of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, alongside L2 attainment for all pupils. This is in addition to the Pathways to Success Schools' own success measures. Other key indicators that will be used to gauge Pathways to Success Schools' improvement will include:
- Attendance levels
 - Key Stage 2 – Levels achieved against core subjects in cluster primaries
 - Key Stage 3 – Levels achieved
 - Estyn Inspection ratings
 - Banding and School Categorisation
 - School and SCCA self-assessments, including leadership and school capacity to improve
 - Pupil feedback, including self-evaluation surveys

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Breaking the link between deprivation and attainment can be even more vital for children from minority background families, or who have disabilities, as their attendance levels can also be affected to a greater extent.
- 5.2 Tackling Poverty and Equalities issues are both cross-cutting themes of Caerphilly Delivers, the LSB Single Integrated Plan, and the Discriminatory Incidents in Schools Report 2014 also provides background information that links the two agendas as it is often the schools in the most deprived areas that report a higher number of discriminatory incidents.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications for the local authority
- 6.2 There is revenue grant funding of up to £20m across Wales for the scheme, with approximately £4.6m allocated to the South East Wales region.
- 6.3 Each school can access this funding via a grant bid to the allocated School Challenge Cymru Adviser.
- 6.4 In addition, an amount of £366,239 has been allocated to the 5 Caerphilly schools in respect of capital spend.
- 6.5 The Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and School Effectiveness Grant (SEG) do not form part of the SCC funding allocations.
- 6.6 The purpose of the funding is to enable the delivery of a support package to drive forward school improvement in the SCC Pathways to Success schools in the South East Wales Consortia area.

- 6.7 The capital funding will be paid direct to each LA for distribution to schools. The revenue funding will be paid to Torfaen, as the EAS bankers, for distribution to schools via the responsible LAs.
- 6.8 Only those schools named by the Minister (see 4.3 above) are eligible for funding. However, a number of schools in the region that are providing support in the form of the release of staff will be reimbursed for the staff time from this grant.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct personnel implications for the Authority. However, given the nature of the SCC programme, it is likely that support for managing capability and performance issues will arise at the schools in question. HR support will be made available to support the SCC Advisers, EAS and Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) School Improvement Officers in dealing with these cases.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The views of all consultees listed have been incorporated in this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Members note the information within this report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 SCC is a new initiative and Members need to be updated on this development.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Education Action 1996

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