

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21st JANUARY 2016

Present: Councillor J.E. Williams (Chair)

Councillors: D.J.R. Bartlett (Vice-Chair), C.A. Campbell, J.M. Charles, I.W. Davies, W.G. Hopkins, P. Hughes Griffiths, J.D. James, M.J.A. Lewis, D.W.H. Richards, T. Theophilus

Mrs. V. Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance:

Councillor G.O. Jones – Executive Board Member for Education & Children

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. R. Sully – Director of Education & Children
Mr. G. Morgans – Chief Education Officer / Head of Education Services
Mr. A. Rees – Head of Learner Programmes
Mr. A. Walters – Head of School Effectiveness
Mr. S. Davies – School Modernisation Manager
Mrs. H. Font – Fitness for Work Manager
Mrs. L. Lawrence – Principal HR Officer
Mr. M. Hughes – Assistant Consultant

Venue: County Hall Chamber, Carmarthen (10:00am – 12:30pm)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.E.M. Jones and J. Williams as well as Mr. S. Pearson (Parent Governor Member).

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Councillor D.J.R. Bartlett	Items 6 – 8	He is President of the Carmarthenshire branch of the National Union of Teachers.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions were received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee was provided with a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting scheduled for 11th February 2016.

RESOLVED that the items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on Thursday 11th February 2016, be noted.

6. SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT WITHIN SCHOOLS

Councillor D.J.R. Bartlett declared an interest in that he is President of the Carmarthenshire branch of the National Union of Teachers.

The Committee considered a report outlining support provided by the Local Authority to schools in relation to sickness absence management. The Committee noted that the use of supply cover in schools to cover sickness absence had been discussed during a previous school visit and that members had subsequently requested this report as part of its forward work programme.

The Committee was informed that following the introduction of the Authority's new Sickness Absence Policy in April 2014, a model policy was sent to all schools for adoption during 2015. Members were also informed of the different initiatives provided by the People Management & Performance Division (within the Chief Executive's Department) to support schools in better absence management, including the Occupational Health Centre and Human Resources advice. The report outlined the following issues:

- Bespoke training for Head teachers on absence management
- Guidance on referrals to Occupational Health
- The introduction of a mutual funding scheme for school absence
- The introduction on an All-Wales Supply Teacher Agency provider

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Concern was expressed at the use of supply teacher agencies and it was asked whether the Local Authority could facilitate a pool of teachers for use by the County's schools. It was suggested that this would ensure that the teachers were qualified and competent and that they were paid a fair salary. The Principal HR Officer informed the Committee that the National Procurement Service had sought to address these concerns by appointing an all-Wales provider for agency placements in schools. The provider was called New Directions and as part of its contract, it was required to ensure that all the relevant safeguarding checks had been completed as well as good references sought. The contract also required that the provider have a performance framework with regular supervision and training for those employed by it. However, she added that it was commonplace for head teachers to recommend qualified and competent supply staff to each

other.

In response to a further question regarding the possibility of establishing a local arrangement within the County, the Chief Education Officer noted that this could be considered but that he advised that the Authority and schools implement the mutual funding scheme for school absence in the first instance. He reminded the Committee that administering a supply pool would require a team of officers at a time when budgetary pressures continued to increase. He also reminded members that schools were under no obligation to use the new all-Wales provider agency and were free to make local arrangements as had previously been mentioned. However, New Directions' supply teachers were qualified and had been checked and schools could negotiate in order to ensure fair salaries and conditions for the supply teachers.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. PROPOSALS FOR 3-19 CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT- REFORM IN CARMARTHENSHIRE SCHOOLS

Councillor D.J.R. Bartlett declared an interest in that he is President of the Carmarthenshire branch of the National Union of Teachers.

The Committee considered a report relating to 'Paving the Way: A Strategic Review of 3 – 19 Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Carmarthenshire'. The proposals had been developed in order to implement the Donaldson (Successful Futures) recommendations, the Furlong Review and the New Deal in all the County's schools and special settings. The purpose of the review was to:

- Outline the main themes and challenges in the present-day curriculum and assessment planning, in response to imminent and far reaching reforms at a national scale.
- Propose original responses to complicated problems posed by impending curriculum and assessment reform.
- Offer firm strategies for implementing meaningful curriculum reform and transformation, in order to benefit the education of all learners in Carmarthenshire.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

It was asked whether the imminent retirement of the Welsh Government's Education Minister would impact on these proposals and whether a new administration and education minister following the Assembly elections in May, would be likely to make further changes. The Head of Learner Programmes acknowledged that this was a pertinent question but it appeared that there was political consensus in support of the proposals. There was now significant momentum behind the proposed changes which led him to believe that regardless of the result of Assembly election, many of these changes would be implemented.

In response to a question about a curriculum tailored to Carmarthenshire, the Head of Learner Programmes acknowledged that as yet, there had been no specific guidance from the Welsh Government but it appeared that the minister

wished to give local authorities flexibility as to what was taught in their schools. He suggested that whilst the core topics within the curriculum would be set across the whole of Wales, teachers in the County would be able to use local history and cultural traditions to give their lessons a local flavour.

It was noted that the 'pioneer schools' listed in the report were all larger primary schools and it was suggested that the curriculum requirements of such schools would be very different to those of a small rural school with two or three teachers. The Head of Learner Programmes acknowledged that those listed were the larger schools simply because they had the capacity to release staff to work on the new developments. However, officers were working to ensure that staff from smaller schools would be able to input into the various curriculum development groups.

It was asked whether Coleg Sir Gâr would have a different curriculum as it was not under the jurisdiction of the Local Authority. The Head of Learner Programmes informed the Committee that the review of the 11-19 curriculum in Carmarthenshire being undertaken by the Learning Transformation Manager, had been carried out in parallel with the development of the Paving the Way document and followed discussions between the Local Authority and the College regarding the development of a strategic vision for education in the County. The review would identify how the existing partnership structures would need to develop and adapt in order to deliver a curriculum that met the needs of all 11-19 learners in the County.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS 2014/15

Councillor D.J.R. Bartlett declared an interest in that he is President of the Carmarthenshire branch of the National Union of Teachers.

The Committee considered the report on school performance and achievement which summarised the key issues arising from an analysis of data in relation to the performance of schools during the academic year 2014/15. The report included the following sections:

- Standards: The County's achievements for 2014/15
- Inspection Outcomes
- Developing Values and Skills

The Committee was informed how performance and standards in the County's schools compared with best performing schools across the ERW region.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

It was asked how the department intended to implement the areas for improvement outlined in the report. The Chief Education Officer informed the Committee that the three key areas of improvement (Performance of eFSM learners, performance of more able and talented learners, performance at the Foundation Phase) would be included in the departmental business plan for 2016/17 as well as being included in the ERW business plan as the County's key

priorities for 2016/17. The Head of School Effectiveness added that every school was categorised in relation to the type of support it required and that Carmarthenshire was the first authority in the ERW region to visit schools on a regular basis to drive improvements. Progress was evident, especially in the secondary sector which had received significant input from officers.

The number of Challenge Advisors working in the County was queried. The Head of School Effectiveness Officer confirmed that there were 12 advisors although aspects of the work were also supported by head teachers or other officers from the department, brought in when necessary.

Reference was made to the importance of leadership in schools but concern expressed that this had been deemed unsatisfactory in 10% of the schools inspected during 2014/15. The Head of School Effectiveness informed the Committee that this related to two schools, both of which had recently come out of ESTYN monitoring following their respective inspections. Officers from the Authority had worked successfully with the schools during this period and it was encouraging to note that Carmarthenshire had no schools in the lowest Welsh performance sector.

It was acknowledged that whilst the report itself was encouraging and that 75% of leadership was deemed to be either excellent or good by ESTYN, it was asked whether this should in turn impact on the teaching and standards, both only deemed to be adequate in 40% of schools. It was suggested that there should be a correlation between excellent leadership and the standards and teaching evident in schools. The Head of School Effectiveness agreed that in theory, strong and effective leadership should lead to improved standards and teaching within schools. However, whilst ESTYN did talk with pupils and survey workbooks in the primary sector, inspectors' decisions on the school standards or teaching were made based on teacher assessments. He added that Carmarthenshire' schools tended to produce quite conservative teacher assessments, often overly self-critical which in turn impacted on how schools were perceived by the inspectors.

Reference was made to the key questions posed by ESTYN during its inspections of schools and it was asked whether the County's schools struggled with any of these in particular. The Head of School Effectiveness noted that attendance had been a key issue for ESTYN in recent times and should a school's attendance figures be a cause for concern, this appeared to have a knock-on effect with inspectors looking for other faults. For example, if attendance was not at a desired level, the care and support provided or the leadership of the head teacher might be questioned, thus leading to lower grading in the final inspection report. The Director of Education & Children reminded the Committee that the Inspection Outcomes Profile for 2014-15 only referred to the 20 schools inspected and cautioned members from drawing too many conclusions from such a small number of cases. He added that in the past, the Authority had been criticised for having too many schools in various ESTYN monitoring categories but this had improved significantly in recent years. The department was now very adept at getting schools out of ESTYN monitoring, should that be required.

In response to a question on the County's performance in relation to other ERW partners, the Chief Education Officer noted that for most categories, Carmarthenshire was 3rd or 4th behind Powys and Ceredigion. The Director of Education & Children noted that it was important to consider the numbers of pupils

in the County's schools, compared with some of its neighbours and that Ceredigion and Powys both had fewer numbers of learners who were eligible for free school meals.

Reference was made to the on-going gap between those pupils who were eligible for free school meals and those who were not. The Director of Education & Children acknowledged that this was one of the County's main challenges and was a key improvement for 2016/17.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. BRO MYRDDIN - PROPOSAL (STAGE 2) LANGUAGE CATEGORY CHANGE

The Committee received a report relating to the proposal to change the language category of Ysgol Bro Myrddin from Bilingual (2A) to Welsh-medium. The report outlined the observations received following the consultation period and the proposal to publish a statutory notice to implement the changes in April 2016. The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

The proposed language category change was welcomed and it was suggested that the provision of a Welsh-medium secondary school in the County was long overdue. It was therefore proposed that the Committee endorse the proposal and urge the Executive Board and County Council to proceed with the publication of the statutory notice. The Committee agreed to the proposal.

Clarification was sought as to what options were available to parents opposed to the proposal. The School Modernisation Manager informed the Committee that Q.E. High School would be the option available to parents in the Carmarthen area who wished for their children to have subjects taught through the medium of English.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

9.1 The report be received.

9.2 The proposal to change the language category of Ysgol Bro Myrddin from Bilingual (2A) to Welsh-medium (WM) be endorsed and that the Executive Board and County Council be urged to proceed with the publication of the statutory notice.

10. MEP PROPOSAL (STAGE 3) FOR COPPERWORKS INFANTS AND LAKEFIELD CP SCHOOLS

The Committee considered the proposal to discontinue Copperworks Infant & Nursery School and Lakefield Primary School in Llanelli and to implement the proposal as detailed in the Statutory Notice dated 3rd November 2015. The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Reference was made to the Committee's visit to Copperworks and Lakefield schools and the concerns voiced by local members regarding traffic issues in and around the proposed site of the new primary school. The School Modernisation

Manager informed the Committee that there were plans in place to address these concerns and that these would be dealt with as part of the planning process.

It was asked whether the travellers who had recently occupied the site of the new school would hinder progress of the development. The Director of Education & Children reassured the Committee that officers from the Housing & Public Protection Division as well as the Police were in dialogue with the travellers and it was envisaged that they would be moved on very soon.

Clarification was sought as to the head teacher for the new school. The Director of Education & Children stated that subject to the approval of the final stage of this process, the first step would be to establish a governing body for the new school and its first role will be to oversee the appointment of a new head teacher and their deputy. He added that the department was eager to commence this process as soon as possible.

The prospect of the establishment of a dual-stream school in this area was welcomed but concern was expressed that the secondary sector in Llanelli was not yet ready to accommodate the numbers of Welsh-speaking pupils who would be ready to move into secondary education in the future. The Director of Education & Children acknowledged that the instigation of a dual language stream was an innovative aspect of the proposal and no objections to this had been received. The Chief Education Officer reassured the Committee that work to prepare secondary schools for this eventuality was already underway. Positive discussions had already been held with Bryngwyn and St. John Lloyd schools whilst Coedcae School had specifically requested assistance from the Authority.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

9.1 The report be received.

9.2 The Executive Board and County Council endorse the proposal to discontinue Copperworks Infant & Nursery School and Lakefield Primary School (and establish a new primary school) and to implement the proposal as detailed in the Statutory Notice of 3rd November 2015.

11. EDUCATION & CHILDREN TASK AND FINISH GROUP 2015/16 PLANNING AND SCOPING DOCUMENT

The Chair presented the planning and scoping document for the scrutiny task and finish review which had been established to investigate the attainment gap between learners eligible for free school meals and those who were not. The Committee was informed that the Group had already met on two occasions since December 2015. The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

It was suggested that the Welsh Government's definition of poverty was too simplistic and it was asked whether the Group would consider the impact of rural poverty on the performance of pupils in rural schools. The Chief Education Officer welcomed the comments and noted that very often, rural schools were offering far more opportunities for pupils outside the normal school day, than those in urban

areas, simply because there were fewer opportunities and facilities in those rural communities. The Chair agreed that the Group would consider the request at a future meeting.

RESOLVED to endorse the Task & Finish Group's planning and scoping document.

12. SCRUTINY VISITS ACTIVITY REPORT 2014/15

The Committee considered an activity report on its site visits undertaken during the 2014/15 academic year. A total of 20 schools had been visited between October 2014 and May 2015. The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Clarification was sought as to the future plans for the former Pantycelyn and Gwendraeth Comprehensive Schools. The Director of Education & Children informed the Committee that there was no firm answer for either site at present. The Authority was considering a proposal from Llandovery Town Council that it should move Ysgol Rhys Prichard onto the Pantycelyn site whilst the Head of Corporate Property was leading an officer group which was also considering the options for both sites.

It was suggested that the visits were one of the most important activities undertaken by the Council's scrutiny committees and the Chair reiterated the importance of the visit programme, highlighting some of the key outcomes emerging from the visits held during the past year.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

13. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 17th DECEMBER 2015

Reference was made to the budget consultation and it was asked whether the position regarding protection for schools was now any clearer. The Director of Education & Children informed the Committee that discussions were still on-going between the WLGA and the Welsh Government as some local authorities did not want to pass on the Education Improvement Grant to their schools due to the potential impact on their own budgets. Unfortunately, whilst officers were keen for this to be resolved, he was unable to offer a definitive answer at present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 17th December 2015, be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE