

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 26th JANUARY 2017

Education & Children Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group Final Report 2015/16:

Narrowing the Attainment Gap: Learners eligible for free school meals

To consider and comment on the following issues:

- To endorse the report and recommendations for further consideration by the Executive Board.

Reasons:

- At its meeting on 24th September 2015, the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group to undertake a review into the attainment gap for eligible for free school meals learners.
- The recommendations contained within the report have been formulated by the Group following the consideration of a range of evidence over a series of meetings held between December 2015 and November 2016.

To be referred to the Executive Board for decision: YES

Executive Board Member Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Gareth Jones (Education & Children)

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| Chair of the Task & Finish Group: Cllr. Eirwyn Williams | Designations: Chair of the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee | Tel Nos. / E-Mail Addresses: 01267 224028 jewilliams@carmarthenshire.gov.uk |
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 26th JANUARY 2017

Education & Children Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group Final Report 2015/16:

Narrowing the Attainment Gap: Learners eligible for free school meals

Review Background

The Education & Children Scrutiny Committee has a key role to play in monitoring services, development of key policies and strategies, as well as identifying areas for improvement or development.

At its meeting on 24th September 2015, the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee considered provisional Examination and Teacher Assessment Results. During consideration of this item, the Committee noted that one of the priorities for the Authority during the 2015/16 academic year was to improve the performance of those learners eligible for free school meals (e-FSM learners) and that this was a national as well as a local priority. The Committee then agreed to establish a task and finish group to research and review the attainment gap for e-FSM learners.

Objectives and Scope

Following its first meeting, the Group agreed that the scope for the review would be:

- Learners eligible for free school meals, including Looked After Children, and the attainment gap in Carmarthenshire.

The Group agreed that the main aims of the review would be:

- To research the attainment gap for learners eligible for free school meals in Carmarthenshire.
- To identify trends at all key stages and key indicators.
- To review how the Pupil Deprivation Grant is being used in our schools.
- To identify best practice interventions in the County's schools, across ERW, the rest of Wales and the UK.

- To raise the profile of the challenge of overcoming the attainment gap in the midst of shrinking budgets, other priorities and curriculum changes.
- To formulate recommendations for consideration by the Executive Board.

Approach

The Task and Finish Group's membership was as follows:

County Councillors

- Cllr. Ryan Bartlett
- Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths
- Cllr. John James
- Cllr. Hugh Richards
- Cllr. Tom Theophilus (until 5th July 2016)
- Cllr. Eirwyn Williams (Chair)

Co-opted Members

- Mr. Simon Pearson – Parent Governor Representative (until 31st March 2016)
- Mrs. Vera Kenny – Roman Catholic Church Representative

The Democratic Services Unit based in the Chief Executive's Department, provided research and general support to the Group.

The following officers provided specialist advice and support during the Group's review:

- Gareth Morgans – Chief Education Officer / Head of Education Services
- Aeron Rees – Head of Learner Programmes
- David Astins – Strategic Development Manager
- Glenn Evans – Senior Education Consultant
- Mary Parry – Consortium Associate School Improvement Officer

A total of 7 meetings were held between December 2015 and November 2016 during which the Group considered evidence and information from a wide variety of sources. The sessions were designed to provide the Group with the relevant information, context and background to the topic.

In addition to officers from the Education & Children's Department, the Group received evidence from the following individuals during its review:

- Mr. Joe Cudd – Head Teacher of Maes-y-Morfa CP School, Llanelli
- Mrs. Rhian Evans – Head Teacher of Carwe, Gwynfryn and Ponthenri School Federation
- Ms. Lisa Davies – Teacher at Carwe School
- Professor David Egan – Director of Wales Centre for Equity in Education
- Mrs. Betsan O'Connor – Managing Director of ERW
- Mrs. Tracy Senchal – Head Teacher of Coedcae Secondary School, Llanelli

Key Conclusions

- The impact of poverty on attainment is a well-known and well researched phenomenon, indeed, there is a wide range of research and good practice available from across the UK to inform and assist the County's schools in targeting the problem. Carmarthenshire needs to build and enhance on this research and good practice.
- There is evidence of much good practice within Carmarthenshire itself, as testified by the narrowing gap over a number of years. However, the good practice in Carmarthenshire and across the ERW region needs to be promoted and implemented by all schools.
- Minimising the impact of poverty on education attainment and reducing the attainment gap requires long term strategies and commitment from all agencies and organisations involved. There is no quick fix solution.
- Free School Meals Service has developed effective electronic and online systems. However, ensuring that those eligible for free school meals take up that opportunity, remains a challenge
- It is essential that rural poverty is not forgotten, especially, as the Public Policy Institute for Wales states: "there is evidence that rural poverty can be masked by the relative affluence of rural areas and by a culture of self-reliance in rural communities".
- It is clear that good leadership in schools as well as giving e-FSM learners a high priority in a school's development plan, is essential to ensure success in dealing with this matter as well as regular tracking and monitoring of pupils.
- Successful schools find creative ways of using the Pupil Deprivation Grant effectively.
- Engagement with parents is important and successful schools share information with and support them.
- The greatest impact of some of these initiatives undertaken by schools is not necessarily an improvement in standards but often is seen in the well-being of the pupils.
- School governors have a key role in monitoring and challenging the way in which their schools spend the PDG and seek to minimise the impact of poverty on education attainment.
- The loss of the PDG would have a significant impact on schools' ability to cater for and support e-FSM pupils.

Recommendations

The Group recommends that:

- Carmarthenshire County Council continues to consider the attainment gap as a matter of priority whilst acknowledging that it requires perseverance from all interested parties over a long period of time to ensure success.
- The County Council develops and publishes a good practice guide for Carmarthenshire schools, outlining effective methods and solutions to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and reduce the attainment gap.
- In developing a good practice guide, the County Council utilises existing and online systems to share with schools and practitioners (e.g. HWB).
- The County Council support an event to launch the good practice guide / promote the deprivation agenda be arranged in Carmarthenshire, in association with the University of Wales Trinity St. David and the European Forum for Freedom in Education (EFFE).
- That the County Council considers and responds to the findings and implications of ERW's rural poverty research, when it is published in 2017.
- That the County Council lobbies the Welsh Government on the importance of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and encourages the relevant minister to safeguard the grant for the long term.
- In light of on-going financial pressures, the County Council should urge and support schools to make interventions such as those funded by the PDG, as sustainable as possible for the longer term as well as integrating such initiatives into everyday teaching practice.
- County Council departments be requested to ensure the promotion of the Free School Meals Service to eligible families through front line services (e.g. Housing Benefits Service), encouraging those in receipt of or applying for other benefits, to apply for free school meals.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Signed: **Linda Rees-Jones** **Head of Administration & Law**

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|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities | Legal | Finance | ICT | Risk Management Issues | Staffing Implications | Physical Assets |
| YES | NONE | NONE | NONE | NONE | NONE | NONE |

1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities – Addressing the attainment gap between e-FSM and n-FSM learners contributes to the following strategic objectives and outcomes in Carmarthenshire County Council’s Corporate Strategy 2015-2020:

- Making the best use of resources
- People in Carmarthenshire fulfil their learning potential
- Carmarthenshire has a stronger and more prosperous economy

It also contributes to implementing ERW’s Business Plan and strategy for ‘Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Educational Outcomes 2015-18’, as well as the Welsh Government’s curriculum reform.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below:

Signed: **Linda Rees-Jones** **Head of Administration & Law**

- 1. Local Member(s)** – N/A
- 2. Community / Town Council** – N/A
- 3. Relevant Partners** – Head teachers, the Managing Director of ERW and the Director of Wales Centre for Equity in Education all addressed the Task & Finish Group during its review.
- 4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations** – Officers from the Education & Children and Chief Executive’s departments contributed to and supported the work of the Task & Finish Group.

**Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW:

| Title of Document | File Ref No. / Locations that the papers are available for public inspection |
|---|---|
| <p>Task & Finish Group Planning and Scoping Document – E&C Scrutiny Committee (21st January 2016)</p> | <p>Cymraeg http://democratiaeth.sirgar.llyw.cymru/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=153&MId=255&Ver=4&LLL=1</p> <p>English http://democracy.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=153&MId=255&Ver=4&LLL=1</p> |
| <p>Provisional Examination and Teacher Assessment Results and Provisional School Attendance Data – E&C Scrutiny Committee (24th September 2015)</p> | <p>Cymraeg http://democratiaeth.sirgar.llyw.cymru/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=153&MId=172&Ver=4&LLL=1</p> <p>English http://democracy.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=153&MId=172&Ver=4&LLL=1</p> |