

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER, 2020

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price [Chair]

Councillors:

L.R. Bowen, K.V. Broom, D.M. Cundy (In place of B. Thomas), T.A.J. Davies, J.P. Jenkins, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, E.M.J.G. Schiavone, E.G. Thomas and D.T. Williams

Co-opted Members:

A. Enoch - Parent Governor
V. Kenny - Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance:

Councillor G. Davies, Executive Board Member for Education & Children

The following Officers were in attendance:

G. Morgans - Director of Education & Children's Services
S. Davies - Head of Access to Education
A. Rees - Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing
S. Smith - Head of Children's Services
A Thomas - Head of Education Services and Inclusion
S. Griffiths - Modernising Education Programme Manager
N. Thomas - Service Manager
M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer
E. Bryer - Democratic Services Officer
R. Lloyd - Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner - Technical Officer

Virtual Meeting : 10.00 am - 12.55 pm and 2.00 pm - 3.00 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Bill Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM

There were no declarations of party whips.

The following declaration of personal interest was made:-

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
M.J.A. Lewis	5 – The Education & Children's Services Strategy	President of Carmarthenshire Young Farmers Clubs

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CARMARTHENSHIRE'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Committee considered a report detailing a Community Impact Assessment of the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact on our children and young people and the Department/Council's response to the challenges faced over the last six months.

Whilst the report did not cover all aspects of the Department's work since March, it provided an insight into some of the challenges and the solutions developed to address those challenges.

The Committee noted that the department's services and schools continue to be under pressure as a result of Covid-19.

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:-

- There is much mention of long covid and officers were asked how much this is taken into account in relation to the future of children currently in primary and secondary schools and the knock on effect of the pandemic on literacy and numeracy. The Director informed the Committee that this is an issue which has been considered since early September. Officers are working hard with headteachers to keep schools open, however, the wellbeing of children remains a priority. Funding has been received from the Welsh Government to support children and young people leading to the employment of an additional 28 teachers and 49 teaching assistants across our schools. Meetings are held weekly with headteachers to look at this issue and to prepare strategies. Assistance will be in place for quite some time to see schools through this and to support them through this challenging period. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised that the department had recently published a Wellbeing Strategy which detailed the various measures available to support children and staff. With regard to literacy and numeracy, these form part of the teaching plans. He added that officers are looking carefully at this and are discussing various methods of which could help e.g. accelerated learning;
- Concern was expressed regarding the fact that many nurseries are going through a very difficult time at the moment and some may be forced to close and the subsequent impact this will have on people going back to work. The Director informed the Committee that officers have been supporting pre-school providers since the onset of the pandemic so that key workers were able to go to work. Grants have been given to some of them to ensure that they continue to survive. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of businesses managed to obtain the WG issued Childcare Providers Grant because the criteria were difficult to meet. WG are therefore looking to open that up. Grants are also available from the County Council and have been issued to 88 businesses to date;
- With regard to the initiative whereby computer equipment is provided to

school children during lockdown, officers were asked how this scheme is implemented. The Executive Board Member explained that it became apparent that there were many pupils who were disadvantaged because they did not have access to IT equipment at home and so the initiative began. IT kit was collected from the various schools and provided to children in need of it. The Director explained that it was a huge undertaking as the need was underestimated. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing added that IT kit was rolled out in three tranches, two during the summer term and as the demand was higher than anticipated, a third tranche was added at the beginning of the Autumn term. Some requests are still being received and the system of IT kit provision has moved from being centralised to a local system;

- With regard to the results of the parental survey, concern was expressed that only 6% stated that the biggest impact of covid was thinking about university or college and concern was expressed that it was evident that not enough responses were received from secondary school parents and officers were asked if an emphasis could be put on these respondents the next time a survey is undertaken. The Director informed the Committee that respondents were asked if they would be willing to contribute again and most said that they would. Additionally, some schools do their own surveys and collect the information locally. If a further survey is undertaken then officers could cater for secondary schools specifically. The Director welcomed the decision taken not to hold examinations this year, bearing in mind the effect of the last few months. The challenge now will be ensuring that there is solid evidence in relation to grades allocated;
- Reference was made to the increase of 19.2% in the number of new social care contacts and the increase of 26.6% for safeguarding compared to the same period last year. The Director informed the Committee that Children's Services was one of the only sections that did not close down over the past few months. There was a reduction in referrals across Wales but we did not see that dip in Carmarthenshire;
- It was noted that the most concerning cases continued to receive support throughout lockdown and officers were asked if any contact was made with the other families either by phone or meeting remotely. The Head of Children's Services explained that in view of the inevitable impact on services, families were graded red, amber or green and despite lockdown visits continued to be undertaken to those families in the highest category. Risk assessments were undertaken and social distancing rules observed. For those families in the lower categories, video calls and telephone calls were used to keep in touch and provide necessary support. The Director added that vulnerable learners were also rated red, amber or green to ensure that they had access to assistance like childcare and free school meals;
- Reference was made to children's wellbeing and the fact that there is more pressure on some children because they have problems at home and officers were asked if the counselling service is being provided because the school have been closed. The Director explained that counselling has been available virtually throughout the period and funding has been received to expanding the counselling service. The situation is being monitored closely via educational psychologists. Wellbeing is high on the department's list of priorities, not only for staff but also for learners;
- Concern was expressed that there appeared to be inconsistency throughout

the county with regard to distance learning and officers were asked if best practice is being shared so that all schools are aware of the expectations. The Executive Board Member stressed that it is up to individual headteachers to lead on this and there is an expectation that this is happening. School leaders have to give clear and firm instructions to their staff with regard to what is expected. The Director explained that examples of best practice demonstrated during the most recent lock down has been collected and shared with all schools. He added that unfortunately some children have not engaged with distance learning and that is a challenge. ERW has also created a bank of resources to support distance learning;

- With regard to distance learning, the importance was stressed of teachers logging into any modules they have prepared to view them from the pupils' perspective to see what it looks like as quite often modules are inaccessible. Officers were asked how distance learning is going to be monitored. The Director explained that Headteachers have been advised that one of their key challenges is that they need to monitor their distance learning on a regular basis. In some schools reports are provided on a weekly basis outlining the learning that has taken place that week. The department has also advised governors that they should be checking what is happening at their school with regards to distance/blended learning. He added that this would need to be monitored on an on-going basis to ensure consistency;
- Concern was expressed that some children are returning to school following a period of isolation imposed by the school only to be told that they should not have returned but the family had not been contacted by TTP. The Director explained that as the virus attacks without warning, it makes things very difficult. Our priority is to keep pupils and staff safe and we have to react immediately. He agreed that communication in such instances should be done on numerous platforms and schools should be aware if a pupil has issues with receiving communications such as no wifi or poor mobile signal;
- Asked about the present position in relation to absenteeism, the Director informed the Committee that it was a cause for concern in September/beginning of October, however, attendance has since improved and was currently over 90%. Officers were also undertaking a process of reconnecting with families who are still a bit anxious about sending their children back to school. Some parents have decided not to send their children back to school and although the Authority is not using its statutory powers in such instances, schools and Local Authority officers were actively endeavouring to reconnect and work with these families;
- Concern was expressed with regard to the 563 families who are entitled to claim free school meals have not done so. The Director advised the Committee that schools are working with officers in order to assist these families to access what they are entitled to.

The Chair took the opportunity, on behalf of the Committee, to thank all the headteachers, teachers and school staff throughout the county, for everything they have done over the past few months in the battle to keep our schools open and our children safe in the battle against the pandemic.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. THE EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES STRATEGY 2020-2025

[NOTE: Councillor M.J.A. Lewis had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered the Education Services Strategy. Local Authorities have defined responsibilities to deliver high quality services to meet the needs of all children and young people. The strategy sets out a clear, shared vision for the role that Education Services plays in the future development of vibrant communities and a prosperous economy in Carmarthenshire.

The Committee was informed that, following feedback from the Executive Board, the strategy now covered a 10 year period from 2020-2030.

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the statement in the strategy that there would be no more than two year groups per teaching class and concern was expressed over the consequences for small rural schools. The Executive Board Member explained that the strategy is the department's vision for the next ten years and one of the elements contained therein would be to not have mixed groups and the wellbeing of the child was the basis for this. The Director added that there are a number of challenges facing smaller schools which can be overcome through federation and sharing of resources. There are 95 primary schools in Carmarthenshire, which is the highest number in any county in Wales;
- Whilst completely agreeing with the statement in the report that Carmarthenshire has many inspirational education leaders, officers were asked what happens to those talented leaders when they can no longer do the job because they are unable to cope with the strain. The Executive Board Member agreed that it was challenging and this may be why it was so difficult to appoint headteachers for small schools. The department keeps in touch with all headteachers and offers support where needed. He pointed out that, unfortunately covid has added to the strain. The Director agreed that it was challenging, however, headteachers are in a transitional period. Whilst there was no easy answer, the department offered as much support as possible and where a school is under-performing because the headteacher may be struggling additional support is offered to ensure that there is no effect on the pupils;
- The importance was stressed of recognising the pressure that senior leadership teams in school are under with the combined pressures of covid and the new curriculum, which is very challenging. The Director explained that measures are being put in place to reduce the workload. He added that Estyn will not be inspecting school for some time, which will remove some pressure. He added that there was only so much that officers are able to do and it may be that something at the school needs to change;
- Reference was made to the fact that all schools are in clusters and they are working on the curriculum. It was suggested that when secondary school clusters meet they should invite their feeder primary schools to advise them to ensure continuity of learning and avoid a fall in the standard achieved when pupils begin year 7. The Director agreed that there is a lot that the secondary sector could learn from the primary sector e.g. thematic learning and he would ensure that this suggestion was fed back to the clusters;

- With regard to improving standards, officers were asked how the Authority will assess and communicate improvements to the public. The Director advised that it was a question of how Estyn can test what improvements have been made. Tracking progress and benchmarking were key elements to enable schools to evidence any progress made. The school would need to share that information with the public via the governors' annual report;
- Reference was made to recruiting inspirational leaders and officers were asked if they were confident that they will still be able to recruit such leaders if they can't speak Welsh. The Director explained that the Authority was introducing a far more robust process with regard to recruitment. The Assessment Centre approach used for the appointment of Heads of Service will be used for the appointment of headteachers because any headteacher needs to be just as skilled as a Head of Service. He added that he liked candidates to have a degree of Welsh but more so to have an appreciation for the language and a commitment to learn the language;
- With regard to the purposes detailed on page 70 it was felt that we should be including our history, from a balanced point of view. The Director agreed that it was important to concentrate on what is on our own doorstep i.e. Welsh heritage. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing added that the local curriculum provided an opportunity for developing a programme of learning which was relevant and which nurtured not only citizens of Wales but also global citizens.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. MEP - PROPOSAL TO SHORTEN THE INTERNAL SCHOOL ORGANISATION DECISION MAKING AND DETERMINATION PROCESS

The Committee was informed that, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, all members of the MEP team were redeployed for a period of around 4 months to work in other critical areas in the department and as such were only able to complete very limited amounts of project work. Prior to the pandemic, the team had planned to undertake several statutory consultations (in relation to school reorganisation or federation matters) with imminent commencement, all of which had to be postponed with rescheduled dates to be confirmed. This did not include any statutory school reorganisations that would have been brought forward as a result of the conclusion of the MEP review.

The redeployment of the MEP team resulted in a delay to school re-organisation proposals of around 6 months due to the need to establish new timelines for each proposal and update all documentation with the most recent data sets. With regards to Carmarthenshire County Council's investment programme, all projects with contractors on site at the time of initial lockdown were shut down and closed, with re-commencement dates continually being approved to allow works to continue. As a result, it was anticipated that the pandemic will have a significant impact on the MEP programme in terms of funding and timelines.

The MEP team were now in the process of undertaking all the work planned prior to the pandemic and were working on developing the MEP Review and new timescales for the postponed statutory consultations. It was hoped that all relevant project related matters could still be undertaken within a timescale as close to the original as possible, however, it was expected that there would be some delay to

determination and implementation.

In order to be able to progress with any school re-organisation proposals (that could be linked to investment projects), consideration had been given to reducing the Internal School Organisation Decision Making and Determination Process once more. Whilst it was accepted that reducing the process will not wholly alleviate the delays incurred due to the pandemic, it will go some way to help the MEP team to re-prioritise required consultations in an effective and timely manner.

It was noted that currently consultation was required with the Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Board at Stages 1 and 2 with the addition of full Council at Stage 3 in order to determine the proposal. It was proposed to remove consultation with the Scrutiny Committee from Stages 2 and 3. This is due to the Executive Board being able to approve Stage 2 and County Council being able to approve Stage 3. This would reduce the process by approximately 2 months. Consultation would therefore progress as follows:-

Stage 1 – Education & Children Scrutiny Committee and Executive Board

Stage 2 – Executive Board

Stage 3 – Executive Board and County Council

The proposal still ensured that the Scrutiny Committee was able to formally consider the proposal before any public consultation is agreed and also allowed members of the Scrutiny Committee to determine the outcome of the proposal as members of full Council. They will also be consulted with during the formal 6 week consultation period (if permission to consult is granted by the Executive Board).

The following question was asked in relation to the report:-

- Asked why it was felt that the first stage was the best stage at which to consult with the Scrutiny Committee, the Head of Access to Education explained that it is at the very beginning of the process that the Committee is able to influence the process and it would not be possible to shape the proposal after it has been out for consultation.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 6.1 That the proposal to shorten the internal school organisation decision making and determination process be endorsed;**
- 6.2 To recommend that the Executive Board progress with the amended process for progressing statutory proposals and consultation as detailed in the report i.e. the removal of consultation with the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee at Stages 2 and 3.**

7. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Committee considered its Annual Report for 2019/20 which detailed the work of the Committee during the 2019/20 municipal year. The report had been prepared in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution which requires Scrutiny Committees to prepare an annual report giving an account of the Committee's activities over the previous year.

The report provided an overview of the Committee's work programme and the key issues considered during the year. The report also provided details of development sessions and site visits arranged for the Committee as well as attendance data.

RESOLVED that the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2019/20 be endorsed.

8. EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year, which had been prepared in accordance with the Council's Constitution which required Scrutiny Committees to develop and publish annual forward work programmes identifying issues and reports to be considered at meetings during the course of the municipal year.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme for the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee for 2017/18 be confirmed.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 11TH MARCH, 2020

It was pointed out that in the list of those also in attendance at the meeting, the name of Dr. Caryl James, Ysgol Penboyr should be amended to read Dr. Carol James, Ysgol Penboyr & Hafodwenog.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 11th March, 2020 be signed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of the above-mentioned amendment.

10. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

The Chair advised at this point in the proceedings that the meeting would stand adjourned until 2.00 p.m.

RECONVENED MEETING

The meeting reconvened at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price [Chair]

Councillors:

L.R. Bowen, K.V. Broom, D.M. Cundy (In place of B. Thomas), T.A.J. Davies, J.P. Jenkins, B.W. Jones, D. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, E.M.J.G. Schiavone, E.G. Thomas and D.T. Williams

Co-opted Members:

A. Enoch	-	Parent Governor
V. Kenny	-	Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance:

The following Officers were in attendance:

G. Morgans - Director of Education & Children's Services
S. Davies - Head of Access to Education
A. Rees - Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing
S. Smith - Head of Children's Services
A Thomas - Head of Education Services and Inclusion
S. Griffiths - Modernising Education Programme Manager
M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer
E. Bryer - Democratic Services Officer
R. Lloyd - Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner - Technical Officer

11. MEP - PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE YSGOL HEOL GOFFA TO A NEW SITE AND INCREASE ITS CAPACITY FROM 75 TO 120

The Committee considered a report outlining a proposal to relocate Ysgol Heol Goffa to a new site and increase its capacity from 75 to 120.

Ysgol Heol Goffa is a special school located in Llanelli and is maintained by the County Council. The school caters for 75 pupils between the ages of 3-19 years old who have severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Individual Development Plan. Ysgol Heol Goffa was currently over-subscribed and this trend was likely to continue for the foreseeable future as there was an increased demand for places which was putting significant pressure on the Local Authority to place pupils. The current capacity of Ysgol Heol Goffa was 75 with 101 pupils on roll as at January 2020. As a result, the Authority was currently developing a scheme to increase the capacity of Ysgol Heol Goffa to 120 places by providing a new school with facilities fit for the 21st Century on a new site. The proposed new site was located next to the recently completed Ysgol Pen Rhos.

A formal consultation exercise was undertaken from 21st September 2020 to the 1st November 2020, the results of which were detailed in the report.

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:-

- Concern was expressed that perhaps the proposed expansion wasn't big enough to future proof the school, bearing in mind the obvious need for the provision in the area. The Head of Access to Education explained that with every MEP scheme officers try to project forward. The Authority is receiving 75% grant funding towards the cost of the scheme, however, it was not possible to use this to provide extra places. It would be very difficult to justify an increase in provision to the WG. Officers are confident that the figure of 120 is pitched just right;
- It was pointed out that the attendance figure at the school is already 101 and officers were asked if it would be possible to extend the school in the future if needed. The Head of Access to Education explained that over the past few years when a new school has been built, the possibility of future expansion has been built in;

- Reference was made to the lack of detail contained in the Quality Impact Assessment (QIA). The Head of Access to Education explained that a corporate template is used for the QIA. He would take the comments on board and if more rationale needs to be include rather than “no comment” then that will be done;
- Reference was made to the fact that in Ammanford and Carmarthen this provision is located in secondary schools to facilitate an easier integration into mainstream education easier, however, the provision in Llanelli was a separate school and the importance was stressed of the children being able to mix with their peers and provided with every opportunity to enter maintstream education.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

11.1 that the report be endorsed;

11.2 to recommend to the Executive Board the publication of a Statutory Notice.

12. MEP - PROPOSAL TO REVIEW PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE BLAENAU AND LLANDYBIE AREAS

The Committee considered a report detailing a proposal to review primary education provision in the Blaenau and Llandybie areas.

The Authority has a legal responsibility to review the number and type of schools it has in an area and whether it is making the best use of resources and facilities to deliver the opportunities that children deserve.

Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau is a Welsh medium, community primary school located in the village of Blaenau with capacity for 99 pupils aged between 4-11 years. In recent years, pupil numbers at the school have declined. In January 2020 there were 34 pupils at the school meaning that there were 65 surplus places or 66%. Welsh Government, through the School Organisation Code, advises Local Authorities to review their provision where there are more than 10% surplus places in an area. Based on current pupil projections it was estimated that the pupil figures will remain low in the foreseeable future. Additionally, the condition of the school building was poor and the school has been in deficit since 2011/12 and remains with a deficit of £83,895 for 2019/20. Their original funding allocation for 2020/21 was £149k and their forecast position for the year is an increase to the deficit balance.

From an educational perspective having such a small number of pupils and mixed age classes makes it extremely difficult for the school to deliver the breadth and depth of curricular and social experiences which pupils of this age require to fully develop. The culmination of these unavoidable facts presents a school model which does not represent a sound, stable educational model or best use of resources. With no prospect of there being a significant increase in pupil numbers for the foreseeable future consideration regarding the sustainability of the school was required.

Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie is a transitional (working towards Welsh medium) 3-11 primary school located in the rural village of Llandybie. It is a successful school

which by January 2019 had reached its capacity and although there was a slight decrease in pupils at January 2020 this trend was likely to continue for the foreseeable future based on current pupil projections. As a result the Local Authority is developing a scheme to increase the capacity of Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie to 315 places with 45 nursery places by providing a new school on a new site with facilities fit for the 21st Century. The project will re-locate Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie from its current site to a new site which is within the current catchment area of Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie. The new school will provide a Welsh Government standard primary school building with capacity to accommodate 315 pupils and 45 nursery pupils between the ages of 3-11 years old and ensure that the school is able to deliver the full curriculum in modern, safe and inspiring learning environments with enhanced outside areas.

This proposed investment will address poor building condition and lack of adequate space and provision in the existing school by providing a category A school with sufficient places for current and projected demand. Over the last 5 years there has been a sustained increase in the number of pupils choosing to enter the Welsh medium stream and a fall in the number of pupils choosing to enter the English stream.

The Local Authority has a responsibility to provide all pupils with the best education possible and believes that providing bilingual opportunities has a role to play in this. This aligns with Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan objective of ensuring that all pupils are able to speak, read and write the Welsh language fluently by the end of Key Stage 2 in accordance with their expected stage of development. The best way to create confident, bilingual individuals is through immersing pupils in the Welsh language and as a result the Local Authority is looking to change the nature of provision. As a result of the ongoing challenges that both schools face, it was not possible to sustain current arrangements and a review of the education provision within the areas of Blaenau and Llandybie was required.

It was therefore proposed:-

- To discontinue Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau as of 31st August 2021;
- From 1st September 2021 all pupils will be registered at Ysgol Llandybie operating on both sites (Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie and the former Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau) increasing its capacity to 287 + 50 nursery places;
- Re-designate Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie's catchment area to include that of the former Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau catchment area as of 1st September 2021;
- Change the nature of provision at Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie to Welsh Medium as of 1st September 2021;
- Relocate Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie to a new school site and increase its capacity to 315 + 45 nursery places as of September 2024, when occupation of the new school is proposed.

The transitional capacity noted above (287 + 50 nursery places) combines both schools' current capacity including nursery places. As a result, the nursery places in the transitional capacity is greater than the final school's capacity. The final capacity figure (315 + 45 nursery places) meets the need and demand of the area for the longer term. It is the Authority's intention that all current pupils remain at the school and continue to receive their education through the current language. It is

important to note that there will be no change for current pupils attending Ysgol Llandybie.

RESOLVED

12.1 that the proposal to review primary education provision in the Blaenau and Llandybie areas, as detailed in the report, be endorsed;

12.2 that it be recommended to the Executive Board that a formal consultation process be initiated.

13. MEP - RECONFIGURE AND REMODEL BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT SERVICES AT YSGOL RHYDYGORS TO IMPROVE PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Committee considered a report detailing a proposal to reconfigure and remodel Behaviour Support Services at Ysgol Rhydygors in order to improve provision for children and young people.

Following a strategic review of the Authority's Behaviour Services, it was proposed to move from a silo focus on behaviour to a more universal approach to include pupil wellbeing and engagement. To achieve this a four phase model of behaviour services has been developed which included providing behaviour and engagement support on four levels. Support ranges from intervention and support in mainstream schools to specialised respite or residential placements.

Currently, the Authority has a range of settings in which pupils are supported. This includes Ysgol Rhydygors, Carmarthenshire Secondary Teaching and Learning Centre (Pupil Referral Unit for secondary pupils), Canolfan Bro Tywi (Pupil Referral Unit for primary pupils) and Canolfan y Gors (Pupil Referral Unit for secondary pupils with significant anxiety and/or emotional wellbeing and mental health issues requiring the support of CAMHS-Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). The vision of the four-phase model includes encouraging each of these settings to work together as one Specialist Behaviour and Wellbeing Support Service Team. One of the principal ways of achieving this is to create consistency in the type of provision offered at each of the settings and to create a system ensuring that links with mainstream schools.

At the current time, once a child is placed in Rhydygors, the historical evidence suggests that the young person remains there until they are 16 with no further mainstream experience. The new Four Phase Model is developing behaviour support services to allow easier access to early intervention so that schools have direct access to a link Behaviour Support Service team member who will be trained in restorative approaches, trauma informed practices and have continuous professional development to support the needs of their cluster of schools.

There are always learners who have complex needs and require robust support packages outside of mainstream provision but the Authority's ethos supports inclusivity and developing needs led support and services. Within the Four Phase model when a child is recommended for a place in Phases 3 or 4 there should always be the opportunity for transition back to mainstream, or even access mainstream for subjects that they engage with positively and the learning of others is not negatively impacted, when the young person can regulate emotions and

engage in their education in a positive and safe manner. This can be undertaken by continuous monitoring and assessment and with close, transparent and trusting relationships with our mainstream schools.

For the purposes of consistency, access to highly specialist support, access to a broad and balanced curriculum with a range of accreditation options and the offer of individual and bespoke education plans offered in the current Pupil Referral Units through the 3 Tiered approach, there was a requirement to discontinue Ysgol Rhydygors as a special school and establish it as a Pupil Referral Unit and the proposal presented to Committee today will initiate this change.

Whilst it was acknowledged that Ysgol Rhydygors has been providing education for pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties in the form of a special school for a number of years, it was recognised that an enhancement of the Pupil Referral Unit model will more appropriately cater for the needs of society and its young people, thereby providing consistent opportunities across the county.

It was therefore proposed:-

- To discontinue Ysgol Rhydygors Special School as of the 31st August 2021. All former Ysgol Rhydygors pupils will continue to receive their education on the site of the former Ysgol Rhydygors school. If approved, instead of receiving provision in a special school, pupils will be educated in a Pupil Referral Unit. Whilst the proposal should be considered as a whole, the consultation document related to point 1 only. Points 2 and 3 noted below would be undertaken via separate procedures;
- Should the above (Point 1) be approved, the Local Authority will establish a Pupil Referral Unit on the site of the former Ysgol Rhydygors school as of the 1st September 2021;
- Additionally, should Point 1 be approved, the Local Authority will establish a Children's Home/Respite Centre on the site of the former Ysgol Rhydygors School/Residential Unit as of the 1st September 2021. All former Ysgol Rhydygors pupils who have an element of residential education as part of their SEN Statement will continue to receive this on the site of the former Ysgol Rhydygors school.

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:-

- Officers were asked about the cost per pupil in a PRU compared to a school as the unit cost at Rhydygors appeared to be exceptionally high. The Director explained that the cost is higher because of the residential element and day provision provided at Rhydygors;
- Asked for confirmation that learners will not be disenfranchised by the proposed changes, the Director confirmed that everything possible will be done to ensure that learners do not lose out on their provision. He considered that learners will receive an improved provision by moving to the new approach as they will have more access to qualifications which will provide them with more choices when they leave school;
- Reference was made to the fact that pupils are placed in Rhydygors because they have behavioural problems and they need specialist care and attention to address their needs. Concern was expressed over the integration back into mainstream schools and how that transition is going to

happen. The Lead Officer for Behaviour Services explained that with regard to transition, pupils are under constant review and every possible assessment is undertaken. At no point would a pupil be allowed to go back into mainstream education without a robust assessment and full support. No pupils are ever set up to fail. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing added that the model used is based on a fully inclusive approach;

- Officers were asked if a pupil has extremely special needs, what is the position with regards to how much time they can spend in the PRU before moving on. The Director informed the Committee that there is a programme of staff training on mainstream education and pupils will not leave until they are ready to do so.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

13.1 that the proposal to remodel behaviour support services at Ysgol Rhydygors, as detailed in the report, be endorsed;

13.2 that it be recommended to the Executive Board that a formal consultation process be initiated

14. MEP - PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE AGE RANGE AT SWISS VALLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL FROM 4-11 TO 3-11

The Committee considered a report detailing a proposal to change the age range at Swiss Valley Primary School from 4-11 to 3-11.

Ysgol Swiss Valley has been undertaking a pilot scheme to become a 3-11 school since 2013 which was initiated as part of a Welsh Government scheme to give parents flexibility and choice regarding nursery provision. However, as the school was currently advertised officially as a 4-11 school, parents were unaware or confused with regard to what nursery provision the school offered.

The proposal aimed to provide equal provision within the Llanelli area, aligning Ysgol Swiss Valley with neighbouring schools that were already 3-11 schools. The governing body and head teacher were positive following the outcome of the pilot scheme and now wished to proceed with officially making the school a 3-11 school through statutory process.

It was therefore proposed to change the age range of Swiss Valley Primary School from 4-11 to 3-11 from 1st September, 2021.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

14.1 that the proposal to change the age range of Swiss Valley Primary School from 4-11 to 3-11 from 1st September, 2021, as detailed in the report, be endorsed;

14.2 that it be recommended to the Executive Board that a formal consultation process be initiated.

15. MEP - PROPOSAL TO REVIEW PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE MYNYDDYGARREG AND GWENLLIAN AREAS

The Committee considered a report detailing a proposal to review primary education provision in the Mynyddgarreg and Gwenllian areas.

The Authority has a legal responsibility to review the number and type of schools it has in an area and whether it is making the best use of resources and facilities to deliver the opportunities that children deserve.

Ysgol Gynradd Mynyddgarreg is a Welsh medium community primary school located in the village of Mynyddgarreg with capacity for 55 pupils between 4-11 years. In recent years pupil numbers have remained consistent but are still well below capacity. January 2020 figures showed that there were 36 pupils at the school with 19 surplus places, or 35%. Welsh Government advises Local Authorities to review their provision where there are more than 10% surplus places in an area. Based on current projections, it was estimated that pupil figures will remain well below capacity for the foreseeable future. Additionally, the condition of the school building was poor and the school has been in deficit since 2016/17 and remains with a deficit of £48,265 going into the 2020/21 financial year. Their original funding allocation for 2020/21 was £172k.

From an educational perspective having such a small number of pupils and mixed age classes makes it extremely difficult for the school to deliver the breadth and depth of curricular and social experiences which pupils of this age require to fully develop. The culmination of these unavoidable facts presented a school model which does not represent a sound, stable educational model for best use of resources. With no prospect of there being a significant increase in pupil numbers for the foreseeable future, consideration was required regarding the sustainability of the school.

Ysgol Gymraeg Gwenllian is a Welsh medium 3-11 community primary school situated in Kidwelly. In recent years, pupil numbers have remained consistent and slightly below the school's capacity of 140. However, based on current pupil projections, pupil numbers were expected to increase and the school was expected to be close to capacity by 2025 and this trend was likely to continue for the foreseeable future. As a result, the Local Authority is developing a scheme to provide a new school with facilities fit for the 21st Century on a new site.

The project would re-locate Ysgol Gymraeg Gwenllian from its current site to a new site which was within the current catchment area of Ysgol Gymraeg Gwenllian. The new school will provide a Welsh Government standard primary school building with capacity to accommodate 240 pupils (210 + 30 nursery places) between the ages of 3-11 years old and ensure that the school is able to deliver the full curriculum in a modern, safe and inspiring learning environment with enhanced outside areas. This proposed investment will address the poor building condition and lack of adequate space and provision in the existing school by providing a category A school with sufficient places for current and projected demand. As a result of the ongoing challenges that both schools face, it was not possible to sustain current arrangements.

It was therefore proposed:-

- To discontinue Ysgol Gynradd Mynyddgarreg as from 31st August, 2021;
- From 1st September, 2021 all pupils will be registered at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwenllian, operating on both sites (Ysgol Gymraeg Gwenllian and the former Ysgol Gynradd Mynyddgarreg) increasing its capacity to 178 + 17 nursery places;
- Re-designate Ysgol Gymraeg Gwenllian's catchment area to include that of

the former Ysgol Gynradd Mynyddygarreg's catchment area as of 1st September, 2021;

- Relocate Ysgol Gymraeg Gwenllian to a new site and increase its capacity to 210 + 30 nursery places as of September 2023, when occupation of the new school was proposed.

The following question was asked in relation to the report:-

- Asked whether any debt owed by a school will be deleted as soon as the new school is built, the Executive Board Member for Education & Children explained that on 31st August, 2021 any deficit held by either of the two schools will transfer to the Authority.

RESOLVED

- 15.1 that the proposal to review primary education provision in the Mynyddygarreg and Gwenllian areas, as detailed in the report, be endorsed;**
- 15.2 that it be recommended to the Executive Board that a formal consultation process be initiated.**

CHAIR

DATE