

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price (Chair)

Councillors:

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

Co-opted Members:

J. Davies	-	Parent Governor
M. Jones	-	Parent Governor
V. Kenny	-	Roman Catholic Church Representative

Also in attendance: Cllr G. Davies, Executive Board Member for Education and 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
A. Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion
E. Forsyth, Principal Challenge Advisor
L. Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP. - 2.00 - 3.45 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors I. Davies, D.T Williams and Revd D. Richards

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

There were no declarations of personal interest or party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no questions had been received.

4. MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME - PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE YSGOL HEOL GOFFA TO A NEW SITE AND INCREASE ITS CAPACITY FROM 75 TO 120

The Head of Access to Education gave an overview of the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Heol Goffa and noted that the school currently caters for 75 pupils between the ages of 3-19 years old who have severe learning difficulties

(SLD) or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Individual Development Plan (IDP). The current capacity of Ysgol Heol Goffa is 75 with 95 pupils on roll as at January 2019 and as a result, the Local Authority are currently developing a scheme to increase the capacity to 120 places, by providing a new school with facilities located next to the recently completed Ysgol Pen Rhos.

Members raised the following matters/questions in relation to the report –

In response to a request for clarification on how the figure of 120 was achieved, the Director of Education and Children's Services advised that the initial plan was to increase capacity to 100, however after some consideration and significant local intelligence a figure of 120 was closer to the predicated future requirements. He further advised that predicting future requirements was not an exact science however the department was confident that it would be sufficient. It was also noted that moving Ysgol Heol Goffa to a site adjacent to a main stream school would allow some movement between schools.

Members asked whether the relocation would incur additional transport costs for pupils or a change in catchment area. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that the authority holds the decision in relation to enrolment at specialist provision and all stated pupils were in receipt of free transport. However, children are encouraged to travel independently wherever possible.

Members noted that the new site included plans for a Hydrotherapy Pool and asked why the school would not access the proposed new Hydrotherapy Pool due to be part of the new Leisure Centre. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that due to the severe and complex needs of the pupils who attend the school there were challenges in transporting pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties to an alternative site, and therefore not all pupils would be able to travel to another setting.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to recommend to the Executive Board that a formal consultation be initiated.

5. MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION IN EDUCATION

During the forward work programme planning the Committee identified Mental Health Provision in Education as an area of interest and requested a report. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing gave an overview of the report which contained data on youth suicide, an outline of support available for at risk young people, school-based initiatives, and an overview of good practice and the national context.

Members raised the following matters/questions in relation to the report –

The Committee referred to the Issues Arising on page 63 of the report which listed exams and school expectations as one of the main pressures and challenges to wellbeing. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised that young people were very candid in focus groups and listed a broad range of issues, noting that school expectations were high on the list but was not the definitive view across the board. Acknowledging that there are significant pressures on schools to perform and this can be passed on to children who may feel it acutely during exam times. He

further noted that the new curriculum would bring new pressures which would need to be tackled in the future. He shared the view that the wellbeing of learners should be addressed first and foremost ensuring that young people are free from anxiety, stress and worries; and in turn standards would improve.

Members noted the case study relating to Ysgol Brynsierfel and asked whether this was being replicated in every school, Members referenced the SPEAKR programme which was relatively in widespread use. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised that there was some very good practice in a number of schools some of which has been recognised by ESTYN. He advised that the SPEAKR programme was a commercial package available for schools to purchase, the programme allows pupils to log when they are happy or not and teachers are able to review data at several points during the school day. The Head of School Effectiveness advised that there were many shared initiatives across the ERW regions with some international work including the Lost Words project.

Members raised a query on the low number of referrals to CAMHS in relation to the national figures, and the high number of girls accessing counselling services when compared to the number of boys. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised that the data from Hywel Dda University Health Board are accurate but acknowledged that the number of referrals to CAHMS were lower than expected. In response to the fact that the number of boys accessing counselling services was half the total number of girls, the Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing suggested that some factors could be a consideration, such as whether boys are more likely to mask their issues and that girls are usually more open and less inclined to mask their issues. He also noted that boys are more likely to be referred for behavioural issues than girls and that this may be a factor.

In noting the increase in the instances of suicide amongst boys and young men, Members asked what guidance was available to schools to identify any early warning signs. The Head of School Improvement advised that schools are working from the Foundation Phase upwards to normalise discussion on these issues and that staff are trained and supported to refer pupils to relevant pathways. Staff are also upskilled to understand the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing advised that the Welsh Government had recently published comprehensive guidance on responding to issues of self-harm and thoughts of suicide in young people and included how to ask questions of children and young people who may have suicidal feelings or are self-harming.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. PROVISIONAL EXAMINATION AND TEACHER ASSESSMENT RESULTS AND PROVISIONAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DATA.

Members received a report containing provisional External Examination, Teacher Assessment Results and School Attendance Data; ahead of a full report due in March 2020 with confirmed data.

Members raised the following matters/questions in relation to the report –

In response to a query on improving performance the Head of School Effectiveness advised that Challenge Advisors work with schools to identify the

progress look at key themes in improvement. If a certain area such as Numeracy required improvement, Challenge Advisors would review the areas where exam results are not successful and develop relevant bespoke support.

Members acknowledged that overall the results were very positive, and learners should be congratulated. The Director of Education and Children's Services affirmed that they had done exceptionally well, and a letter had been sent to each school to congratulate them on their success. Members also noted that there had been a considerable success within the Most Able and Talented pupils.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

Members reviewed the Forward Work Programme and considered reports circulated outside of the committee process since the last meeting on the 4th September 2019.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED:

7.1: that the report on the New Curriculum be moved to a future meeting the Youth Service report be presented at the next meeting on the 25th November 2019

7.2: that the Director of Corporate Services should be invited to the next meeting

7.3: that the Committee should receive an update on the forecast overspend of the Education and Children's Services Department at the next meeting on the 25th November 2019

8. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 4TH SEPTEMBER 2019

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 4th September 2019 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE