

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 6TH JANUARY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price [Chair]

Councillors:

K.V. Broom, T.A.J. Davies, R. James (in place of D. Jones), J.P. Jenkins, B.W. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, E.M.J.G. Schiavone, B. Thomas, 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:

S. Davies - Head of Access to Education
A. Rees - Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing
A. Thomas - Head of Education and Inclusion Services
A. Davies - Principal Educational Psychologist
S. Nolan - Group Accountant
M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer
M. Davies - Democratic Services Officer
K. Thomas - Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner - Technical Officer

Virtual Meeting : 10.00 am - 1.10 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Bowen and D. Jones.

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

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. STAFF AND PUPIL WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH - JANUARY 2021 UPDATE

The Committee considered a report providing an update on staff and pupil wellbeing and mental health as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The

report outlined the additional support and preventative measures put in place by the Department of Education and Children. Whilst focussing on the wellbeing of pupils and school staff, the report also included reference to the wellbeing of other young people who may not be in school but were still under the remit of the Department e.g. young adults in the Youth Support Service.

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

- With regard to the reference in the report that costs are being borne by the Education Department, officers were asked if any support is received from the Welsh Government. The Committee was advised that the Department is very grateful for all the support received from Welsh Government, however, if officers feel that additional support is needed, over and above that funded by Welsh Government, then that cost falls on the Local Education Authority. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing added that any assistance from central government would be welcome, however, no announcement has been made to date;
- With regard to the number of children and young people waiting for counselling, officers were asked how many are on the waiting list and whether that number had increased during the pandemic. The Committee was informed that all requests for assistance are prioritised and anyone with a high level of distress will be seen first. Officers were doing everything possible to reduce the waiting list, however, it was not just an issue of the availability of resources as accessibility and the availability of the children were also currently issues. Although remote support is available some children prefer to wait until face to face sessions are available again and whilst understandable, this has an impact on the waiting list;
- Reference was made to the fact that when it comes to distance learning, there are three tiers of children – those who are easy to reach, those with challenges and those with a higher degree of challenges and officers were asked how satisfied they were that they are able to reach those children in tiers 2 and 3. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing informed the Committee that the pastoral team spend 95% of their team on 5% of pupils and he assured the Committee that work was being undertaken to ensure that the support network in our schools is as strong as it can be;
- Concern was expressed that some children may fall through the net and not get the support they need. The Committee was reminded of the importance of having a good relationship between the school and the parent with regard to distance learning. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services informed the Committee that at the beginning of the first lockdown schools were asked to work with officers on categorising all pupils into red, amber and green in terms of distance learning so that the most vulnerable pupils in the red category could be concentrated on;
- With regard to the audit undertaken at the beginning of the pandemic, officers were asked what type of support is provided for each category and whether this is being audited. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services explained that schools and officers concentrate on the red category and daily contact is expected. With regard to the amber category,

it is all about raising awareness of the needs of the children and what they should be doing. It is made clear to schools that if these children are not online and engaging then they need to take action. Children in the green category need to continue with their learning, however, these pupils also need to be challenged;

- Officers were asked if all children have the IT equipment needed to distance learn and if so, are all schools (primary and secondary) proactive in terms of distance learning. The Committee was informed that 1,600 IT kits have been distributed alongside dongles to enable internet access where required;
- Concern was expressed at the drop in the number of pupils registered for elective home schooling and officers were asked if these pupils have access to online learning. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services informed the Committee that officers were concerned over the level of de-registration at the beginning of the pandemic and they have worked hard on re-engagement with initiatives including using drones to show the safety measures being implemented at schools and parents being invited to see these measures for themselves. He pointed out that the Local Authority receives around £3,500 per capita allowance for each pupil, however, there is no allowance provided for those electively home educated even though staff are designated to assist them;
- Whilst welcoming the work being done with staff and the Welsh Government confidential helpline, an assurance was sought from officers that enough is being done to support staff. The Head of Curriculum and Wellbeing informed the Committee that there are many initiatives in place to support staff including live, virtual sessions offering an opportunity for staff to interact with colleagues from all over Wales;
- Concern was expressed over the tremendous amount of pressure on our teachers and leaders and the fact that if our teachers are not well then we have no chance of getting our school open. Officers were asked if it was possible to make approaches to the Welsh Government to make sure that teachers receive the vaccine as a priority. Officers were asked if it was possible to recommend to the Executive Board that they lobby the Welsh Government to request that teachers be included high on the list of those to be vaccinated. The Executive Board Member for Education & Children agreed to raise this with the Executive Board;
- Reference was made to the fact that the strain on teachers has been immense over the past few months and officers were asked if they had any data to show how many staff are off work due to stress. The Head of Education and Inclusion Services informed the Committee that he did not have the data with him, however, he would circulate to the Committee following via e-mail following the meeting.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

4.1 that the report be received;

4.2 that the Executive Board Member for Education & Children raise with the Executive Board the issue of lobbying the Welsh Government to request that teachers be included high on the list

of those to be vaccinated.

5. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES FACING SCHOOLS

The Committee considered a report outlining the financial challenges facing primary schools. The report detailed the current Fair Funding budget allocation to schools and efforts to distribute equitably to the range of primary schools to meet the educational needs of all learners in Carmarthenshire. The report also outlined some key contextual influences that currently impact on the funding model in schools.

Access to high quality education is a fundamental right for all children and young people and it should not depend on where you live, your social background or the language in which you learn. A good education is one of the most important building blocks a child can receive. It is essential that there is sufficient, equitable funding available to ensure that the education that our children and young people deserve can be delivered effectively and consistently.

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

- Asked if there were any figures available in relation to the total expenditure on education by Local Authorities, the Group Accountant explained that this data is compiled by the Welsh Government on an annual basis and an analysis report is available. She added that it was difficult to compare data because all Education Directorates are slightly different in each Authority with some including libraries and in some ALN is delegated whereas in others in it held centrally;
- Asked for a breakdown of the three elements – learners, deprivation and sparsity, the Group Accountant informed the Committee that she would circulate this information by e-mail following the meeting;
- Reference was made to the fact that the report highlighted the significant challenges in our schools and indicated that we cannot continue as we are and it was felt that it was now time to hold meaningful and measured discussions about this. The Executive Board Member for Education and Children agreed that it was a concern that some of our schools are old, in poor condition and not fit for purpose which was why the Modernising Education Programme was so important;
- Concern was expressed at some of the levels of deficit and also in the way that some schools have coped well over the past year but some have got significantly worse. The Executive Board Member for Education and Children explained that capacity is an issue and when a project is included in the MEP, it is because of capacity issues. The Head of Access to Education added that there is a duty on Local Authorities to plan school places and it was therefore essential to match supply with demand. The Welsh Government requires Local Authorities to review all schools with over 10% spare places;
- Reference was made to the fact that the Committee has been concerned about the level of school deficits and the report was useful in showing the reasons and detail behind this. Officers were asked if it would be possible to receive a similar report for secondary schools and the Head of Education

and Inclusion Services agreed to bring a report on this to a future meeting;

- Reference was made to the fact that a significant proportion of all schools have pupils from outside their catchment area. The Head of Access to Education informed the Committee that it had been intended to undertake a review of all catchment areas, however, this had not been possible due to the fact that most of his team have been redeployed to work in other areas due to the pandemic. He added that the catchment area review will be finalised as soon as practicable.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

[NOTE: At 12.55 p.m., during consideration of the above item, the Committee's attention was drawn to Council Procedure Rule 9 – Duration of Meeting and, as the meeting had been underway for nearly three hours, it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable the Committee to conclude the remaining business on the agenda.]

6. TASK & FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT - ALN FORMULA FUNDING

The Chair informed the Committee that he proposed to defer consideration of this report to the next meeting to enable additional information to be included.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that consideration of the report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.

7. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the following scrutiny report and noted that it would be presented to Committee at the next meeting:-

- Education Support for Vulnerable Learners

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 23RD NOVEMBER, 2020

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23rd November, 2020 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE