

EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 23 JUNE 2023

PRESENT: Councillor A.C. Jones (Chair) (Virtual)

Councillors (In Person):

S.M. Allen	P. Hughes-Griffiths	D. Jones	H. Jones
E. Skinner			

Councillors (Virtually):

L.R. Bowen	M. Donoghue (substitute)	A. Evans (substitute)	B.W. Jones
M.J.A. Lewis	M. Thomas		

Co-opted Members (In Person):

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

Co-opted Members (Virtually):

Dr. F. Healey-Benson, Parent Governor

Cabinet Members (In Person)

G. Davies, Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language

School Representative for Ysgol Coedcae (In Person):

Ms T. Senchal, Headteacher

Also Present (In Person):

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services
S. Davies, Head of Access to Education
A. Rees, Head of Strategy and Learner Support
A Thomas, Head of Education Services and Inclusion
E. Forsyth, Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness
A. Carter, Schools Transformation Manager
J. Antoniazzi, Lead Officer for Behaviour Services & PRU
A. Eynon, Principal Translator
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

R. Evans, Team Manager, School Safeguarding and Attendance
C.S. Griffiths, Welsh Language Development Manager
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 1.30 pm

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K.V. Broom, L. Davies and S. Rees.

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

Member	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Cllr. M. J. A. Lewis	4. Supporting Behaviour	Close relation works as a Psychologist in the Education Department.

There were no declarations of party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. SUPPORTING BEHAVIOUR

A report was presented to Committee which detailed the current situation in relation to supporting improved behaviour across the county's schools.

The Committee was informed that the review of behaviour undertaken across all schools had culminated in the development of a Four Phase Model of Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing Support in order to provide equitable and consistent behaviour support services across the county. The Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language explained that the central team within the Local Authority had been strengthened and £500k funding had been provided to secondary schools to support implementation of the Four Phase Model which included upskilling schools and staff to meet the needs of learners, provision of 'in school' support for staff and learners, specialist Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) support within Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS) and the provision of bespoke support for some of the most vulnerable learners in the Local Authority.

The Committee thereupon received a detailed presentation from the Headteacher of Coedcae Comprehensive School which focussed on the way in which the school had created a culture of safeguarding which provided highly effective, bespoke support to ensure the well-being of pupils and to meet the needs of those with additional learning needs. A recent Estyn inspection concluded that the standard of care, support and guidance for pupils was deemed exemplary. The Committee was provided with an overview of the contextual data regarding the profile of pupils attending the school and acknowledged the correlation between the proxy for deprivation with absenteeism, standards of behaviour and educational outcomes. The interventions and initiatives undertaken by the school had resulted in positive added value whereby vulnerable pupils had exceeded the expected national levels of progress, standards, and educational outcomes.

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Notwithstanding the array of intervention measures implemented the school, the Committee acknowledged the impact of poverty disadvantage on pupils' access to the school. In this regard, a synopsis of the strategies to improve behaviour and attendance was provided to the Committee, together with an outline of the measures and Local Authority support that would assist the school with these endeavours.

A number of observations and queries were addressed, as follows:

- In response to a query, the Lead Officer for Behaviour Services & Pupil Referral Units provided an overview of the Behaviour Support and Community Team provision which had recently been redesigned to reflect the growing the demand from schools for the provision of reactive and proactive support.
- In respect to Coedcae School, reference was made to the significant increase in the number of requests made by teachers for on-call support for behaviour during lessons, particularly for year 11 pupils. It was explained to the Committee that behavioural and attendance issues had manifested in year 11 pupils who had the added pressures and anxieties associated with the requirement to perform for examinations, as well as the educational disruption caused by the pandemic; and this was reflective of the position nationally. It was further reported that the rate of fixed term exclusions did not appear to align with the number of on-call support for behavioural issues due to the utilisation of resources within the school, including the internal facility to re-engage pupils.
- Following a query regarding the support available to staff, the Headteacher of Coedcae School provided an assurance to the Committee that the impact of staff well-being was a key focus for the school's Senior Leadership Team, with effective, open channels of communication and implementation of strategies such as restorative conversations to build positive relationships between teachers and pupils.
- A member highlighted the importance of the need for improved structures for early intervention to improve standards of behaviour and associated expected educational outcomes of pupils prior to their commencement of secondary school education. The Lead Officer for Behaviour Services & Pupil Referral Units clarified that the Behaviour Support services worked across both the primary and secondary sector to deliver programmes of support for learners using the ethos of inclusive practices, with restorative approaches to encourage positive relationships between teachers and pupils and also between teachers, parents/guardians and communities. Furthermore, it was explained that Trauma Informed Practice around neurodivergent behaviour was utilised to ensure the appropriate approaches were utilised to meet the needs of individual learners.
- In response to a query regarding the roll out of the Four Phase Model across the county, the Lead Officer for Behaviour Services & Pupil Referral Units provided an overview of the work ongoing with schools to
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upskill staff to deal with challenging pupil behaviour, provision of targeted approaches to areas of need and the use of specialist settings as an intervention method.

- The Headteacher of Coedcae comprehensive school and her staff were commended for the encouraging and positive work undertaken which provided the Committee with an insight into the prevalence of behavioural issues across schools.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LEVELS

The Committee considered a report which detailed the levels of attendance across Carmarthenshire schools since 2012. The Cabinet Member for Education and Welsh Language referred to the significant adverse impact on school attendance brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, with schools experiencing difficulties in re-engaging with learners and families. It was reported that attendance across Carmarthenshire schools remained lower than pre-pandemic levels, with illness accounting for the majority of absences, though it was noted that the Welsh Government data publication and performance measurement had not yet fully resumed following the coronavirus pandemic.

The report set out the Local Authority support provided to schools to improve and maintain good pupil attendance by way of advisory and operational work and was supplemented by statistical data to demonstrate the impact of such interventions.

A number of observations and queries were addressed, as follows:

- In response to a query, the Team Manager for School Safeguarding and Attendance explained to the Committee that 'Operation Encompass' entailed a partnership initiative between the Local Authority and Police to inform schools of domestic violence incidents in cases where pupils were linked to that address; the aim of which was to ensure the provision of emotional and/or practical support in school to the pupils affected, as required. It was further clarified that 'Operation Endeavour' comprised a partnership initiative between the Local Authority and Police to safeguard children and young people at risk of harm from going missing.
- It was commented that some pupils thrived academically with the online learning provided during the coronavirus pandemic due to the flexibility offered; accordingly some pupils experienced difficulties in re-engaging with the daily routine expected in traditional school settings. The Lead Officer for Behaviour Services & Pupil Referral Units confirmed that the challenges of recent years had resulted in the development of a range of alternative offers to re-engage those who experienced such difficulties, including bespoke educational plans for those Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS) and interventions such as pastoral support services for those in mainstream education.

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- In response to a query regarding the longer-term projection for attendance levels, the Lead Officer for Behaviour Services & Pupil Referral Units referred to the newly piloted EBSA (emotionally based school avoidance) project with the aim of identifying reasons for disengagement in order to provide strategies and support to assist pupils in returning to the school environment or identify appropriate package of support for those unable to engage with mainstream education.
- In response to a query regarding the correlation between the level of parents/guardians home working and absenteeism, the Director of Education and Children's Services referred to anecdotal evidence of issues with school attendance in cases where parents/guardians worked from home. A Member highlighted the importance of research into this area.
- The importance of the role of Attendance and Wellbeing Officers was highlighted by a member in emphasising the impact of absenteeism to parents and guardians. The Head of Education Services and Inclusion referred to behaviour and attendance marketing campaigns by the Local Authority to convey the importance of regular school attendance to parents and guardians.
- The Schools Transformation Manager, in response to a query regarding the collation of absence figures, clarified that a set of 23 codes was utilised consistently amongst all schools to record absence reasons. The Director of Education and Children's Services confirmed that the profile of schools in terms of pupil numbers, their context and the consequential impact on attendance percentages would be taken into account when analysing such statistical information.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6. WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN - ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received for consideration the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) Annual Report which detailed the progress made during the 2022/23 academic year in implementing the authority's 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (2022-2032).

The report had been prepared in accordance with the legislative provisions enshrined in Section 84 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 which required the authority to implement and monitor a WESP to increase bilingual education in schools across the county.

The Committee duly considered the action plan appended to the report which set out the progress made against the 7 outcomes detailed within the WESP to facilitate more nursery and reception children being taught through the medium of Welsh; more young people studying for qualifications in Welsh as a subject, and subjects through the medium of Welsh; increasing provision of Welsh medium

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education for learners with Additional Learning Needs; and increasing the number of teachers able to teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh.

A synopsis of the ongoing work to transition schools to the Welsh Government's new linguistic categorisation system was also set out in the report, together with an overview of the current position in terms of the Welsh Language Development Team, Standards, Partnership Working, Grant funding and future developments.

The issues/observations raised by the Committee were addressed as follows:-

- Reference was made to the 2021 census whereby concerns were raised regarding the low number of teachers able to deliver classes through the medium of Welsh. Accordingly, queries were raised regarding the initiatives implemented to meet the objective of increasing the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh as a subject and through the medium of Welsh, and the role of external agencies in this regard. The Head of Strategy and Learner Support referred to the ongoing national difficulties in recruiting candidates to teaching positions in general and the need to promote teaching as a career of choice. Reference was also made to the National Centre which would explore improvements to the Welsh language provision for schools in accordance with the introduction of the forthcoming Welsh Language Education Bill. A programme of support was also in place for teachers to learn, improve or enhance their confidence in this area. The Welsh Language Development Manager also referred to the variety of training levels and flexibility of course provision to facilitate access to learning for teachers, which would be further enhanced going forward following the provision of Welsh Government grant funding.
- In response to a query, the recruitment challenges for the Welsh for Adults provision was acknowledged by the Head of Strategy and Learner Support and an assurance was provided that work was ongoing to promote and fill these roles to meet the demand for Welsh classes within the communities. In this regard it was confirmed that a report on the Welsh for Adults provision would be provided to the Committee in line with its Forward Work Plan for 2023/24.
- The Director of Education and Children's Services clarified to the Committee, in response to a query regarding the level of Welsh Language skills required by teachers, that the role specification would be bespoke to the role applied for. A programme of support was also offered by schools to ensure that the required skillset was attained.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Committee received for consideration the Education, Young People and Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee Annual Report which detailed the work undertaken by the Committee during the 2022/23 municipal year. The report had

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been prepared in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution and provided an overview of the work programme and key issues addressed, whilst also incorporating any issues referred to, or from, the Cabinet, Task and Finish reviews, development sessions and member attendance.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be endorsed.

8. SCRUTINY ACTIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which detailed the progress achieved in relation to requests or referrals emerging from previous meetings of the Education, Young People and Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee during the 2022/23 municipal year.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN FOR 2023/24

The Committee reviewed its draft Forward Work Plan for 2023/24 which had been compiled following the Committee's informal planning session held on the 11th May 2023. It was emphasised that the Forward Work Plan was a flexible document that could be updated throughout the year as and when required.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Plan 2023/24 be approved.

10. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee reviewed the list of forthcoming items scheduled to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 9th October 2023, which had been derived from the Committee's Forward Work Plan 2023/24.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting of the Education, Young People and the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee to be received.

11. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 5TH MAY 2023

Subject to a typographical amendment on the attendance list on the Welsh version of the minutes in respect of Councillor G. John, it was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 5th May 2023 be signed as a correct record.

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CHAIR

DATE

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