

## Education and Children Scrutiny Committee 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2021

### Subject: An Evaluation Into How Carmarthenshire's Education and Children's Services Department Responded to COVID-19

**Purpose:** To provide reassurance that the Department learns from the experience and addresses any shortcomings.

**Recommendations / key decisions required:** To respond to the shortcomings and report on progress made in addressing them.

**Reasons:** As a 'learning organisation'\* the Education and Children's Services Department needs to review performance on a regular basis and address any shortcomings.  
\* *A Learning Organisation has the capacity to change and adapt routinely to new environments and circumstances as its members, individually and together, **learn** their way to realising their vision.*

The report provides an overview of how the local authority and regional has worked with schools and pupils referral units (PRUs) to promote learning and support vulnerable pupils during the COVID-19 period between June and November 2020, that is the period after the initial lockdown when schools were reopening.

It captures the way the local authority has adapted its work to respond to the challenges resulting from COVID-19. The work was carried out before all schools returned to remote learning in January 2021 but will be help the LA to inform current ways of working.

Relevant scrutiny committee to be consulted YES

#### Education and Children Scrutiny Committee- January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Exec. Board Decision Required NO

Council Decision Required NO

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:- Cllr. Glynog Davies

**Directorate:** Education and Children's Services

**Name of Head of Service:**  
Gareth Morgans

**Report Author:** ESTYN

**Designations:**

Director of Education and Children's Services

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Education and Children Scrutiny Committee**  
**28<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.**

**SUBJECT: An Evaluation Into How Carmarthenshire's Education and Children's Services Department Responded to COVID-19**

**CHRONOLOGY**

**28<sup>th</sup> February, 2020-** The first case of COVID-19 in Wales was confirmed in a person who had returned from Northern Italy, and then transferred to a specialist NHS infection centre at the Royal Free Hospital in London. The Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Frank Atherton, said that the Government would be taking "all appropriate measures" to reduce the risk of transmission.

**10<sup>th</sup> March, 2020-** 9 more cases were discovered in Wales bringing the total to 15, the first significant jump in cases.

**11<sup>th</sup> March, 2020-** the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a pandemic.

**16<sup>th</sup> March, 2020-** the first death in Wales was reported in Wrexham.

**18<sup>th</sup> March, 2020-** the Welsh Government announced that all schools and nurseries in Wales would be closing by the 20<sup>th</sup> March, initially for a period of four weeks, and Education Minister Kirsty Williams said that it would very likely be for a "considerable period of time". A limited number of schools were to remain open to provide support for key workers and children with additional needs. It was further announced in the following days that all exams, including GCSEs and A-Levels, would be cancelled, with grades being based on existing work and predicted grades.

**23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2020-** UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, having the agreement of all devolved governments, announced a lockdown of the United Kingdom, with only essential services remaining open. This announcement was followed by the Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford announcing that the measures would also cover Wales and would come into effect from that evening.

**3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2020-** it was announced that schools in Wales would reopen on the 29<sup>th</sup> June. It was advised that in each school there would be a phased approach with Year groups split into small groups with staggered starts and breaks. It was expected that a third of pupils would be present at any one time.

*COVID-19 Pandemic in Wales from Wikipedia*

Since March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Education and Children's Services Department officers had to radically adapt the way they had traditionally worked to focus primarily on supporting schools and services in order that the children and young people in our care were accessing all the support and interventions they required. It was an unprecedented period of time and decisions had to be taken by the Director, the Departmental Management Team and Service Managers based on the information available at that time.

In the Autumn term all schools and services re-opened fully however at the end of December and into January 2021 schools moved to remote learning.

Over the Autumn Term, 2020 ESTYN undertook a thematic survey to reflect on local authorities, regional consortia and schools' approaches to teaching and learning and pupil wellbeing.

Part 1 of the review was to support the Welsh Government and local authorities/regional consortia by achieving the following objectives:

- provide Welsh Government and individual local authorities and regional consortia with a report reflecting their work and approaches during the lockdown period and at the start of the period when schools return to full operation. The reports will enable Welsh Government to understand the broad strengths and lesson learnt in the way local authorities and regions are operating during this period. It will also enable us to celebrate effective practice as well as sign-posting local authorities and regional consortia to consider other ways of approaching these new challenges. The national report will look at learning and remaining challenges for the education system as a whole.
- Identify how learning from before the summer is being used to support planning for and delivery of blended learning approaches and support for vulnerable learners in the Autumn term.
- learn lessons from the most effective practice about capacity, collaboration, future planning and change management. This will support planned reforms in education and local government over the next few years.

Part 2 of the work focussed on two aspects:

1. **Promoting learning-** what quality assurance work has been done to improve the quality of the learning offer and how has this been used to develop further guidance and professional learning?
2. **Supporting vulnerable learners-** how has the local authority targeted services and support to vulnerable learners to support them to engage in learning, what barriers still exist?

#### **Key themes that were explored- Promoting learning**

- **Learning from September-** support for schools to plan learning
- **Planning for progress-** support for school leaders to identify specific groups or cohorts of learners that have been disproportionately affected by school closures
- **Recruit, Recover, Raise standards- accelerated learning programme-** work with schools to plan work under the Recruit, Recover and Raise standards grant funding.
- **Professional learning-** developing the expertise of practitioners in pedagogies/ approaches that maximise the potential of blended learning

#### **Key themes that were explored- Vulnerable learners**

- **Promoting wellbeing-**work to identify and respond to the wellbeing needs of vulnerable learners.
- **Curriculum-** work to ensure that all vulnerable learners have access to a curriculum that is appropriate to their learning needs.
- **Health and Safety-** support for schools to implement relevant guidance in relation to health and safety.

- **Specialist services and multi-agency working-** engagement with partners and how will this inform and strengthen future collaborative working.
- **Statutory processes and referrals-** meeting statutory duties and responding to any changes in demand for services.
- **Professional learning-** support for the professional learning of staff to support vulnerable learners.

The findings of these reports were positive reflecting effective partnership working between all involved in the education system. However, a few areas need further consideration and will be incorporated into our 2021/22 Departmental Business Planning.

**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:

*Edy Morgans*

**Signed:** Director of Education and Children's Services.

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>

### Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

Officers had to consider and respond to Welsh Government policy and guidance and implement changes at a pace which was often challenging. In addition the lack of policy and appropriate guidance from Welsh Government impeded progress on occasion and local decisions had to be taken based on the information available. There has been a clear focus on vulnerable children and young people throughout this pandemic.

### Legal

The Local Authority has had to ensure compliance with COVID related legislation ensuring that it continues to deliver a high quality service to all children and young people.

### Finance

The Department has supported schools with all financial management issues during this period including provision for learners eligible for free school meals, early years childcare funding, utilising grants and ensuring schools have access to all required resources.

### ICT

Access to suitable ICT has been a priority ensuring that learners had suitable hardware and connectivity in order to engage in remote learning. This was a challenging task with the County Council providing 1600+ pieces of hardware and 255+ MIFI connections. It is an ongoing piece of work as many learners are required to self-isolate due to being contacts to a positive COVID case.

### Risk Management Issues

A robust and comprehensive Risk Assessment Template was provided to all schools prior to the June re-opening. This template is reviewed on a regular basis reflecting changes in guidance and advice from Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and other organisations. In regard to vulnerable learners and staff schools were advised to undertake individual risk assessments and implement appropriate actions to mitigate the identified risks.

### Staffing Implications

Appropriate advice and guidance have been issued to staff by the HR Department throughout this period. Regular and constructive meetings have been held with Trade Unions to address any issues and challenges.

### Physical Assets

Schools were effectively supported in planning and preparing Covid safe learning environments for the safe return to school in June. This included a range of resources including signage, hand washing stations, hand sanitising units in every classroom and suitable PPE.

## CONSULTATIONS

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

Signed: 

Director of Education and Children's Services

- 1. Scrutiny Committee-** during the initial months of the pandemic this Committee did not meet. We have however taken a report to the November meeting outlining our response to Covid.
- 2. Local Member(s)-** regular communication was shared with local members in regard to schools.
- 3. Relevant Partners-** regular communication was shared with school Governors.
- 4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations-** regular meetings were held with the Department's Employee Relations Forum.

**EXECUTIVE BOARD PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S)  
AWARE/CONSULTED**

YES

**Include any observations here**

### Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information

#### List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Title of Document	File Ref No.	Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
<b>ESTYN Letter</b>	Appendix 1	Attached to this document
<b>ESTYN Thematic Report</b>	Appendix 2	Attached to this document