

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 4TH DECEMBER, 2019

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H. TROLLOPE (CHAIR)

Councillors D. Bevan
M. Cook
G. A. Davies
W. Hodgins
C. Meredith
J. C. Morgan
K. Pritchard
K. Rowson
T. Smith
B. Summers
S. Thomas

T. Baxter (Co-opted Member)
A. Williams (Co-opted Member)

WITH: Lynette Jones, Corporate Director Education
Lynn Phillips, Head of Education Transformation
Michelle Jones Education Improvement Manager
Liz Thomas, Scrutiny Officer

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Millard, L. Elias and J. Holt.</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 25th October, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 25TH OCTOBER 2019</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 25th October, 2019 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>SPECIAL EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 6th November, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 6TH NOVEMBER 2019</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 6th November, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><u>Item 6 – Management of Pupil Places and the School Estate</u></p> <p>A Member referred to the increased demand for places at Pen-y-</p>	

Cwm Special School. The Service Inclusion Manager said that the service looked at trends and the primary needs of the pupil coming into the system e.g. Autism, profound learning difficulties, etc. to project forward. Historically it had not been possible to capture data on 0-3 year olds. The Inclusion Service managed and monitored uptake and placement at Pen-y-Cwm school and a consultation document and report was being prepared to look at increasing capacity at the school.

A Member enquired regarding out of county pupils and what areas in the borough pupils came from. The Service Inclusion Manager said that currently Pen-y-Cwm school was not accepting pupils from out of county for a range of reasons and it was reasonable that places be reserved for pupils living in Blaenau Gwent.

The Chair requested that in relation to the River Centre and Pen-y-Cwm schools that a breakdown of the numbers of children attending the schools against their catchment area schools be provided. The Service Inclusion Manager said that this information could be provided as a percentage on future reporting.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.

No. 8

IMPROVING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME 2019

Consideration was given to the report of the Strategic Education Improvement Manager which was presented to provide Members with an overview of those schools, over the last 3 years that have presented as a cause for concern, their progress and the work delivered to continue to support them to improve.

The Director of Education spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

A Member referred to categorisations and commented that school categorisations could be affected if a school performed poorly in one subject area. The Director said that if it was a core subject any decline or incline would have an exaggerated impact on categorisations. Schools were trying to move away from this process as good work could sometimes be overlooked and try to make it more distributed in the way schools were categorised.

A lengthy discussion ensued regarding correspondence from the

Executive Member for Education in relation to a Blaenau Gwent school. Members requested that the Executive Member for Education provide a response regarding correspondence about a meeting relating to a Blaenau Gwent School.

The Committee agreed this course of action.

In response to a Member's question regarding the condition of Brynmawr Foundation school, the Director said that the school had been identified as needing refurbishment which would include disabled access.

A Member requested that information regarding the movement of school categorisations be presented in graph form. The Director of Education agreed that this information would be presented in colour graph form in future reporting.

In response to Members concerns regarding redundancies in schools, the Director said that Abertillery Learning Community had suffered some negative press attention which had not helped to recruit high quality teachers. She pointed out that a number of learning support assistants had been renewed and commented on the integral role of support assistants and confirmed that learning support assistants in Abertillery Learning Community responsible for pupils with additional learning needs would not be affected. A review of learning support assistants had been undertaken which took into account the teacher to pupil ratio set out in the national model. The number of learning support assistants at risk of redundancy had been devised from this calculation and schools and HR had supported learning support assistants through redeployment and other opportunities available.

A Member commented that the onus was on the school Governing Body to deliver first class education to pupils and deliver its budget. Another Member praised the good work of the Governing Body and staff at Ebbw Fawr for the improvements carried out.

The Chair expressed concern that due to roadworks being carried out near Brynmawr Foundation school pupils were missing certain aspects of sports play. The Director said that Brynmawr Foundation school had a large playing space and roadworks at and around the site needed to progress quickly so that sports could resume.

	<p>Members concurred that it was a positive report with 11 schools categorised as Green and 10 schools categorised as Yellow.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report be accepted as provided.</p>	
No. 9	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 15TH JANUARY 2020</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 15th January, 2020 be approved.</p>	
No. 10	<p><u>SCHOOL ATTENDANCE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented to provide Members with the opportunity to scrutinise attendance data for Blaenau Gwent at Primary and Secondary school level for the academic year 2018-19.</p> <p>The Education Welfare Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member referred to the 1.6% persistent absenteeism, the Education Welfare Manager said that there were some inconsistencies with how individual schools dealt with persistent absenteeism, however, the Education Welfare Service worked closely with schools to promote regular school attendance and to embed new working practices which supported this aim. The Service was also looking at how other local authorities dealt with this issue. She added that the majority of absences were due to illness and not holidays.</p> <p>A Member commented that some parents were hard to reach and schools were working hard to promote good attendance and address persistent absenteeism.</p> <p>A Member enquired if school staff absenteeism was recorded. The Director of Education confirmed that school staff absences</p>	

were reported to the relevant scrutiny committee i.e. school staff attendance data would be presented to the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

A Member referred to PISA data for 15 year olds. The Director of Education said that this was a sample across Wales. The headline was positive but not perfect and reflected the data accurately but the ambition remained to improve.

In response to a Member's question regarding truancy, the Education Welfare Manager said that absences were challenged and an officer would make a home visit if necessary. Schools shared good practice, one school had introduced battle boards and punctuality boards. Working as a multi agency to look at attendances provided a more effective service and strong links with Children's Services enabled referrals to be made. The Director commented that forensics of high level data enabled the team to work more effectively using code analysis.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2, namely that the report be accepted as provided.