

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15TH JANUARY, 2020**

**REPORT OF:**

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H. TROLLOPE (CHAIR)**

Councillors J. Millard (Vice-Chair)  
D. Bevan  
L. Elias  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
J. C. Morgan  
K. Pritchard  
K. Rowson  
T. Smith  
S. Thomas  
A. Williams – Co-opted Member

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Education  
Head of Education Transformation  
Service Manager for Inclusion  
Press & Publicity Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

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

<p><b>No. 2</b></p>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Cook, G.A. Davies, C. Meredith and B. Summers.</p> <p><b><u>Co-opted Member</u></b> T. Baxter</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>EDUCATION &amp; LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET - 4TH DECEMBER 2019</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>Item 8 – Improving Schools Programme</u></b></p> <p>A Member raised concern that the action had been marked as completed when no response had been received. The Scrutiny &amp; Democratic Officer advised Members that the Head of Democratic Services had spoken with the Executive Member for Education and it was advised that the Executive Member would contact the Leader of the Labour Group directly.</p> <p>The Leader of the Labour Group confirmed he had not had any contact with the Executive Member for Education to date. A Member commented that all Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Members should receive a response.</p> <p>The Leader of the Labour Group agreed with his colleague’s view that all Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Members should have all the information and suggested that the Chair write to the Executive Member for Education to avoid this situation arising in</p>	

	<p>future.</p> <p>The Chair agreed with this course of action.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>EXECUTIVE DECISION SHEET</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Executive Decision Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Executive Decision Sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 7</b>	<p><b><u>PUPIL EXCLUSIONS</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented to provide opportunity for Members to scrutinise exclusion data for Blaenau Gwent at Primary and Secondary schools for the academic year 2018/19.</p> <p>The Service Manager for Inclusion spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>Councillors John C. Morgan and Steve Thomas left the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding the reason for exclusions under the 'Other' category, the Service Inclusion Manager felt that there should not be an 'Other' category as it showed no clarity for the reason for exclusion.</p> <p>A Member enquired if there was a link between the decrease in exclusions and the examination results and referred to the comparative data with Blaenau Gwent rated 13 out of 22 for 5 days or less exclusions. The Director of Education said that figures compare favourably particularly in KS4. The Service Manager for Inclusion said that persistent disruptive behaviour was one of the main reasons for exclusions and there was an ongoing need to minimise exclusions. Regarding managed moves, managed pupil moves was an agreement between two schools and the parent/carers to give a pupil a fresh start and was based on Welsh Government guidance. The River Centre provided a full curriculum and specialist placements were closely managed. The</p>	

school also provided home tuition to some pupils with special medical needs.

A Member requested comparison data for previous years in relation to paragraph 6.1.7 exclusions by month and paragraph 6.1.8 exclusions by year group as a percentage. The Service Manager for Inclusion agreed to provide the comparison data to Members.

A Member referred to the low number of exclusions in primary schools and what support was available. The Service Manager for Inclusion said that in the first instance support would be provided through the Education Psychologist allocated to the school. A Pastoral Support Plan could be used which supports an action focused multi-agency approach. Should it be necessary the school could consider the appropriateness of requesting consideration of change of placement. He added that Primary schools had been successful at keeping exclusions low.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinise the information detailed within the report, thereby contributing to continuous self-evaluation prior to making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

**No. 8**

**21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME - GATEWAY REVIEW**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Education Transformation which was presented to provide an opportunity for Members to scrutinise the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme, particularly the outcome of the Welsh Government facilitated Gateway Review (September 2019).

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

A Member enquired regarding recouping the costs of the sewer diversion and the highway infrastructure. The Head of Education Transformation said that the sewer diversion had cost £1.3m and the Welsh Government had contributed £650,000 towards the costs. In relation to the highway infrastructure a Welsh Government capital maintenance grant of circa £400,000 had been used to ease revenue cost pressures and confirmed that a

total of £800,000 had also been put back into the Council's capital programme from Welsh Government bids.

A Member requested clarity in relation to the Welsh Medium School. The Head of Education Transformation said that discussions had been held regarding revenue implications and the Welsh Government had confirmed that no further revenue support would be available at this time. A presentation would be presented to an informal Executive/CLT in February and following the discussions a report would be presented to this Committee to inform Scrutiny Members of the situation.

The Member commented that Welsh education was a priority for the Authority and this issue needed to be progressed. The Head of Education Transformation said the Welsh Government had confirmed that £6m capital for this project could be carried forward. The Band B priority projects were secondary school remodelling, Bro Helyg remodelling as well as a replacement primary school in the Ebbw Fawr valley. A business case was soon to be submitted to the Welsh Government and will include further refurbishment works in other primary schools if resources allow. Remodelling of schools impacted on pupil attendance and behaviour and work with the Planning Department regarding S106 agreements ensured that future capacity levels in schools was linked to residential developments in the area.

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

Councillor Jonathan Millard left the meeting at this juncture.

**No. 9**      **EDUCATION      WORKFORCE      SICKNESS      ABSENCE**  
**PERFORMANCE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development and the Corporate Director of Education which was presented to provide Members of specific scrutiny committees the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge relevant directorate sickness absence performance and the proposed actions for improvement.

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

A Member enquired if holding annual workforce meetings was adequate. The Director said that workforce meetings were kept under review and sickness performance data was also discussed at Strategic Headteachers meetings. Organisational Development worked closely with Headteachers and were guided by Occupational Health and GP advice.

A Member welcomed the report being presented to each Scrutiny Committee but had concerns that the Sickness Absence Policy was not being adhered to, he was aware that some Managers were not using the iTrent system. He also felt that individual schools should not be identified in the report. The Director would take this point back to colleagues.

A Member referred to sickness absence within the Authority being a key risk and enquired if high levels of sickness had an impact on school performance and enquired regarding iTrent sickness triggers. The Director said this did provide challenges and could be linked to well-being. A successful iTrent pilot had been carried out and 39% of return to work interviews had been recorded on the system, however, further improvement needed to be undertaken.

The Director informed Members that some school based support staff such as catering and cleaning staff were employed by a different Directorate. As individual Workforce Sickness Absence Performance reports would be considered at each Scrutiny Committee Members comments would be considered for future reporting.

A Member commented that clarity was needed regarding which directorate employed which staff and pointed out that special circumstances may need to be considered when dealing with special schools.

Reference was made to the estimated sickness absence costs. The Director said that costs to the Authority for the six month period were estimated at £398,718 and did not include supply costs i.e. on-costs, cover arrangements etc. and this would need to be looked at in detail.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that having scrutinised the absence performance information and proposed arrangements

	<p>to improve attendance rates within the Education Directorate identify any further areas for improvement in order to drive forward performance improvement.</p> <p>Councillor Jonathan Millard re-joined the meeting at this juncture.</p>	
<b>No. 10</b>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 26TH FEBRUARY 2020</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>A Member requested that a six month update on projected results for all schools be added to the forward work programme. The Director of Education would lodge a request with the EAS for the report to be prepared and presented to a future meeting.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 be approved.</p>	