

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE - 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2021**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

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

Councillors J. Holt (Vice-Chair)  
D. Bevan  
M. Cook  
M. Day  
L. Elias  
J. Hill  
C. Meredith  
J. C. Morgan  
J. P. Morgan  
T. Smith  
B. Summers  
D. Wilkshire  
T. Baxter (Co-opted Member)

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Education  
Service Manager Education Transformation &  
Business Change  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>  The following apologies for absence were reported:-	

	<p>Head of School Improvement and Inclusion Service Manager Young People and Partnerships Strategic Education Improvement Manager</p>	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>No declarations of interest and dispensations were raised.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<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 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET - 22ND JUNE 2021</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><u>Vacant Position for Co-opted Member</u></p> <p>It was reported that a nomination had been received to be considered by Full Council in September. If the nomination was accepted, the governor would be briefed in order to attend the October meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p><u>Pupil Development Grants</u></p> <p>A Member referred to the information provided and although the data was welcomed, the Member advised that he had wanted to see how individual grants had been used to support individual learners in schools.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Education agreed that a further update would be provided at the next meeting.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that course of action.</p>	

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

**No. 6**

**VERBAL UPDATE - COVID 19**

The Corporate Director Education provided a verbal update on the current status of Covid-19 within Education and schools. Although, the Corporate Director stated that the situation was a dynamic one and changed on a daily basis.

The Corporate Director advised that the number of cases had increased over the last few days and the situation was deteriorating in the Authority's education and learning settings. There were particular increases in the children and young people category aged between 10-19 year olds. The Corporate Director informed that at present there were 119 positive cases across Blaenau Gwent School estate of which were 109 learners and 10 members of staff. There was also a number of the workforce self-isolating. The highest numbers are within Abertillery Learning Community – Secondary Phase, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community – Secondary Phase, Tredegar Comprehensive and Cwm Primary School. The Corporate Director noted that these were the figures for the second week of term, which emphasised the level of challenge faced and reminded Members that these figures were likely to change on a daily basis.

The Corporate Director referred to the meetings with headteachers to be prepared for the term ahead and advised that these meetings included education, environmental health, health and safety and support services. The responses from headteachers had been excellent and a common position was reached. The Welsh Government infection control framework was considered, which advocates managed self-isolation for children under the aged of 18. The contact groups would be identified for testing and monitoring and this course of action was taken with a view to maintain face to face teaching and learning, where possible. All schools would be providing support for TTP services as there was capacity challenges in this area.

The catering and cleaning staff are fragile due to the number of staff self-isolating and the Corporate Director confirmed that this would be closely monitored along with the situation with teachers and learners as we go through the autumn term.

At this juncture, Members raised the following questions which were answered accordingly.

How are PPE supplies within schools?

The stocks of PPE within schools are sufficient to support teaching and learning. It had also been confirmed that hardship funding would be continued, which would assist with such associated costs.

Have Welsh Government issued guidance on vaccinations for 12-19 year olds?

The vaccinations programme for 12-15 year olds has been agreed by the four Chief Medical Officers across the UK and a WG announcement was imminent. The vaccination programme is currently available for young people over the age of 16 years.

A Member praised the Local Authority in the approach and actions being taken in schools. The Member felt that it was being handled in a positive way.

Concerns were raised around children being sent to school if there was a positive case of Covid-19 within the home and there were mixed opinions of whether children should remain home to self-isolate or be sent to school. The Corporate Director Education advised that Welsh Government had provided some flexibility to work on a local basis, but there was clear guidance in place that needed to be in place by the 20th September. Therefore, Blaenau Gwent was working with Environmental Health colleagues to ascertain the best way forward to manage the situation. The Member felt that parents should be advised to keep children home to self-isolate.

The continued learning and wellbeing of pupils was a real balance as learners had already been disrupted and it was felt that being in school was important for both their emotional and physical wellbeing. It was added that the priority was to ensure learners stayed within their respective school settings. There would be instances where learners may need to work from home and a great deal of work has been done on blended learning should the need arise, however, focus was on maintaining face to face learning.

The Chair thanked the officers for the verbal update and felt it was important that these updates are provided in order to keep our constituents up to date.

**No. 7**      **EDUCATION SERVICES - MAIN SELF-EVALUATION REPORT (SER)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education outlined the report, which provided Members of the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the findings of ongoing self-evaluation processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners.

The Corporate Director spoke to the report and detailed the comprehensive self-evaluation process, which helped to identify those areas where progress has been made and where further improvement was required. It was noted that the detailed findings were contained in the Main SER, which was attached as at appendix 2 and the Corporate Director referred the Members of the Scrutiny Committee to the three inspection areas of the LGES inspection framework. The Corporate further provided an overview of the areas where good progress had been made and areas where further improvement was required as outlined in the report.

In conclusion, the Corporate Director acknowledged that the Main SER document was a very lengthy working document, which covered all of the LGES framework. The document provided the context and data to evidence progress and inform self-evaluative commentary. However, it was intended to update the Summary SER document for future self-evaluation reports and this will enable Members to focus specifically on key priorities. Therefore, the Corporate Director suggested that Members consider the following areas as lines of enquiry for the scrutiny process, in line with the corporate impact assessment as detailed in Appendix 4.

- Recovery and renewal linked to academic progress;
- support for vulnerable learners;
- ALN reform/Curriculum reform;
- learner wellbeing; and,
- collaborative working to support learners, particularly with

schools.

The Corporate Director Education invited questions from Members of the Scrutiny Committee at this juncture.

A Member noted that although the gender gap was mentioned in the report there was no area for improvement and it was asked if this was area to be considered.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the topics covered in the report was not an exhaustive list and summarised in the report, although, gender information could be found in the main Self Evaluation Report.

A Member referred to the accuracy of targets and outcomes outlined in the report as precise data was not being provided. The Member felt that it was important to monitor this information to ensure pupils had not slipped due to the pandemic and target settings was accurate.

The Corporate Director Education informed that in line with the School Development Plans across the schools, the targets set are ambitious, realistic and deliverable. The Corporate Director advised that work was being undertaken in conjunction with the EAS for schools had been identified as needing additional support in a graduated fashion. This work was a key strand of activity in the Recovery and Renewal Plan to ensure the base line data was recalibrated so data focused on attention going forward.

Councillor M. Day left the meeting at this juncture.

Concerns were raised in relation to predicted grades as the pandemic had greatly affected our schools and it was hoped that our vulnerable learners had the appropriate support. It was important that although this data was not available at the present time it be made available to the Scrutiny Committee in order for Members to monitor the situation.

The Corporate Director Education suggested a report could be presented which detailed the evidence on how the appropriate judgement was arrived. In terms of the effects of the pandemic, secondary schools managed KS4 centre determined grades processes well. The Corporate Director added that there had not been many appeals against the grades awarded, therefore, it was

felt that there was a balanced understanding of our learners.

In response to concerns raised in relation to the number of young people attending further education outside Blaenau Gwent as the academic courses was not available. The Corporate Director Education confirmed that it was intended to organise a member briefing with Coleg Gwent to provide the latest position and the Corporate Director agreed to raise this matter with Coleg Gwent at the next Post 16 Strategic Partnership Board.

A Member also asked for information on admissions in secondary schools outside of Blaenau Gwent and the Corporate Director agreed to provide the inward and outward migration data from secondary schools.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and acknowledged that effective self-evaluation is an on-going process (Option 1).

**No. 8**      **INCLUSION STRATEGY AND REVIEW (2021-2022)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education spoke in detail to the report and outlined the key points.

It was noted that an extensive consultation process had been undertaken with Pen y Cwm. A Member felt that it would be beneficial to establish a focus group of like-minded parents and asked if this could be explored.

The Corporate Director advised that the views of both parents and pupils will feature within the development of the strategy.

A Member referred to the Service Level Agreement and hoped that it was a live document which had sign up from everyone as it was important that Coleg Gwent was involved to make them aware.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the review of the Inclusion Service was agreed to ensure that the requirements of the ALN Act are met, this will include reviewing relevant resourcing, structures, job descriptions and ensuring that relevant arrangements are in place to fulfil the needs of the ALN

	Act (Option 2).	
<b>No. 9</b>	<p><b><u>EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN REVIEW</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change advised that the report provided the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with an overview Education Accessibility Strategy Review process and associated timeline. The Service Manager added that the revised Strategy would be implemented from September 2022 and outlined in detail the strong progress which had been made against the Strategy along with associated actions between 2017 and 2021.</p> <p>The Service Manager further spoke in detail to the report and outlined the current context, alignment with the administration of medicines and medical needs as well as the financial implications on the budget.</p> <p>The Committee welcomed the reported and was pleased that Blaenau Gwent was leading the way.</p> <p>Councillor Summers left the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the information therein be noted (Option 1).</p>	
<b>No. 10</b>	<p><b><u>HOME TO SCHOOL AND POST 16 TRANSPORT POLICY REVIEW 2022 - 2023</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Service Manager for Education and Business Change provided a detailed overview of the report and outlined the key points as noted in the report.</p> <p>Concerns were raised around the travel distance for children and it was felt that additional resources should be available for school transport and a Member felt that this needed to be reviewed. The Officer advised that an extensive review had been undertaken and</p>	



Blaenau Gwent's existing limits are more generous than the statutory limits, however, the policy would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Further concerns were raised about public transport, which was late on occasions and the Service Manager for Education and Business Change advised that the Authority was aware of these issues and although the Authority only provided travel grants for pupils, the concerns had been escalated to the appropriate transport providers in order to address the issue.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and approved the Policy in its current format, although it was recommended to the Executive that a review of the Policy be undertaken next year (Option 2).

**No. 11**

**FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 19TH OCTOBER 2021**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education advised that KS4 data would not be available to share with Scrutiny at the next meeting and following discussions the Committee AGREED that Pupil Exclusion report be included on next month's agenda as it was a statutory item.

In terms of 'helping elected members get to know our schools' it was felt that at present there was a great deal of pressure on schools it and was felt that this was not the right time to pursue this activity.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

The Committee, subject to the foregoing, AGREED that the report be accepted and the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021 with the aforementioned amendments (Option 1).