

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: SPECIAL EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2022**

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

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

Councillors: J. Holt  
D. Bevan  
M. Cook  
M. Day  
L. Elias  
S. Healy  
J. Hill  
J.C. Morgan  
J.P. Morgan  
B. Summers  
D. Wilkshire

**Co-opted Member**

T. Baxter

**AND:** Corporate Director of Education  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Service Manager Inclusion  
Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change  
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 G. Collier, C. Meredith and T. Smith.</p> <p>Head of School Improvement &amp; Inclusion Service Manager Young People &amp; Partnerships</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST 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>COVID UPDATE POSITION IN EDUCATION AND ACROSS THE SCHOOL ESTATE</u></b></p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair the Corporate Director of Education gave a verbal Covid update position in education and across the school estate.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education informed Members that currently there were 584 positive cases per 100,000 population, placing Blaenau Gwent fifth across Wales in relation to Covid cases. The level remains high but was down significantly compared to the end of the new year. The Gwent Incident Management team agreed that the schools alert level remains in the very high risk category. The number of cases among school children had increased up to 186 positive cases and 81 staff had been affected by Covid, that was 6.5% of the overall workforce within schools.</p> <p>Blaenau Gwent's position with the Welsh Government categorisation on a RAG status was currently Green as most schools had retained face to face learning. However, recently four schools had introduced elements of blended learning.</p> <p>The Welsh Government Education Minister had issued a letter to all schools outlining that from 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2022 there would be a national move to alert level 0. There would be a cautious phased and planned approach across schools moving forward. He advised that the Welsh Government had reduced the self-isolation period for positive cases to five days.</p>	

Schools were expected to continue to use the Schools Infection Control Framework in relation to local school implementation around positive cases.

Qualification Wales had confirmed plans to hold examinations for both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 learners in the summer term. There was an intention to adjust the examination grade boundaries to reflect that many learners had been subject to disrupted teaching and learning over the last two years and this had been broadly welcomed across the Education sector in Wales.

In response to a Member's question, the Corporate Director of Education reassured the Member that with regard to the Welsh Government School Infection Control Framework a localised implementation was expected. The Local Authority was supporting schools where they had to take decisions around blended learning in relation to communication with parents and health and safety requirements.

With regard to licenses and digitally disadvantaged learners, the Corporate Director said the transition of equipment from those learners that had left education and those learners entering statutory education was being managed and running relatively smoothly. The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change confirmed the process was operating smoothly and they were undertaking regular reviews. Usage and demand for both the mi-fi units and devices had decreased considerably over the course of the autumn term as schools had sought to provide continuity of learning on site, but they were regularly monitoring the situation and working very closely with schools around implementation.

**No. 5**

**EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 were submitted.

The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.

<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2021</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>Item 10 - Management of Pupil Places and the School Estate 2020/21</u></b></p> <p>The Service Manager, Education Transformation &amp; Business Change explained they were working with schools annually to review any capacity issues they had and adapt accordingly, looking at self-help schemes, developing action plans to reduce surplus places and also ensure that there were sufficient places for growth going forward.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>CORPORATE DIRECTOR'S REPORT OF EDUCATION SERVICES</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which presented the Corporate Director of Education's Spring and Summer Terms Report (2021).</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member felt that progress around the seven recommendations on the last Estyn report should have been included in this report. He raised concerns regarding performance data, the Welsh Government had suspended the publication of Key Stage 4 performance measures in 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years stating that qualification awards data would not be used to report on attainment, but that data was included in this report. The Corporate Director of Education explained that progress against the seven recommendations highlighted by Estyn had previously been shared with Members as part of the self-evaluation report. This could also be included within future Corporate Director's Report of Education Services. In relation to performance data the information presented in the report was not attributable to any school and would only</p>	

be used for self-evaluation purposes and not for wider accountability issues. The Director explained that this information was via centre determined grades and was not comparable but did an assessment to move forward and provides a baseline of current performance.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Governing Body at the River Centre, the Director said that Members would be aware from the Improving Schools report that over the last 12 months the River Centre had formally become a school causing concern. As part of the Local Authority powers of intervention they had appointed additional LA Governors, including an LA Chair of Governors which had strengthened the Governing Body significantly. The Director felt assured that the current Governing Body were starting to take steps around admissions, placement of learners and consideration around school development planning to improve the setting for children and young people.

With regard to reporting progress on the new curriculum, the Director said that from September 2022 elements of the initial changes around the curriculum for Wales would be introduced and confirmed that updates around ALN reform, curriculum reform and qualifications reform would become a formal part of the reporting mechanisms moving forward into the new academic year.

The Chair commented that close working with the Social Services Directorate in relation to the new ALN bill should be expanded upon, such as social workers being accessible at schools. The Director said that between the Director of Social Services Annual report and this report they would be able to demonstrate cross directorate working that would be strengthened across both education and social care, particularly as they were dealing with the same children and young people in both community and school settings.

A Member welcomed closer working with the Social Services Directorate particularly around health and well-being as some children with issues such as behavioural problems, eating disorders and mental health issues had been waiting over 18 months for appointments with consultants. The Corporate Director of Education said the situation around collaboration with health services had been

	<p>particularly difficult due to the pandemic. Many services had been under pressure and one of those service areas was CAMHSs, the Director gave assurances that they would continue to work closely with health colleagues to support children and young people. The work of the Youth Services counselling service also ensured that emotional well-being considerations were at the forefront of the work undertaken with children and young people, taking preventative approaches.</p> <p>A Member referred to page 54 – Risk Description EDDRR1 ‘Failure of schools in Blaenau Gwent to adapt and change accordingly to the requirements of the new curriculum and national agenda of the Welsh Government as laid out in the National reform agenda document "Education for Wales: Our national Mission” – and felt this paragraph should be reworded as many schools were working continuously on the new curriculum. The Director explained that this was the risk associated with schools failing to adapt but agreed to revise the wording of this paragraph to avoid and misunderstanding of terminology.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinised the information detailed within the Corporate Director of Education’s Spring/Summer terms 2021 report and contributed to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.</p>	Director of Education
No. 8	<p><b><u>EDUCATION DIRECTORATE – RECOVERY AND RENEWAL PLAN</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education, the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion and the Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change, which was presented to provide Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the updated Recovery and Renewal Action Plan (Appendix 3), and the updated One Page Overview (Appendix 4), which address the Education Directorate’s identified priorities for recovery and renewal, as part of the corporate response to the COVID-19 situation.</p>	

	<p>The Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>The Director of Education responded to questions raised:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The latest position regarding Estyn regulatory activity was that local authority inspections would continue but school based inspection activity would not start until after February half term.</li> <li>• With regard to local authority comparisons, due to the relaxation of performance measures they were unable to benchmark at this point in time and were not looking to currently provide performance information that would consider either family of schools or family of local authorities as that data was not readily available.</li> <li>• Currently absenteeism was approaching 6.5% of the workforce within schools but only a few Headteachers had been affected by Covid.</li> <li>• With regard to car parking at school sites, the Service Manager said there was a traffic management working group in place to look at key issues at individual school sites and schools were prioritised on the basis of risk and safety and were on a rota for the traffic enforcement process. They worked closely with individual schools and Highways to look at traffic management plans and mitigation measures for each of those schools.</li> </ul> <p>A Member referred to page 74 - School Accountability Services and commented that EAS Challenge Advisors in schools had now been replaced with School Improvement Partners. The Service Manager would ensure this was updated on future reports.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report, associated documentation and proposed course of action be accepted.</p>	<p>Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change</p>
<p><b>No. 9</b></p>	<p><b><u>YOUTH SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020 – 2021</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager, Young People and Partnerships which was</p>	

presented to provide Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the work of the Youth Service.

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

A Member referred to paragraph 2.3 and enquired regarding progress on youth club developments in Brynmawr. The Director said restructuring was being undertaken with the Detached Youth Work team to ensure the right people were appointed with the right skill sets. The intention was to take the services to community settings that young people were more comfortable with and work with them on street corners etc., this would increase the reach of the service and would impact areas without youth clubs such as Brynmawr.

A Member commented that Youth Services provided a fantastic service that worked well and was needed in all towns throughout the borough. She felt that young people only wanted a safe place with shelter to gather and outreach workers did an excellent job interacting with young people on their level.

A Member raised concerns regarding the risk to future funding for the Youth Services. The Director of Education said work was currently being undertaken on securing future Shared Prosperity Funding. The Member commented that the Youth Services team were doing an excellent job and needed to be supported to secure future funding for the service, as it was important to do more for young people throughout the borough.

A Member referred to paragraph 6.1.1 youth homelessness. The Director of Education said the number of cases of young people dependent upon friends and family to facilitate accommodation had increased due to the pandemic, but was not identified as actual homelessness. It had become an increasing problem across the borough and they were monitoring the situation closely as it did impact upon life chances for young people. With regard to priority housing for them, the Director said that the Service Manager Young People & Partnerships did often refer young people to Housing colleagues.



The Chair commented on the excellent work that had been undertaken by the Service Manager, Young People and Partnerships and her team regarding period poverty. The Director also acknowledged the work of the Service Manager, Education Transformation and Business Change who was leading on this strand of work outside of community settings and the work that was taking place directly within schools.

With regard to school holiday activities, the Service Manager, Education Transformation and Business Change reminded Members of the School Holiday Enrichment programme (SHEP) initiative and said they worked closely with the Community Services Directorate and schools to identify settings that meet the criteria and have suitable staff resources and facilities to accommodate the provision for school holiday activities.

A Member requested a breakdown of partners that the Authority worked with regarding Summer holiday activities. The Director of Education agreed to provide the information and informed Members that the Detached Youth Work team was partially funded by Gwent Police.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considered and accepted the report.

Director of Education