

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: SPECIAL EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2019**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER**

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

Councillors: J. Millard  
D. Bevan  
M. Cook  
L. Elias  
W. Hodgins  
C. Meredith  
J.C. Morgan  
K. Pritchard  
K. Rowson  
T. Smith  
B. Summers  
S. Thomas

**Co-opted Members**

T. Baxter  
A. Williams

**Executive Member - Education**

Councillor J. Collins

**AND:** Corporate Director of Education  
Head of Education Transformation  
Service Manager Inclusion  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Education Transformation Manager  
Youth Services Manager  
Service Manager Performance & Democratic / Advisor

**ALSO: EAS Representatives**  
Ed Pryce, Assistant Director - Strategy & Policy  
Geraint Willington, Director – Resource, Business and Governance

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
	<p><b><u>BEREAVEMENT</u></b></p> <p>It was with sadness that the Chair informed Members of the death of Phil Hackling a former Blaenau Gwent employee within the Housing Service. Members stood and observed a one minute silence as a mark of respect.</p>	
No. 1	<p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G.A. Davies and J. Holt.</p>	
No. 3	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><b><u>EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT SERVICES (EAS) VALUE FOR MONEY REPORT, FINANCIAL YEAR 2018/19</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education and the Director – Resources, Business and Governance (EAS) who presented the report which described the outcomes of an external report on the value for money (VfM) of the Regional Service in 2018/19.</p> <p>A Member referred to the external consultants conclusion and felt that assurances were needed that to achieve the desired educational outcomes a collective effort from Executive and Scrutiny Members, the EAS and Schools was needed to drive further improvements. The responsibility and accountability rested with everyone. The Executive Member for Education offered a level of assurance and confirmed that a collective approach would be used.</p>	

The Director of Education gave examples of performance improvements such as language and literature for 7 year olds, A\* grades and level 6 English had improved. Working jointly in an holistic way had demonstrated clear improvements with the Directorates Service Plan. There was a range of services committed to joint working and raising pupil ambitions.

A Member enquired if the emerging picture of Blaenau Gwent was mirrored across the whole EAS region and felt that concerns needed to be addressed. The Director of Education said regular monthly meetings were held and any emerging concerns could be raised. Discussions also included areas that needed additional challenge to schools. Wider group meetings were held every half term between EAS officers, Inclusion officers, Youth Service, Legal officers and officers from Organisational Development, all shared relevant information to provide additional support where needed and hold the EAS to account.

The EAS representative commented that communication and information was shared at half termly meetings between the five regions with a view to a shared strategy and shared knowledge of individual schools to ensure that appropriate support and challenge had been provided to secure the necessary pace of improvement. The meetings were recorded and actions reviewed at the next meeting.

The Member referred to the differences in school performance. The Director of Education said that the Governor structure included the five local authorities Directors of Education to consider and challenge EAS inspection reports.

In response to a Member's question regarding the 2% ISB being put in the general reserve, the Executive Member for Education advised that this would be part of the wider discussion on the Council budget.

A Member commented that he welcomed the report but expressed concerns regarding educational outcomes in the EAS regions and enquired regarding the proportion of Challenge Advisors appointed to primary and secondary schools and the Mentor support for secondary schools and

	<p>requested a breakdown of these figures. The EAS representative said</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there was a commitment to capacity building through Mentor support demonstrated by the spending of some £167,000 to fund the programme;</li> <li>• there was an acknowledgment of secondary school performance.</li> <li>• National categorisation - the EAS was accurate and robust in their categorisation with five local authorities support.</li> <li>• Challenge Advisors – changes within secondary schools had been owing to national changes as well as strategic decisions.</li> <li>• Significant strength in leadership in primary schools.</li> </ul> <p>A Member requested percentages and numbers of Challenge Advisers supporting primary and secondary schools. The EAS representative would provide the numbers requested.</p> <p>A Member raised concerns around the ISB budget for schools, PDG and FSM had dropped and felt that the Executive Member needed to be aware of this issue. A Member commented that these issues would be considered at a future budget meeting.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members provided feedback thereby engaged in self-evaluation processes prior to recommending for approval by the Executive.</p>	<p>EAS representative</p>
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>YOUTH SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2018-2019</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Youth Services Manager.</p> <p>The Youth Services Manager presented the report which provided an update on the performance of the Youth Service and for Members to scrutinise the impact of the service.</p> <p>In response to a Member’s question regarding the potential end of European funding, the Youth Services Manager said that there was a potential risk that European funding would</p>	

	<p>cease, however, part of her role was to look at opportunities and explore funding routes such as the Big Lottery and City Deal.</p> <p>A Member raised concerns regarding duplication of some work. The Youth Services Manager responded that the Youth Support grant received from the Welsh Government enabled the service to appoint additional youth workers to support young people who need additional support with their emotional and mental health. The Manager emphasised that it was about understanding and recognising how youth working can contribute to improving mental health in young people and not about duplication of work. A Youth Homelessness Co-ordinator had been appointed to look on a local level what issues were happening in Blaenau Gwent with the focus on those young people at risk of experiencing homelessness and mental health.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding value for money in relation to the Duke of Edinburgh project, the Youth Services Manager said that Blaenau Gwent held the licence for groups such as local football and rugby teams to set up their own Duke of Edinburgh project, however, schools held their own licence.</p> <p>A Member enquired regarding the maximum age of young people the Youth Service supported. The Youth Services Manager said that the Youth Service co-ordinated the 11-18 Counselling Service. There was a legal requirement to support young people up to the age of 25 and monies had been ring-fenced to meet this duty.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely to accept the report as provided.</p> <p>Councillor Steve Thomas left the meeting at this juncture.</p>	
<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>MANAGEMENT OF PUPIL PLACES AND THE SCHOOL ESTATE 2018/19</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Education Transformation Manager.</p>	

The Education Transformation Manager presented the report which provided Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the management of pupil places focussing on both processes and outcomes.

In response to a Member's question regarding capacity issues and pupil projections in special schools, the Education Transformation Manager said that the Inclusion team would look at capacity in special schools re pupil projections. There had been significant demand for places at the special school and work was being undertaken on the consultation document for expansion to accommodate pupil numbers.

The Member requested that information regarding the special school be added to future reports for Members consideration. The Education Transformation Manager said a report would be included in the forward work programme and information on the special school would be included in future reporting.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

Another Member enquired how the Education Transformation team would address surplus places. The Education Transformation Manager said that work on the reduction of surplus places action plan was being developed for schools and the team would look at projected pupil numbers on current trends, explore teaching arrangements, look at pupil population figures in future years and introduce short term measures to monitor pupil numbers.

The Education team work closely with schools to monitor capacity in line with projections and focused on what was needed for that particular school. The team would look at self-help for schools to manage their spaces more efficiently.

A Member enquired if the team received information from the Planning Department in relation to new residential developments. The Education Transformation Manager said that the team looked at current approved developments and projected proposals and would

Education  
Transformation  
Manager

incorporate approved developments into the team's projections.

The Committee FURTHER AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2, namely that the Scrutiny Committee considered the report and provided comments relating to improvements that can be made to the current monitoring processes.