

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2020**

**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  
J. Holt  
C. Meredith  
J.C. Morgan  
K. Pritchard  
K. Rowson  
T. Smith  
B. Summers  
S. Thomas

**Co-opted Member**

A. Williams

**AND:** Corporate Director of Education  
Head of Education Transformation  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Youth Services Manager  
Press & Publicity Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

**ALSO: EAS Representatives**  
Ed Pryce, EAS  
Sarah Davies, Principal Challenge Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
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 Councillor G.A. Davies.</p> <p><b><u>Co-opted Member</u></b> T. Baxter</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 &amp; LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 15<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2019</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>Item 5 – Action Sheet – 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019</u></b></p> <p>Improving Schools Programme - A Member again raised concerns that all Members had not received the correspondence from the Executive Member for Education in relation to a meeting in a Blaenau Gwent School. The Chair confirmed that he had spoken to the Head of Democratic Services who had clarified why the Action had been completed and a letter from the Executive Member</p>	

would be sent to the Leader of the Labour Group to address this issue.

The Leader of the Labour Group confirmed he had received a letter from the Executive Member for Education which had addressed the Labour Groups concerns, however, he felt it was not appropriate to share the private correspondence with the Committee.

The Chair advised Members that he would enquire if the correspondence from the Executive Member to the Leader of the Labour Group could be shared with all Members of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

### **Item 7 – Pupil Exclusions**

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Education clarified that some exclusions did carry on from key stage 3 through to key stage 4 and could potentially be the same pupil.

### **Forward Work Programme – 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2020**

A Member referred to the Forward Work Programme for 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 and the request for the EAS to prepare a six month update on projected results for all schools so that Members could be kept fully informed and enquired regarding a timeframe.

The EAS representative said that key stage 4 target setting had significantly changed since level 1. Secondary schools no longer had to set prescribed targets, they could be bespoke to specific cohorts, Challenge Advisors would monitor this, however, it would be very difficult to aggregate this in a meaningful way, currently there was a period of flux and it was impossible to predict a timeframe.

The Member referred to categorisation points and said that the Welsh Government had made many changes to education over the last 8 years and Members needed to be kept fully informed. The EAS representative responded that as there had been a long period of change a Members workshop could be arranged. The Director of Education

	<p>said there would be interim measures in place for the next three years and the Directorate were supporting teachers as best they could by relaying messages regarding curriculum changes and associated reforms.</p> <p>The Chair requested that a Members briefing session be arranged with the EAS.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	EAS Representative
No. 6	<p><b><u>EAS BUSINESS PLAN AND LOCAL AUTHORITY ANNEX 2020-2021 (DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION)</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented for Members to consider the full contents of the draft EAS Business Plan 2020-2021 and the Local Authority Annex 2020-2021, as part of the regional consultation process.</p> <p>The EAS representative presented the report and highlighted the main points contained therein, including that the EAS Improvement Strand 3 – Robust assessment, evaluation and accountability mechanisms, supporting a self-improvement system could be covered in more detail in a Members briefing session.</p> <p>A Member requested a breakdown on the numbers of challenge advisors for both primary and secondary schools and enquired regarding timescales for staff with capability issues to show improvements of results. The EAS representative said that a breakdown of Challenge Advisors would be provided. The EAS were not the sole provider of support to schools, but their emphasis was on the quality of that support and brokering the right support to match the school. Ultimately capability issues were for the Governing Body to determine.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED this course of action.</p> <p>The Director of Education commented that capability procedures were in place and were based on individual cases with an appropriate supportive approach for members of staff to continue to improve. It was evidence based in line with policy and Organisational Development</p>	EAS representative

procedures. The Member felt that a timescale for improvement should be in place with the EAS and Governing Bodies both involved to ensure improvements were made.

A Member commented that secondary schools needed specialist Challenge Advisors. The changes this year had been important and focused on the School Development Plan and moving towards improving targets. School to school working needed to be effective to help drive curriculum changes forward and enquired if all schools were taking part in school to school working. The Challenge Advisor said there had been a cultural change regarding school to school working, whereby a whole school wraps around another school as a model with Challenge Advisors support. There had been significant improvement in which schools had put themselves forward to engage as Learning Network schools and to encourage other schools to engage.

Councillor Wayne Hodgins left the meeting at this juncture.

In response to a Member's concern in relation to succession planning within the broader leadership team, the EAS representative assured Members that this was a general comment and not aimed at Blaenau Gwent. There was a strong working relationship with the Local Authority and Blaenau Gwent was proactive in its intervention with schools.

A Member referred to a Network meeting and said that Governors needed a greater understanding of issues. The EAS representative said there had been additional meetings focussing on a new model due next year. Schools had expressed an interest in the cluster model and the EAS would provide the training models. Two clusters from Blaenau Gwent had applied for this model and would be informed if they had been successful in due course. A Member said that the Tredegar cluster was unaware of this. The EAS representative said that notification had been forwarded to the Chair of Governors and Head Teachers. He commented that sometimes the detail could be lost in the volume of communication received.

A Member referred to the Business Plan and enquired what the impact would be if one authority pulled out. The EAS responded that the five authorities recognised the financial efficiencies of working collectively. If this scenario came about the EAS Financial Director would have to address the issue. The Director of Education commented that Blaenau Gwent would find it difficult not working collectively with other local authorities.

A Member referred to retaining a high bar for the identification of those who can provide support for other schools and had concerns on the impact this would have on the school staff had been seconded from. The EAS representative said that in relation to capacity of schools the Governing Bodies would decide if staff could be seconded to provide support to other schools. If a school wanted to withdraw from this process, then another school could be found in order to broker the best candidate.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report and Business Plan be accepted.

**No. 7**

**BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION SERVICES DRAFT  
SELF-EVALUATION FINDINGS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented to provide Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the findings of ongoing self-evaluation processes undertaken in the Education Directorate, with partners and across the Council.

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

Members referred to Appendix 1 and the pupil well-being slide and requested if there was any evaluation on impact to support the statements. The Director of Education said a whole wealth of information was captured combined with anonymised case studies in relation to the school counselling services. The Youth Services Manager commented that wellbeing had improved and this information was provided in annual reports to the Welsh Government and in FADES, however, exclusion data could

not be captured as it was confidential. Counselling services engaged with over 7,000 pupils and the numbers were increasing, the facts and figures reported demonstrated how support was tailored and adapted accordingly. Members understood the wealth of information behind the figures but felt that footnotes on background information was needed. The Youth Services Manager said that the Counselling Service data could be shared with Members.

Youth  
Services  
Manager

With regard to higher levels of language acquisition in very young children in the Early Years, a Member commented that they would like to see evidence that those children accessing Flying Start services were having 'the best start in life' compared to those children not in Flying Start areas. The Director said that only 1/3 of children were able to access a Flying Start setting but there were concerns for those children between 3-5 who did not attend an Early Years setting and had no preparation for school or language acquisition.

A Member enquired regarding improving school attendance levels and the impact of families taking pupils on holiday in school term time. The Director said that attendance was one of the key links to achievement but it was at the Head Teachers discretion to authorise a pupil's absence, however, the Local Authority would discourage absence in term time. The Education Welfare Service and the Local Authority were both aware which individual schools needed additional support in this area and were working to address this issue.

The Chair enquired if the consequences of pupils being absent in term time was included in the staff newsletter and whether any fines had been issued. The Director said that graphs showing how the decline in attendance was linked to achievement had been included in the newsletter and was also as part of the Callio project and this could be refreshed. She confirmed that some fixed penalty notices had been issued and would provide Members with the number of fines issued.

Director of  
Education

Councillor Derrick Bevan left the meeting at this juncture.

A Member referred to the high Elected Home Education rates. The Director of Education said that an action plan

	<p>was in place for those individual pupils who needed additional support. There was commitment from Head Teachers to work with the Department to identify pupils on the cusp of becoming EHE.</p> <p>A Member enquired if parents opted for EHE to avoid heavy fines for non-attendance at school and requested a Members briefing session be held on school attendance. The Member briefing session would include information on the total number of fines issued to parents.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED this course of action.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that the report as presented be accepted.</p>	<p>Education Welfare Officer</p>
<p><b>No. 8</b></p>	<p><b><u>SCHOOL CATEGORISATION</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented to inform Scrutiny Members of the Blaenau Gwent school categorisation profile for 2020.</p> <p>The Strategic Education Improvement Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>At the request of the Chair the EAS representative gave a brief explanation of Steps 1, 2 and 3.</p> <p>Step 1 – Redundant / no longer used  Step 2 – Leadership  Step 3 – Schools requiring support with training and leadership</p> <p>A Member commented that parents needed to be reminded that a school with a red categorisation was not a failing school but needed support in relation to changes in leadership etc. The EAS representative explained that it was important that School Governors inform the community regarding the level of support a school required.</p> <p>A Member referred to schools where there had been a change of leadership but no improvements had yet been</p>	



	<p>seen. The EAS representative confirmed that schools with an Estyn categorisation would need to have red level categorisation of support in relation to changes in leadership.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2, namely that the report as provided be accepted.</p>	
<p><b>No. 9</b></p>	<p><b><u>FINAL PERFORMANCE KEY STAGE 4 2019</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education and the Strategic Education Improvement Manager which was presented to provide Members with an update on the final performance information in line with agreed reporting arrangements for Key Stage 4 performance at Local Authority level.</p> <p>The Director of Education spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member referred to the contribution of non GCSE subjects. The EAS representative commented that Head Teachers took the opportunity to have the best points, it was a balance of the two; GCSE and non GCSE.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report as provided be accepted.</p> <p>Councillor Steve Thomas left the meeting at this juncture.</p>	
<p><b>No. 10</b></p>	<p><b><u>INSPIRE 2 ACHIEVE AND WORK PERFORMANCE REPORT JANUARY–DECEMBER 2019</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Youth Service Manager which was presented to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the local Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF).</p> <p>The Youth Services Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p>	

In response to a Member's question regarding young people supported into employment, the Youth Services Manager said that the team followed up on young people supported into employment and the young people mentioned in the report were currently still in employment.

A Member raised concerns that the Department was heavily dependent on grant funding and enquired regarding funding at the end of the programme in 2022. European funding would no longer be available and the Council budget would need to be looked at going forward as not all funding was passported into the schools budgets. The Member requested that the Executive Committee consider budget implications.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

The Chair commented that as funding was due to end in 2022 there was a risk that staff would seek other employment. The Youth Services Manager responded that staff were committed to their role and were used to working in grant funded settings, however, this may be an issue in the last year of funding.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinised the information detailed within the report and contributed by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

**No. 11** **BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR NURSERY AND STATUTORY EDUCATION 2021/22**

Consideration was given to the report of the Education Transformation Manager which was presented to outline the outcome of the annual review and consultation process associated with the Blaenau Gwent Admission Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education.

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

	<p>In response to a Member's question regarding catchment areas and capacity at Pen-y-Cwm Special School, the Head of Education Transformation reported that currently there were no specific catchment areas for Special Schools, however, it was intended to bring a report forward on the capacity at Pen-y-Cwm school and the report was scheduled into the Forward Work Programme for spring / summer 2020.</p> <p>The Chair commented that consistent implementation of the Admissions Policy was key to successful delivery.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the policy document be accepted.</p>	<p>Head of Education Transformation/ Scrutiny Officer</p>
<p><b>No. 12</b></p>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 29<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2020</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Members agreed that a Special Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee meeting would be arranged for early April, 2020.</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 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2020 be approved.</p>	