

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT:** **EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER, 2020**

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

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

Councillors: J. Holt  
D. Bevan  
M. Cook  
M. Day  
W. Hodgins  
C. Meredith  
J.C. Morgan  
J.P. Morgan  
L. Parsons  
T. Smith  
B. Summers  
S. Thomas

**Co-opted Member**

T. Baxter

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

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

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
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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. Collier and L. Elias.</p> <p><b><u>Co-opted Member</u></b> A. Williams</p>	
No. 3	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>Councillors Wayne Hodgins and Lee Parsons declared an interest in Item 9 – Outcome of the Leisure Review and Performance Monitoring for the Aneurin Leisure Trust.</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> September, 2020 were submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p>A Member reported that two points had been omitted from the previous minutes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular updates regarding COVID-19 within Education and the County Borough.</li> <li>• Regular COVID-19 testing for teachers.</li> </ul> <p>The Interim Corporate Director of Education said he would address these issues under item 10 Education Directorate Response to COVID-19.</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> SEPTEMBER, 2020</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 was submitted.</p>	

	The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 15<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 2020</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Chair spoke to the report and invited comments from Members.</p> <p><b><u>Management of Pupil Places and the School Estate 2019/20</u></b></p> <p>A Member requested that information regarding schools with increasing numbers of surplus places be included in the report. The Interim Corporate Director of Education said the report would focus on surplus places and also include where there were sufficiency issues in schools.</p> <p><b><u>Improving Schools</u></b></p> <p>In relation to improving schools a Member enquired if all the information and dialogue would be included in the report to look at how schools were improving. The Interim Corporate Director of Education assured Members that the report would cover schools causing concern and Members would be fully appraised of progress made.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 be approved.</p> <p>Tim Baxter, Co-opted Member, left the meeting at this juncture.</p>	
<b>No. 7</b>	<p><b><u>OUTCOMES 2019-2020: FOUNDATION PHASE, KEY STAGE 2, KEY STAGE 3, KEY STAGE 4</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education and the Assistant Director EAS which was presented to inform Members of Welsh Government: School Performance Reporting Arrangements for 2019-2020, provide an overview of national outcomes as context and provide anonymised local data where available.</p>	

The Assistant Director EAS spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein and advised Members that due to the pandemic the Welsh Government had cancelled all statutory data collections at foundation phase, key stage two and key stage 3 and relaxed the reporting arrangements from schools to local authorities so the data was not the same as in previous years.

In response to a Member's question regarding old data, the Assistant Director EAS said that the reason why there was no current update to this data was that the Welsh Government had suspended the processes for sharing that data back to local authorities.

A Member commented that the figures in the report did provide some information moving forward and felt that science needed to be improved in most secondary schools. He raised concerns that youngsters had not been able to sit exams in the summer and potentially this could happen again next year and enquired if extra support would be put in place for youngsters when they sit A level exams in two years' time. The Assistant Director EAS agreed with the Member's comment that learners had missed out on sitting exams and said learners would need additional support put in place by schools, even if schools were temporarily closed and would have to employ distance and blended learning either with the whole school or small cohorts within the school as they self-isolate. The well-being of learners was a priority to re-engage them with learning.

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

No. 8

**SUMMARY OF INSPECTION OUTCOMES FOR EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS – AUTUMN TERM 2019 AND SPRING TERM 2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education and Strategic Education Improvement Manager which was presented to provide Members with important performance monitoring information regarding the inspections undertaken by ESTYN of educational establishments.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager spoke to the report and gave an overview of the three schools inspected by ESTYN:-

- Brynmawr Foundation School
- Cwm Primary School
- Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg

A Member said that the two primary schools had received good reports but raised serious concerns regarding Brynmawr Foundation School in relation to important shortcomings particularly in literacy and numeracy and leadership management. The Principal Challenge Advisor EAS said the key fundamentals in this report were around leadership and teaching and learning. Leadership had been significantly strengthened at the school, the Headteacher had appointed a Deputy Headteacher and a further two additional assistant Headteachers. There had been a deficit of professional learning but she advised Members that during the pandemic the school had continued to engage with the EAS through professional learning. The school had engaged with the National Middle Leadership Development Programme for all of its middle leaders and its senior leaders were used as part of that facilitation team and this work was still ongoing. She assured Members that Brynmawr Foundation School had a very robust distance and blended learning plan which was being shared regionally. It was important for Members to know that the schools causing concern meetings had continued to ensure effective evaluation of the work on the ground and to identify professional learning needs.

The Interim Corporate Director of Education reiterated that SCC sessions with Brynmawr Foundation School and other schools causing concern had been held. Leadership at the school had been strengthened, but he felt that it would take time for improvements to impact on the school and would keep Members updated on the progress made.

In response to a Member's question regarding no library provision at the school, the Interim Director of Education said that there were schools that did not have an active 'normal' library, but learners were not disadvantaged as

they had access to this provision via either quiet spaces or through digital means.

Councillor Cook left the meeting at this juncture.

The Chair referred to the accelerated reader programme and felt it was beneficial for learners' wellbeing to have a quiet safe room to read and hold a physical book.

The Interim Corporate Director of Education said there were other opportunities within schools to ensure learners had environments in schools that were conducive to breakout periods, and this would also be taken forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme. Brynmawr Foundation School would be a priority project for investment as part of the Band B programme.

The Principal Challenge Advisor supported the Director's comments and said that although Brynmawr Foundation School did not have a dedicated library it used those resources widely across the school and within classroom settings. She reassured Members that as part of their development planning, the school was bringing accelerated reader into their school as part of the intervention work around literacy.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely the report as provided be accepted.

**No. 9**

**OUTCOME OF THE LEISURE REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR THE ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST**

Councillors Wayne Hodgins and Lee Parsons declared an interest in the following item and remained in the meeting.

Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education which was presented to provide Members with an update on the outcome of the Leisure Trust Review.

The Youth Services Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. She advised Members on the outcome of the Leisure Trust Review and

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clarified the client function was now aligned within the Education Portfolio. There was also an opportunity for Members to scrutinise the proposed future monitoring performance arrangements of the Aneurin Leisure Trust.

Councillor Clive Meredith left the meeting at this juncture.

The Chair enquired regarding the asset transfer for the Metropole Theatre in Abertillery. The Youth Services Manager said that this process had been put on hold due to the pandemic and was now scheduled to take place by April 2021.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Metropole, the Youth Services Manager said that it was currently in a holding situation by the Trust. They had made a successful application to the Arts Council, which now funded all the workforce at the Metropole until the end of March.

A Member enquired regarding any intended future closures of facilities being reported to this Committee, the Interim Director of Education said that as part of the recommendation a 6 monthly progress report would be presented to this Committee and would cover any implications associated with COVID-19 on leisure provision across the County Borough. There had been financial implications associated with loss of income, however, the Leisure Trust were reporting and were managing their loss of income through reducing expenditure associated with staffing implications and furlough etc. He felt that there was no reason at this point in time to be discussing potential loss of services.

A Member referred to previous Working Groups and Task and Finish groups on libraries whereby one of the recommendations had been for libraries to be used as community hubs and enquired if this had been taken up. The Interim Director of Education said the provision of community hubs across the County Borough was very much a part of the key strategic agenda. There would be benefits from both a user perspective and the library's perspective to ensure that this provision is protected moving forward. Libraries existed in most town centres and were supportive of community need, there was also potential for

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digital developments and to use the staff skill sets such as supporting people in relation to the provision of Revenue and Benefits applications, etc. He felt that this was the right approach and informed Members that work was ongoing to take advantage of those community settings.

The Youth Services Manager agreed with the Director's comments and added that the Trust were meeting fortnightly with the Council to develop this approach and all libraries were being considered.

A Member commented that the library in his Ward had a post office provision once a week. The Interim Director of Education said this was a prime example of how a community hub could work when co-located with library provision.

The Chair enquired regarding reporting arrangements, the Interim Director of Education confirmed that along with the 6 monthly progress reports, other reports may be presented by exception to this Committee throughout the year.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely the report's update and proposals for future reporting arrangements be accepted.

**No. 10**    **EDUCATION DIRECTORATE-RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director for Education which was presented to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the Education Directorate's response to the COVID-19 situation, particularly supporting the schools during the emergency period.

The Interim Corporate Director for Education spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. A verbal update had been delivered to September's Committee, however, this report provided more background context and a current view of the response.



In response to a Member's question regarding testing of school staff, the Education Transformation Manager said there were three testing methods:-

1. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board portal for access to testing.
2. Staff testing protocol within the local authority whereby schools and individual staff members were able to self-refer for tests on a daily basis. With priority access to testing centres including Rodney Parade in Newport.
3. Incident Management Team option with representation from Public Health Wales to look at significant clusters or potential outbreaks as a result of school based transmissions.

Effective processes were in place to ensure that staff could access testing within a timely manner. The staff testing protocol which was delivered via Civil Contingencies ensured that access to tests was on the same day as referral. The process had been fast and highly effective to date. The Education Transformation Manager reassured Members that as part of health and safety considerations all schools had Covid secure risk assessments, which were regularly reviewed when positive cases were identified within schools.

A Member enquired regarding the high transmission rates within the community and what measures were in place to combat transmission at school start and finish times. The Education Transformation Manager said that all schools had stringent measures in place including a visitor's protocol. Engagement with parents was ongoing either virtually or via the telephone and access to schools was restricted unless absolutely necessary. Handbooks and guidance had been issued to parents and staggered start times and one way systems at some sites had been introduced. Effective measures were in place to limit parent engagement on site and to ensure that parents moved offsite in a timely manner when collecting and dropping off pupils. The Council's Communications team supported schools with regular key messages to parents and raising awareness.

In response to a Member's question regarding an update on PPE, the Education Transformation Manager assured Members that there were no issues with shortages of PPE at any settings. There had been a national shortage in production and distribution of gloves in the early stages of the Pandemic but the Directorate had effectively planned and managed the allocation and distribution of PPE for all school sites and no school had been negatively affected.

The Interim Director of Education added that some funding from the Welsh Government for face coverings for pupils had been received, however, the funding was not sufficient to cover the cost of two face coverings per pupil and had been complemented by the Directorate.

The Education Transformation Manager informed Members that distribution of face coverings was based on availability. A second delivery was expected soon and all secondary pupils should have at least two face coverings for the remainder of the autumn term with an additional two face coverings being distributed early within the spring term.

A Member enquired regarding transport providers maintaining daily records of pupils' journeys to ensure they comply with the test, trace and protect strategy. The Education Transformation Manager said this was continuing and all data logged from the transport providers. This data was used as part of the contact tracing process for positive cases in schools, there were spot checks and quality assurance checks around that information to look at improvements to the recording of data and information within the transport provision.

A Member raised concerns regarding staff testing as they were on the frontline and felt that staff should be given the opportunity to be tested at least once a month. The Education Transformation Manager said that regular testing would go against Public Health Wales policy. Tests should only be accessed if staff were symptomatic. However, from a staffing perspective if there were significant concerns with regard to potential outbreaks the Directorate could instigate an Incident Management Team response and look at an approach via that means. But at this point in time the Directorate could not offer regular testing unless staff were

symptomatic or there were potential public health implications.

The Chair enquired with the increase of home tuition, if that impacted on domestic abuse incidents. The Interim Director of Education said that in the summer term EHE numbers stood at 54, since September that had increased by 28 learners and this was being monitored closely. With regard to domestic abuse, he assured Members that Operation Encompass had continued throughout the emergency period.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager said there had been an increase in the number and frequency of incidents involving individual pupils and they had continued to monitor the situation during lockdown arrangements. She confirmed that as part of the performance report an update would be provided at the next Joint Safeguarding Committee.

Councillor Wayne Hodgins left the meeting at this juncture.

A Member commented that with increased transmission rates, there were a number of youngsters who had been told to self-isolate who were not abiding by the guidance and enquired if the Education Directorate were liaising with Social Services and the Police regarding these issues. The Interim Director of Education had drafted correspondence to all parents across the county borough to highlight the current situation in terms of COVID-19. The correspondence covered a request for parents to consider compliance with the regulations around COVID-19, if there was a lack of compliance in a non-school setting, especially where learners were self-isolating, that would have an impact upon school settings. The Directorate had reinforced the importance of compliance with national lockdown firebreak regulations particularly in non-school settings.

The Education Transformation Manager said that where issues of non-compliance had been identified in relation to self-isolation, the Directorate worked closely with Environmental Health colleagues, the Youth Service and the Police to follow up and address any particular issues to limit the impact on schools. Documentation had been

Strategic  
Education  
Improvement  
Manager

strengthened to highlight the self-isolation periods and to give clarity regarding potential implications for non-compliance.

Councillor Bob Summers left the meeting at this juncture.

The Youth Services Manager informed Members that the usual Youth Workers had been deployed to work as Detached Teams in the towns working closely with the police. She reported that in the main young people were adhering to the lockdown and had an understanding of the consequences if rules were broken. She asked that Members contact her directly if there were any issues in a particular area.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager said that in relation to pupil safety regarding groups congregating and having a negative impact upon the running of the school, the Directorate could hold a Safer Schools meeting which could be called under the Crime and Disorder Act with a view to putting in place an appropriate plan for that particular setting.

The Chair raised concerns regarding transmission rates in relation to youths congregating whilst awaiting test results, he said a virtual meeting with Police had been held in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour.

Another Member reiterated concerns regarding parents not following the Council's and school advice in relation to their children self-isolating. There were instances of inside gatherings and he felt that parents needed to be responsible to avoid the spread of infection into schools. The Interim Director of Education said these issues had been discussed at Gold Command but they had little or no direct influence over parental and community based non-compliance issues. Where services were aware of non-compliance issues such as group gatherings or lack of social distancing, these issues could be reported to Environmental Health and where there were contraventions these would also be reported to the Police.

The Youth Services Manager reassured the Member that Youth teams were out in the community advising young

people of what was expected of them and were working closely with the police in communities.

The Chair commented that several incidents had been reported to the Police, the fire brigade had been called out twice and a class for autistic children at Bedwellty Park had been disrupted, but accepted that the Council were doing everything they could to address these issues.

The Education Transformation Manager said they were working closely with Environmental Health Officers, Community Safety and the Police and when issues were reported this was followed up by an Environmental Health visit with parents. Environmental Health were also looking at potential enforcement action where there were significant public health risks as a result of people not abiding by the self-isolation requirements. The Directorate was doing all it could to ensure public compliance with guidelines.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that Members scrutinised the information detailed within the report and recommend to the Executive Committee that the Directorate continues to work closely with all organisations, schools and the police in combating COVID-19.