

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – SPC Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching purpose of the Panel is to provide ongoing challenge to schools performance to ensure that *pupils in Swansea are receiving high quality education and the authority is meeting its objectives in relation to improving school standards and pupil attainment.*

2. Key Activities

The Panel is currently meeting on a monthly basis and the work completed since March 2020 includes:

- a) On the 12 March 2020, the Panel met with Pentrehafod Secondary School to look at how they work with pupils at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- b) On the 15 July, the Panel looked at the impacts of COVID on Education in Swansea.
- c) On the 22 October, the Panel discussed the return of pupils to Swansea schools and the Covid recovery plan for Education. The Panel also agreed their work programme for the remaining meetings of the 2020/21 council year.
- d) On the 19 November, the Panel met with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors for Waun Wen Primary School to discuss the wellbeing of pupils, as part of their watching brief on this issue. The Panel also looked at Elective Home Education, an issue highlighted for scrutiny by the Scrutiny Work Planning Conference.
- e) Over this period, the Panel has also kept up to date with individual school Estyn Inspections published and any advisory/practice documents.

3. Achievements / Impact

We have sent four letters to the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills since March 2020, which gave our views, raised concerns and made recommendations. Some of these include, for example:

Elective Home Education:

The Panel received an update on Elective Home Education, as referred by the Scrutiny Programme Committee in November. Concern had been expressed about the rising numbers of parents choosing to de-register their children from school since the COVID situation and the safeguarding implications. The Cabinet Member, Director of Education and Head of Service for the matter attended the Panel and outlined the current situation, our legal requirements and how we work with home educators and our partners to ensure children are safeguarded and are receiving a suitable education. The Panel were reassured by the activity that is taking place but did agree that a register of Home Educated pupils was needed, this was being considered by the Welsh Government. New statutory guidance from Welsh Government was consulted upon in October 2019 but is currently on hold as to COVID 19 responses took priority. We heard that Swansea is prepared to take on the requirements of the statutory guidance if implemented.

COVID updates relating to Education in the July and October meetings:

- The Panel heard that in early September the priority was to get as many pupils back to school as possible. They were told that the Welsh Government had given schools a period of grace until the 14 September when it was expected that all schools would be operational. The Panel were pleased to hear this was achieved successfully in Swansea. The Panel recognised this was down to the hard work of Headteacher's and school staff.
- We are pleased that Swansea is making provision for free school meals during the holiday periods between now and Easter 2021 and that we are still providing payments and will continue to do so, either directly to bank accounts or food parcels, during these holidays.
- We were reassured to hear that the Council has focused on the wellbeing of school staff and in particular school leaders. We heard school governors have been encouraged to ask

questions of their Headteacher's in particular, to ensure that their wellbeing is being considered at this difficult time.

- We heard that since the 14 September we have seen a good, solid attendance in our schools across Swansea. Although, in the early part of September, there has been as many as 88 requests from parents asking to electively home educate their children. However, since September, there has been a good rate of attendance across schools and this has remained stable.
- We heard there has been an increase in the use of our digital platforms including Swansea Virtual School and the HWB platform, which is positive. We were told that in the summer months a lot of kit was issued, the Council adopted a very flexible approach to ensure that any digitally excluded pupil could still have that kit and the connectivity. In the main, we are confident pupils have what they need. We are reassured to hear that this will continue to be monitored carefully and that schools are encouraged to communicate if they need help.
- The Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning & Skills, Cllr Jennifer Raynor, told us that the Education Department is working fantastically well as a team and that she is very pleased with the way the Department is running and that she is more than happy with where we are currently. We were reassured to hear her comments and are supportive of them. We are impressed with how both schools and the Education Department as a whole has responded to this national health crisis. We wrote to the Director of Education asking her to share our thoughts and to give our thanks to council staff, schools and governing bodies.
- We did express our concern about what will happen during examination time. We were informed that there has been an independent review of examinations in 2020, which will be reporting shortly. In addition, we were expecting to hear from the Welsh Government on what will happen in 2021.

Action Recommended / questions asked of Cabinet Member:

- Confirmation about the financial position of schools that operated as hubs during lockdown.

4. Education Scrutiny Performance Panel - Future Work Programme 2020/21

Date	Items to be discussed
17 Dec 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Swansea Skills Partnership 2. Update – Education and Schools recovery from Covid 3. Annual Audit of Schools (<i>for information item</i>)
21 Jan 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analysis of pupil and school performance (<i>Annual item</i>) 2. Behaviour Strategy and how associated delegated spend to schools has been used (<i>Panel identified this item for scrutiny pre March</i>) 3. PDG summary of spend to support vulnerable pupils (<i>Annual item</i>)
Feb -date tbc	Annual Budget as it relates to Educations matters (<i>Annual item</i>)
25 Feb 2021	School 2 - Penyrheol Comprehensive School – Discuss school performance
18 Mar 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional Learning Needs Reform and implementation (<i>watching brief item</i>) 2. New Curriculum update including progress with implementation (<i>watching brief item</i>) 3. The New Estyn Regime and summary of outcomes of thematic reviews
22 Apr 2021	School 3 – Murryston Secondary School – Discuss school improvement following Estyn Monitoring
13 May 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education Other Than At Schools Update (EOTAS), including progress with new provision 2. Update 21st Century Schools Programme