



To:
Councillor Jennifer Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning and Skills

BY EMAIL

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Summary: This is a letter from the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 19 November 2020. It covers looking at Wellbeing in Schools with Waun Wen Primary School and Elective Home Education.

Dear Cllr Raynor,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 19 November 2020

We would like to thank you and the Interim Director of Education Helen Morgan Rees, the Headteacher of Waun Wen Primary and the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors for attending our meeting on the 19 November. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

Wellbeing of Pupils at Waun Wen Primary School

As you will be aware we have decided to keep a watching brief on the wellbeing aspect of the new curriculum and as part that work we invited Waun Wen Primary School to our meeting because of the good practice they are displaying.

The Headteacher outlined some of the challenges the school faced before Covid, how they are trying to mitigate these challenges and what the school has done to keep pupil wellbeing at its heart throughout the Covid period.

We heard the context of the school is challenging with 57% Free School Meals, 47% English as Additional Language (27 languages) and 42% Additional Learning Needs and a high number of pupils live in areas 1 or 2 of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. That many of the pupils at the school will have suffered from Adverse

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Childhood Experiences also known as ACES. One of the key issues faced at the school is speech, language and communication needs.

We understand the school had faced a number of challenges before Covid including: baseline scores very low, lack of vocabulary, difficulty using expressive language, children who have suffered trauma, social services involvement with families, children not able to regulate themselves, children not ready to learn. We heard that some of the ways the school addresses these problems including the use of training on vocabulary acquisition, training on trauma and ACES, worked with Gwella Project, Empathy Lab Project (developing vocabulary to express feelings).

We were told that from lockdown the school made time available to telephone families, deliver food for FSM pupils, and run a food bank in staff room for parents. They managed to acquire Easter eggs for all their pupils, they delivered playdough and workbooks to pupils to ensure all pupils including those who do not have full access to IT, so could engage with educational activities. We were interested to hear about how they encouraged pupils and reassured parents by putting together a short film on how the school will look when they would return in September.

We heard how the school Governors, particularly the Chair and Vice Chair, supported the school through this period including with regular phone calls, email support and agreeing with changes to policy and curriculum.

We were pleased to hear that the support provided by the Council to schools was very good and included courses run by the local authority, letters to parents from interim Education Director, Health and Safety guidance and support including from the Test, Trace and Protect service.

We were encouraged to hear you say that you congratulate the schools Senior Management Team who have faced the challenges at the school and have addressed them with what needs to be done in order to enable pupils, when they are in the classroom, to be in a position to learn. We agreed that it is inspiring to see, when supported, how pupils can become more resilient and able to learn.

We supported the words of Director of Education when she said she was proud of Waun Wen Primary School in normal times but in these Covid times, they have gone way beyond.

Elective Home Education

We wanted to look at this issue because Councillors understand that the numbers of requests to de-register pupils had increased substantially resulting from the Covid situation.

The Panel heard that the local authority is not responsible for the provision of elective home education or under any statutory obligation to support it. However, under section 436A of the Education Act 1996, the local authority has a duty to arrange to identify children not receiving a suitable education. That although there is no legal framework for the local authority to regularly monitor provision of home education, the Council are mindful of its wider duties of care, and do contact parents to discuss their ongoing home education provision.

We were told that currently there are 234 families electively home educating but that this figure fluctuates. The Council accepts and respects the right of parents to choose to electively home educate and are mindful of our boundaries. The Council does endeavour to work in a supporting manner to foster good relationships with home educators. We heard that there have been 88 requests to de-register pupils since Covid.

We heard that the support and safeguards include a focus on building positive relationships with the elective home education community, offering signposting, advice and guidance. If there is a circumstance, which gives rise to concerns education officers will liaise with other relevant services and agencies. In addition, School Attendance Orders can be used as a last resort if there is a concern appropriate education is not being provided.

We were pleased to hear that any pupil who has received their education at home can apply to be readmitted to a maintained school at any time. We understand that some parents are fearful about children returning to school because of Covid particularly where there are family health concerns. We were encouraged to hear that a more flexible approach is being used at present including delaying removal from school role, not penalising non-attendance and providing reassurance on risk assessments.

We were told that new statutory guidance from Welsh Government was consulted upon in October 2019 but is currently on hold as COVID 19 responses took priority. We were pleased to hear Swansea is prepared to take on the requirements of the statutory guidance if/when it is implemented.

We are reassured by the approach that the Council is taking to pupils being electively home educated. We are pleased to hear about the safeguards that are in place, based on the current limited Welsh Government guidelines. The Panel would like to see a register of electively home-educated pupils be developed but recognise that this is in the reach of the Welsh Government. We therefore look forward to seeing that statutory guidance when it is published in due course.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised but on this occasion do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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