



Report of the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee

Cabinet – 17 June 2021

Supporting Education Recovery

Purpose:	To seek Cabinet approval of the recommendations of the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee.
Policy Framework:	Digital Competence Framework Guidance 2018 (Welsh Government). Developing a Whole-school Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being Framework 2020 (Welsh Government).
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance and Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. All schools are supported and monitored to maintain and improve blended learning approaches developed during the last year.2. To develop a whole school approach to emotional health and wellbeing.3. The systematic dissemination of good practice in blended learning and supporting emotional health and wellbeing is accelerated.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the policy development committee's review of evidence during the academic year 2020-2021, it is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunities for education improvement, continuity of learning and skills development.
- 1.2 This report addresses the key experiences and emerging issues presented to the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee during 2020-2021 municipal year. An extraordinary year of crisis

management and significant disruption in education was examined thoroughly.

2. Challenges And Opportunities Heard By Committee

- 2.1 Access to learning opportunities were considered carefully by the committee. Although thousands of new devices were issued to schools and their pupils, this was largely through a pre-Covid initiative and gaps remain in equitable access as a result of varying approaches to remote and blended learning as well as availability of appropriate devices during disruption of education. Minimising disruption to learning remains a key priority alongside ensuring that the learning offer is strong whether at home or in school. Devices to schools are still being delivered to support digital learning as well as access to learning.
- 2.2 Authority wide planning for continuity of learning was outlined to the committee. The aims of the Continuity of Learning Plan remain live issues as schools still require whole year groups of pupils to self-isolate. Building on the initial plan has supported schools well and this will need to continue in future.
- 2.3 Support to develop the education profession has been provided during the last year. A few practitioners have experienced a steep learning curve in improving their own and pupils' digital competence and engagement in learning. Further flexible professional learning opportunities are essential to provide equitable quality learning opportunities across all schools.
- 2.4 Views of parents and learners were discussed with officers and it was clear that there were high levels of parental satisfaction during the initial lockdown period. However, the experiences of parents and pupils varied during the autumn term as schools were required to be highly adaptive in switching to remote learning, depending on how staff, individual pupils and whole year groups or classes were affected directly by the virus itself. Inevitably, pupils' experiences were varied. At a time of re-focussing and re-setting, it is vital that all schools learn from the best experiences.
- 2.5 Views of challenge advisers were considered by the committee. It became clear that schools were well supported during the crisis. There was an acknowledgement that all schools were trying to do their best in reacting to a crisis and that their main priority was to keep learning going in highly controlled Covid-19 safe environments. The committee heard that many schools had shared their experiences and had refined their remote learning offer by listening to learners. It was also clear that well-being of children and young people was a prime concern and that there had been a downgrading of duties in relation to the current statutory curriculum during most of the autumn term.
- 2.6 Support for vulnerable learners became a clear focus for the committee in reviewing evidence. The committee heard how parents/ carers and school staff had been supported by officers, across the council, working

together to protect the most vulnerable, identify new vulnerabilities and provide universal and targeted resources to support emotional health and mental well-being, in particular.

- 2.7 Emerging themes for, re-mobilising, re-focussing and re-shaping were considered in the context of national and local consideration. Officer advice to the committee was to develop the work on well-being as part of readiness to learn and emotional health.

3. Recommendations of the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee

- 3.1 A whole Council approach is developed towards focussing on the emotional health and well-being of all learners by supporting and monitoring schools in developing a whole school approach to emotional health and wellbeing. Key events and support packages will be made available to schools to develop high standards. This work will include developing a Swansea-wide policy on assessing the emotional, wellbeing, and learning impact of Covid-19 coupled with the dissemination of evidence-based good practice to support schools' work.

- 3.2 A whole Council approach is developed towards supporting digital competence and capacity, both in terms of access to devices and capacity for learning, with a particular focus on learner access. Professional learning opportunities and key events will be developed further.

- 3.3 A whole Council approach is developed towards the systematic dissemination of good practice in relation to readiness for learning and benefits of blended learning. Opportunities created during the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to well-being, engagement and participation will be shared systematically. In addition, innovative learning experiences will be widely shared across schools.

- 3.4 The learning from the pandemic should be used in implementing Curriculum for Wales especially in encouraging learners confident to take responsibility for their own learning.

4. Equality and Engagement Implications

- 4.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and the Socio-economic Duty (Wales) must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- Ensure that decisions do not impact negatively on people with fewer financial means.

Our Integrated Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

- 4.2 An IIA Screening Form has been completed and included as appendix A with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required.
- 4.3 The IIA showed that these recommendations would have a positive impact on children and young people and very minimal impact on all other groups. All schools will be kept engaged throughout the implementation of the recommendations to ensure that the benefits are realised across all our schools. All the recommendations fit within the expectations and considerations of the WFG with no risk in their implementation. The cumulative impact is seen as very positive.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A - EIA Screening Form