



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
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 15 July 2021 looking at the behavior strategy and at changes to the regional education partnership.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 15 July 2021

We would like to thank the Headteacher's from Bishop Gore and Pontarddulais Secondary Schools for attending our meeting, as well as yourself and the Director of Education. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

We invited the two Headteacher's from different Secondary Schools in different parts of Swansea to discuss how they are using the monies they have been delegated as part of the behaviour strategy. We wanted to find out how schools are using these monies to reduce referrals to Education Other Than At Schools Services, to re-introduce pupils back into schools after attending such services and other behaviour related issues.

We were pleased to hear from Helen Burgum the Headteacher at Bishop Gore Secondary School, Gareth Rees the Headteacher and Rachel Thomas the Assistant Headteacher at Pontarddulais Secondary School. Both schools made a presentation addressing the key questions sent to them by the Panel prior to the meeting.

We heard that the context of each school is very different and therefore the way they are using their delegated monies to address behaviour issues is bespoke to each. We felt this was positive and appropriate because schools are then able to tailor the services to their pupils needs. We noted that only a small amount of the work

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completed in both schools in relation to behaviour matters was funded via this delegated pot, with a much larger amount being funded from within school budgets. For example for pastoral support, ALN, school nurses etc.

Both schools have developed a provision where their aim is to enable pupils, which includes working with partners, to provide a curriculum that is appropriate to meet the needs of individual pupils. We understand the importance of wellbeing in schools and were pleased to hear the Headteacher at Bishop Gore say *'they strive to provide supportive learning environments that are both stimulating and challenging, where pupils are encouraged, praised and nurtured in order to develop self-awareness and discipline'*.

We were pleased to hear that both schools integrate pupils back into mainstream after a period in EOTAS using a hybrid approach with bespoke timetables including a mix of mainstream provision.

We heard that training for school staff is a key feature in addressing behaviour and both schools have shown their commitment to this. We were interested to hear about, for example, the Thrive Strategy, an approach that helps teachers develop pupil's social and emotional skills. Also, about the other initiatives and activities that engage pupils and help them manage their behaviour like Bulldog Boxing and the Baxter Project.

We did share both the Headteacher's concerns in relation to how the pandemic has affected pupils and schools including:

- Stopping of outdoor visits and use of external providers
- the negative impact on some pupil's mental health and wellbeing, with some pupils having experienced additional trauma, like crisis/bereavement and lost employment/financial worries
- the pupils daily routines were disrupted. Lack of tolerance towards others
- some vulnerable pupils did not participate in blended learning opportunities (unwilling/reluctant/too anxious to engage in online learning)
- pupils identified with additional needs including SEBD, were unable to access the support usually received in the school setting
- support services were not able to conduct direct face to face work and so some families declined support and refused to engage remotely

We recognise that schools are working to address these issues now that pupils are fully back in school, but we felt it was important it emphasise the importance of continued support to schools on these matters.

We also heard that both schools found it necessary to re-establish boundaries for their pupils after they had spent large amounts of time at home. Pupils were behaving well in the structured classroom environment but issues were arising in those unstructured places like at break time. Both schools have worked to address this. The Headteacher from Pontarddualis School said *'over the last half term there has been a marked improvement in behaviour around the school and pupils have adapted remarkably well, however there are have been pressures on staffing and costs around these issues'*.

We were encouraged to hear that the impact of the work being done at both schools has reduced exclusions, EOTAS referrals, improved educational outcomes and has increased pupil confidence.

We were keen to emphasise the importance of sharing the good practice being shown by both schools including what has been learnt through the pandemic. We asked how this is done and we heard that there are a number of formal and informal mechanisms designed for this purpose, by using online platforms and via meetings like for example SCCASH.

Regional Scrutiny

I updated the Panel on my recent attendance at the Regional ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group meeting on the 28 June 2021, informing them of some of what was discussed. And said I thought things may have moved on since that meeting, which was confirmed by the Director of Education.

- Shadow South West Wales Education Partnership Joint Committee has met twice.
- Concerns raised by the Scrutiny Councillor Group were discussed in this meeting. They agreed that work needed to be done to wind down ERW.
- Agreement has been made in principle for services of the new Partnership would be available to other local authorities.
- It was recognised that ERW would not wind down fully by 31 August and there will be a period of transition required.
- We wanted clarity on the liabilities of the existing partnership and the liabilities until the end of the transition period.
- The staffing structure for the new partnership has been reduced in proportion to new body with a scaling down of approximately 40%.
- The Governance structure will appear in the new legal agreement. This is currently in draft and needs to be finalised. It does include some of the issues raised by the Scrutiny Councillor Group on the 28 June and these have been put into that draft. There is still work to be done and it is planned that the draft legal agreement will go to each Local Authority in the autumn.
- We asked if the new partnership would have a clear business plan by the 1 September and we were told that will be the case.
- We said we would like to see an informal scrutiny model similar to the one currently in place.
- We suggested that the Chair of the Regional Joint Committee attend some of the Scrutiny meetings to discuss performance of the body.
- We would like the chair of the new scrutiny body to attend the Joint Committee in at least an observer capacity. We were informed that this is planned as part of the new agreement.

Your Response

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised but can you provide a written response to the following points by 23 August 2021.

We would like to hear your views on the points raised by the Headteacher's attending and how, if appropriate, these could be supported more widely. Headteacher's were asked how they believe work in this area could be improved, they said, improvements could be made by:

1. continued Cynnydd funding (highlighted at SCCASH meeting), funding of pre 14-16 to prevent EOTAS referrals and to train more staff in the Thrive approach.
2. improvement to behaviour strategy could be made but the strategies and approaches being flexible to meet the changing needs of the pupils. This means upskilling staff to ensure they have training such as ELSA, CBT etc. This is costly but we need the agility to respond swiftly. We need also need to develop programmes around mental health, tolerance and contextualised safeguarding. Initiatives such as the Cynnydd Learning Coaches help and support our pupils to look at pathways and self-regulation. These roles are grant funded and the money is coming to an end for many of these types of projects.
3. how we subsidise our provisions, the need to ensure that roles and provision are sustainable to enable planning to take place to continue to meet the needs of for learners given the very specific issues that are now emerging as a result of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

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