



**Report of the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee /
Corporate Delivery Committee**

Cabinet – 21 July 2022

**Supporting the Challenges for Learners in Recovering
from the Pandemic**

Purpose:	To consider implications of recovery from the pandemic for learners in Swansea schools
Policy Framework:	Education in Wales: Our National Mission 2017-2021 Achieving Better Together – Swansea Council's Recovery Plan Welsh Government Curriculum and Assessment Reform
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance and Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Swansea Council explores with all key partners how we understand Swansea and its neighbourhoods.2) Swansea Council maps community assets and community engagement for all Swansea schools.3) Swansea Council reviews the use of Free School Meals as an indicator of vulnerability4) Council considers how well schools engage with parents and communities in person, via social media, formally and informally.5) Council considers how philosophy in Swansea schools and communities can improve communication and wellbeing.6) Council explores the idea of Swansea Council becoming Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) informed Council.7) Council considers developing on-site facilities to increase vocational opportunities in schools, where required and continues to develop vocational opportunities for all learners for whom this is a preferable route.

- 8) Council maps existing Learning Champions to inspire learners and seeks the support of both universities in driving forward Learning Champions for Swansea learners.
- 9) Council provides all pupils in Swansea with a library card, promotes leisure/ sports facilities to schools and communities as well as outdoor learning as part of the schools' curriculum.
- 10) Council publishes its exclusions reduction strategy.

Report Author: Helen Morgan-Rees

Finance Officer: Peter Keys

Legal Officer: Stephanie Williams

Access to Services Officer: Rhian Millar

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The COVID-19 pandemic presents many children and young people who learn in Swansea schools with challenges that need to be addressed. In spring 2021, the Schools Performance Scrutiny Panel heard about the emerging issues and challenges for schools and their learners. As a direct consequence, the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee explored how issues and challenges could be overcome, in a holistic manner.
- 1.2 For the municipal year 2021-2022, the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee (PDC) focussed its attention on supporting the challenge faced by learners as they emerged from the pandemic. As outlined below, the emerging challenges are ones known at the time. It is evident that the risk of disaffection and disengagement with learning was particularly important to the committee as well as the greater challenge faced within certain communities within Swansea. It is timely that the committee considers policy to inform, assist and influence the Council and its schools in supporting learners as part of its commitment for an excellent education for all.
- 1.3 The Schools Performance Scrutiny panel noted the following emerging themes in 2021:
 - insecure foundations for learning
 - learners' lack of progression could disadvantage them for life
 - demands on teaching profession
 - certain learners more challenged than others
 - education system pressure

2. Evidence considered by the committee

- 2.1 Over the programme of work, this PDC committee has listened to and discussed challenges, issues, and opportunities from a broad spectrum of inputs including academics from three universities (Glasgow, Swansea and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David); primary and secondary school leaders as well as sports and education officers of the Council. Officers presented on and informed the discussion on demographic data, approaches to supporting vulnerable learners, preventing exclusions, sports promotion, and professional learning for awareness on adverse childhood experiences in Swansea schools. Officers and school leaders, including Partneriaeth (regional support) officers provided information on key challenges and solutions affecting learners during and beyond the pandemic.
- 2.2 Over eight sessions, summarised below, committee Members heard wide-ranging evidence about the challenges faced by learners in certain communities as well as solutions and opportunities that could be harnessed. A few schools outlined their work on going the extra mile for learners facing challenging times as well as existing curriculum enrichment programmes, they had developed. The concept of Learning Champions namely individuals within a school community who could help motivate and inspire learners is particularly noteworthy in terms of policy development.
- 2.3 The committee saw a consistent focus on three key pillars with the idea of Learning Champions to inspire and motivate children running throughout:
- reaching educational potential for all pupils, especially those in adverse circumstances.
 - vocational education tied to the City Deal and local businesses.
 - Physical literacy, sport, health, and outdoor education.
- 2.4 In the first session, Professor Chris Chapman from University of Glasgow gave Members information relating to his role and his background in the education profession over the years. He outlined the two main programmes he has been involved in since moving to Scotland in 2013, the first being “The Network for Social and Educational Equity” which has developed through partnerships between the university, local authorities, and various other bodies to form the West of Scotland Regional Improvement Partnership, which now covers 8 local authorities and around 35% of the children in Scotland. The second project is “Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland” which is a more place based and holistic approach to tackling child poverty and developing the voice of young people. He indicated that the starting point for a lot of the work, is that schools cannot tackle poverty and create an educational system that is fair and supports children to achieve in isolation. The approach starts at a classroom level but takes in the wider school approach also, as well as factoring in the influence of wider society and communities.

Officers referred to and detailed the good work already ongoing in Swansea by school improvement advisers in sharing good practice between schools, the importance of the pupil development grant to schools and its pivotal role in trying to improve education for young people in disadvantaged areas. Officers outlined the previous and ongoing work undertaken with Durham University in promoting evidence-based education approaches in schools.

- 2.5 In the second session, Officers presented statistical trends in relation to learners in Swansea including pupils eligible for free school meals, pupil distribution across Swansea as linked to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD); the Vulnerability Assessment Profiles (VAP); Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils, Looked After Children (LAC) and those with higher/lower than average numeracy and literacy scores. In addition, figures relating to Operation Encompass, developed in 2019 with South Wales Police, to record incidents where pupils have observed domestic violence were shared.

Members outlined and discussed the need to keep children engaged in education through appropriate help and support and within the school environment and to avoid exclusions wherever possible, whether this is through additional individual support, the work of the PRU, or via the expansion and promotion of more vocational courses.

- 2.6 In the third session, officers presented key information to the committee on vulnerable learners and plans to reduce pupil exclusion rates in Swansea. Areas discussed in the included the following:
- who our vulnerable learners are -those requiring statutory intervention; child protection/looked after children (LAC), those in need of care/ support and learners with disability/ learning difficulties.
 - definition of vulnerability –monitoring reports on vulnerable young people.
 - improved collaboration and working arrangements - links developed with Child and Family Services (CFS) and Education through single point of contacts (SPOCs).
 - lessons learned - varied professional assessments of vulnerability, children with statutory interventions are priority, no one size fits all approach taken, working together to support families and use of the various frameworks available.
 - planned ways forward - safeguarding and child protection policies and processes, use of care planning to respond to changing vulnerability (LAC, Safety, Wellbeing), promoting the SPOC relationships to support agencies, empowering schools to escalate concerns and build contingency.
 - exclusion categories and numbers of young people affected and, in each definition/category.
 - what happens to young people following exclusion – change of school/college, home tuition, referral to and involvement and utilisation of expertise of staff in the pupil referral unit.

- management of moves and rules and procedures in place to assist young people who are often in crisis, numbers of schools involved.
- outcomes and overseeing of moves and progress of young people.
- pastoral support plans (PSPs)– document which is put together on an individual basis for the young people at risk of exclusions.
- prevention and early intervention strategies – whole school approach and initiatives that help and support the PSPs, implications of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (ALNET) going forward, behaviour policy, staff training available, exclusions reduction strategy, EOTAS policy being developed.
- case studies and examples of feedback from young people who have been through the system.

2.7 The fourth session saw secondary school leaders outline the various actions and initiatives that had helped to support the pupils, staff, and parents during the various lockdowns, amongst these were:

- secondary headteachers group which continued to meet via Teams throughout the pandemic.
- regular contact between the headteacher and the heads of all the primary catchment schools.
- availability of free school meals (50%+ of pupils) for children in the first lockdown and the change to payments system after that.
- provision of the childcare facility for key workers.
- delivery of IT equipment to children to enable inclusion in online work and attendance.
- checking of online pupil attendance and the follow up visits/calls by staff to encourage attendance and participation.
- delivery of work to pupils.
- support and help for vulnerable learners.
- development of COVID-19 recovery action plan which links to the school's development plan.
- good liaison with staff, setting up of well-being groups and staff helping and supporting each other and covering for absent colleagues was excellent.
- mental health/anxiety issues for young people and their families.
- support and help for young people and families who had lost relatives – provision of counselling service and bereavement advice from local authority helped greatly.
- platform groups for young people with low moods – 6-week programme has worked well.
- transition arrangements for current year 8s did cause some problems due to the various lockdowns and restrictions and the subsequent lack of contact between school/pupil/families prior to them attending the school, which has been an issue.
- inclusion programme for vulnerable pupils and those with social problems was well used by pupils.

- issues with numbers of statemented pupils wanting to attend the school and lack of availability and access to the specialist facilities has been an issue which has led to an investment in nurture classes and significant improvements to the classrooms and learning provision for specialist facilities pupils.
- continuing of attendance monitoring and follow up work with pupils to engage and encourage better attendance.
- community use of schools playing fields is protected, new gym been developed for pupils, and sport/well-being is embedded into curriculum now, recent appointment of rugby hub officer and links with Swans football on ALN football team.
- awarding of GCSE grades this year via assessment/no exams.
- issues around the communications on national expectations on examinations and their alternatives.
- understanding vulnerability and its impact on student progress and life chances – developing a shared understanding of students who have a barrier to learning and development which could be from wide-ranging areas such as social deprivation, attendance problems, mental health issues, additional learning difficulties, free school meals, English as an additional language.
- key milestones in a child’s journey through the school system – links with cluster schools and issues around lack of reading and literacy skills, inter-generational poverty and lack development of social skills of children, impact of COVID-19 going forward.
- impact of new curriculum going forward on teaching and how and what children are taught.
- knowing your students – development of a detailed profile of each student on a both academic and well-being level, including cognitive profile, impact of adverse childhood experiences, attendance/exclusion.
- development of a “pupil on a page” programme which includes a wide area of data on topics such as attendance, achievement, conduct, wellbeing, reading levels.
- development of a “class” and a “year” on a page to compare, contrast and monitor across a wider cohort.
- possible need for greater support from local authority on attendance issues due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and ideally each comprehensive could have their own dedicated education welfare officer.
- equity starts with achievement – encourage and give children the opportunity to be successful.
- Alumni programme – started in Easter 2020 – raising of pupils’ horizons and expectations, giving pupils different and life enriching experiences and taking them to places they have never been both physically and mentally welcoming former pupils back into school both individually and via businesses to provide opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships, and mentoring possibilities.

- excellent links with Careers Wales and the education business exchange scheme, careers fairs, employment videos.
- links with Virgin Atlantic Partnership – one of only three schools in the world which are involved.
- Brilliant Club – aimed at more able & talented pupils and help with university visits and extra tuition.
- developing whole school health and well-being – including engagement with community partners, refining of relationship/sex education programme, pupil survey helps to develop new ideas, development of school reading programme.
- impact of COVID-19 particularly on the routines of school, engagement and attendance initiative and transition issues for current years 7 & 8.
- broad curriculum and offering of vocational courses – but there are some issues with students attending college and adapting to the different “non-school” environment.
- issues with Cynnydd project, particularly around data collation and bureaucracy issues.
- what we need to do going forward – country wide problems with literacy, development of Swansea wide reading profile, encouragement to participate in physical activity, pilot schemes with communities on mentoring and entrepreneurship.

2.8 The fifth session focussed on vocational provision. Officers presented a ‘for information’ report which updated the Policy Development Committee and outlined the current positional statement for vocational education in Swansea for children and young people aged 14-19.

The background to the current provision of vocational education in schools and colleges which is based around learning provision for 14–19-year-olds in schools and colleges in Wales and is determined by the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure, 2009, which places a duty on local authorities, 14-19 networks, schools, and colleges to work with Welsh ministers to provide local curricula that comprise of a range of courses and options for learners.

Officers detailed that an additional Junior Apprenticeship programme in Wales is aimed at 14–16-year-olds and enables them to undertake a level 1 or 2 vocational pathway at a local college, developing practical skills while gaining qualifications. A programme known as the Junior Academy in Swansea has been developed through partnership with Swansea schools and Gower College Swansea since 2019-2020.

The additional funding which has enabled the delivery of training provision via the Cynnydd project was also outlined.

Current areas of delivery for vocational provision in schools are:

- vocational courses delivered on school site by school staff, for example Health and Social Care;

- vocational courses delivered on school site by college staff, for example Children's Care and Learning Development;
- vocational courses delivered off site by college staff, for example Engineering and Construction;
- full-time vocational course and work-related experience (Junior Academy) delivered off site by college staff and industry links, for example Landscaping & Horticulture and Hair & Beauty; and
- links with and courses and initiatives available via Coleg Sir Gâr and Neath Port Talbot Group of Colleges.

The links with Careers Wales across all schools in Swansea was also outlined in preparing young people with support, employer engagement and work readiness, as well as the potential impact of the new Curriculum for Wales which has these areas embedded within it.

The importance of identifying skills shortages and preparing young people for future jobs, particularly those linked to Swansea Bay's City Deal going forward should be assisted by the development of the Skills and Training programme agreed via the City Deal recently approved by both Welsh and UK governments.

2.9 During the sixth session, Dr Nalda Wainwright, provided input to the committee on children's health and physical literacy. Key areas included:

- decline in physical activity across society.
- definition of physical literacy.
- development process for activity from toddlers to pensioners.
- children are moving less now than in the past and the various reasons and factors of modern life that impact on this.
- increase and availability of technology for young children and its impact on reducing outside activity and play.
- lack of outdoor activity, play and mixing with other children of different ages and its negative impact on children's development both physically and mentally which can cause issues with cognitive aspects and speech.
- motor development mountain – and movement vocabulary and development.
- positive/negative spiral of engagement and the effects and relationships between the lack of activity and ill health going forward in later life.
- links between motor competence and physical activity and its impact and importance in rising the perceived physical competence in young children, particularly those under the age of 7.
- Perry Preschool Project in the USA and its findings relating to both the financial and social benefits received, compared to the amount invested, which could be up to a sevenfold benefit.
- SKIP Cymru (Successful Kinaesthetic Instruction for Pre-schoolers in Wales) – early years/foundation phase-based

initiative that has proved to benefit and develop young children's motor skills.

- Welsh Government report on Physical Activity of Children & Young People which has been agreed but not yet rolled out across the country due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council's Sport and Health Manager indicated that the staff are committed to improving and expanding physical literacy across the board and indicated that the staff particularly enjoy the sessions with the young people and encouraging them to get involved for all the reasons outlined above. He outlined that he has staff qualified in Physical Literacy courses run by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. He detailed that often in schools, staff will target and specifically encourage young people who aren't involved in the 'traditional' school sports teams to get involved and participate. He outlined that the team is involved with over 90 schools in Swansea and outlined the success of the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) and referred to the excellent results and positive feedback received from a survey of young people who had taken part in the scheme (appendix b to the report).

- 2.10 The penultimate session of committee saw Education Directorate's response to research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and its effects within education services was considered by the PDC committee in full.

Education supports schools to break the cycle of ACEs for learners in Swansea. Officers outlined the definition of ACEs as described by Ace Aware Wales as traumatic events, particularly those in early childhood that significantly affect the health and wellbeing of people in later life.

Reference to the Public Health Wales ACE Study for Wales in 2015 in which over 2,000 adults aged 18-69 years had taken part and which provided anonymous information on their exposure to ACEs before the age of 18 years and their health and lifestyles as adults. The survey showed that suffering four or more harmful experiences in childhood increases the chances of high-risk behaviour and ill health going forward.

The effects of the pandemic are already having an impact on both children and families who have experienced increased anxieties, altered routines, jeopardised finances, and the sickness and deaths of loved ones. This can have a particular impact on those previously affected by ACEs.

Regional professional learning offer for wellbeing which has always been an excellent source of training which many Swansea schools have benefitted from has focussed well on ACEs. ERW (now Partneriaeth) regional staff recognise that trauma and attachment are huge barriers to learning at an early stage and were one of the first regions to introduce an attachment awareness pilot scheme. The partners have consistently

sourced excellent training on which attendance from Swansea schools is high.

The Looked After Children (LAC) element of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) issued by Welsh Government to be used as a school improvement grant, to “disproportionately advantage” care experienced children, and indicated schools in Swansea have used their allocation of PDG/LAC monies to purchase nurture and wellbeing facilities and equipment, such as the resilience toolkit, and programmes to support mental health through meditation and mindfulness.

Officers then outlined that the Education Directorate has built up excellent working relationships with other departments within both Swansea Council and external services and gave a snapshot and overview of the various schemes, initiatives, and projects in operation to assist young people.

Examples of good practice were outlined in a couple of schools namely Cefn Hengoed Comprehensive and Plasmarl Primary, but it was outlined that all schools across the city could have been included due to the excellent work that is ongoing across the board.

She outlined that although the authority has made excellent progress in the issue of ACEs, they are always keen to explore new ideas to ensure our children and young people have the best educational experience that we can possibly provide. Ace Aware Wales are very keen to work with the authority to become the first ACE aware Council in Wales, by using their TrACE Toolkit.

In addition, regional partners from Partneriaeth guided Members through the following key issues:

- Setting up of the ACE support hub in 2017 and a series of important reports were produced following this including the one on sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from ACEs.
- Review of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Policy led by Julie Morgan MS which began last year, and has outlined the impact of COVID-19 in raising the problems of young people whilst at the same time reducing the access to services because of the pandemic.
- Welsh Government’s Renew and Reform COVID-19 recovery plan and its emphasis on supporting learners’ wellbeing and progression with a focus on narrowing educational inequalities.
- Curriculum for Wales guidance and focusing on developing learners.
- Equity in education and ensuring that those who need more assistance and help get access to IT.
- Stress and the three types of responses within the nervous system – Positive, Tolerable and Toxic – and the reactions and

issues associated with each type and its effect on the body going forward.

- Trauma based approach, racial trauma, supporting learners with sensory learning difficulties, building trust through play, using sociograms to develop peer to peer relationships, developing empathy in learners, using emotion coaching and poverty proofing.

2.11 The final session of committee in March 2022 saw Dr Emily Marchant from Swansea University give a brief overview of her background and experience in the subject area, and then gave a detailed and comprehensive presentation on outdoor learning. The research findings from the Health and Attainment of Pupils in Primary Education Network (HAPPEN) survey, Swansea University were shared with the committee.

Included in the presentation were the following areas:

- Investing in a child's learning experience has potential in maximising future achievement, employment prospects and health and well-being during adulthood.
- Impact of COVID-19, and the increasing inequalities in children's health, wellbeing, development, and learning.
- Network development in schools, healthy schools' advisers, impact of new curriculum going forward.
- HAPPEN network, which is based around primary schools and aims to bring together education, health, and research, and develop a better understanding of school's needs and target specific areas of health and well-being.
- 500 schools across Wales involved with 20,000+ pupils having been engaged and involved.
- Access to the SAIL databank which includes a wide range of information across health and education such as birth weights, vaccinations, parenting, family health issues, educational attainment.
- Network is also a basis for collection of information on different programs and initiatives undertaken in schools.
- HAPPEN at home pupil survey undertaken during the lockdown and school closure periods which aimed to compare children's health and wellbeing during school closures in 2020 with the same period in 2019 and 2018, it also aimed to examine the impact on the free school meals (FSM) cohort.
- Results of the survey which indicated a positive impact and increase on children's physical activity, but a negative effect on self-reported school competency, particularly those on FSM.
- Widening of inequalities and access to outdoor space has been lessened over the years.
- HAPPEN staff survey which was launched in July 2020 to gather the perspectives of primary school staff about the impact of school closures, the phased reopening of schools and the full time return to education in September 2020. This was completed

by over 200 staff from 78 primary schools across 16 local authorities in Wales (headteachers, teachers & support staff).

- The responses and feedback from the staff developed 5 key recommendations – Prioritise the health & well-being of staff and pupils, focus on engaging parental engagement & support, enhancing digital competence of pupils, teachers & parents, Adapting the learning environment & teaching practice and the Clear communication of guidance & expectations.
- Growing recognition of the benefits of outdoor learning and the improved engagement of pupils who participate.
- Qualitative evaluation of curriculum-based outdoor learning conducted in three primary schools in Swansea prior to establishment of Swansea Outdoor Schools which included Interviews with teachers and headteachers, focus groups with pupils to explore the barriers and facilitators to effective outdoor learning implementation.
- Benefits to children of being outdoors and its positive impact on learning – freedom from classroom, engagement with nature, improved attendance, engagement, concentration, and behaviour.
- Wider benefits of outdoor learning and play;
- Barriers to expansion.
- Estyn report of outdoor learning at Crwys Primary.

Crwys Primary School headteacher also detailed the excellent result and comments made particularly towards the outdoor education provision from the Estyn inspection which took place prior to the pandemic. Outdoor education is fundamental part of the curriculum: '**Happy children learn**'.

- 2.12 Following each of the eight inputs from partners, officers and schools, Members commented on the importance of keeping learners motivated and on track so that their opportunities for future pathways of learning could be maximised, despite challenges.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Council explores with all key partners how we understand Swansea and its neighbourhoods.
- 3.2 Swansea Council maps community assets and community engagement for all Swansea schools.
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- 3.4 Council considers how well schools engage with parents and communities in person, via social media, formally and informally.
- 3.5 Council considers how philosophy in Swansea schools and communities can improve communication and wellbeing.

- 3.6 Council explores the idea of Swansea Council becoming Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) informed Council.
- 3.7 Council considers developing on-site facilities to increase vocational opportunities in schools, where required and continues to develop vocational opportunities for all learners for whom this is a preferable route.
- 3.8 Council maps existing Learning Champions to inspire learners and seek the support of both universities in driving forward.
- 3.9 Council provides all pupils in Swansea with a library card, promotes leisure/ sports facilities to schools and communities as well as outdoor learning as part of the schools' curriculum.
- 3.10 Council publishes its exclusions reduction strategy.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

4.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and 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 Acts.
- 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.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

4.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

4.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

4.2 An IIA Screening has been completed and as this report is for information only there is no need to complete a full IIA report.

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:

[Network for Social and Educational Equity](#)

[Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland](#)

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s80345/append%20a.pdf?LLL=0>

[append b.pdf \(swansea.gov.uk\)](#)

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s81133/ACEs%20report.pdf?LLL=0>

<https://phw.nhs.wales/news/new-survey-shows-both-good-welsh-public-sector-awareness-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-and-opportunities-for-improvement/knowledge-and-awareness-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-in-the-public-service-workforce-in-wales/>

Appendices:

Appendix A - IIA Screening Form