



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

BY EMAIL

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Date 1 February 2023
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Summary: This is a letter from the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning following the meeting of the Panel on 19 January 2023, where the Panel looked the New Curriculum for Wales, meeting with the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors from the Pontarddulais Comprehensive School cluster.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 19 January 2023

We were pleased to meet the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors from Pontarddulais Comprehensive School and each of the cluster of Primary Schools feeding into it, including Pengelli, Pontlliw, Penllergaer, Pontarddulais and Llangyfelach Primary Schools. The Panel would also like to thank you, Partneriaeth Link Officers, the School Improvement Service and the two Commissioned Headteachers for your input.

I along with the Panel, were keen to discuss with them how the new Curriculum for Wales was being implemented on the ground and how the work being done at each Primary School in the cluster was being brought together as pupils made the transition to the Comprehensive School.

We were encouraged to hear Headteachers in the cluster believe that the new curriculum itself is excellent in principle, because it is skills based, progressive and is relevant to the children and their experiences and needs. Although, they did say there is far more work involved in constructing this curriculum than anyone envisaged at a school level and particularly at the national level. We did recognise the amount of work that has been done for this cluster.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TRUSLOW A CHRAFFU

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We heard about the good communication links between the primary schools and the comprehensive school and the transition work taking place as pupils move to secondary education, which we understand, is not just simply a transition day for the pupils, but is an ongoing process designed to be a continuation of their learning. We were pleased to hear how the cluster puts a strong emphasis on joint working and not just in terms of the new curriculum.

We asked about how the new curriculum provides for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). We were pleased to hear that, because the new curriculum is based upon progression, you can cover the same general topic with all pupils and they will perform to their ability. The schools by using the new curriculum can provide for ALN pupils and the more able and talented pupils within the same work, because they are looking at what the child themselves is able to do. We were interested to hear that the cluster has a progression map which goes from age 3 to 16 years.

We heard from the Commissioned Headteachers that they look at the Pontarddulais cluster with a little bit of envy because they have such got a good way of working together, which had become clear across all their visits to the schools. They agree that there is a well-developed shared and collaborative working approach across the cluster that has led to a clear development of progression.

We were keen to hear from the schools about how they have developed a shared understanding of what they mean by progression and how children will be working along their learning journey. We recognise that this must be challenging because each school will have their own approach to their curriculum and this can be difficult for any cluster of schools. Although, we understand that the Pontarddulais cluster is dealing with this by having a shared understanding of what is meant by progression of a child's journey.

We do recognise that different clusters across Swansea are at different stages in their journey to introduce the new curriculum but felt that a lot can be learnt from the work that has been carried out in this cluster of schools. We also understand that one of the advantages of this cluster is that all of the primary schools feed into the secondary school. We recognise that this is not always the case across Swansea schools, so it could be more complex to take that model to other clusters.

We were keen to explore the challenges the schools have faced and how they are working as a cluster to overcome them. Headteachers told us about four of the main challenges they have and continue to face in introducing the new curriculum including: time, financing (releasing staff particularly difficult), pressure on staff and workloads and the importance of ensuring a consistency of messages across the cluster.

Schools explained that the financial help they received to release staff for meetings had contributed to the success of the cluster, we would therefore hope that this financial help will be continued.

We would be interested to hear how this and other good practice in relation to cluster working is being shared across schools in Swansea, because we understand that other clusters are at a much earlier stage in their path to introducing the new curriculum. We want to ensure that as expertise is developed in different schools and clusters that other schools are able to benefit from this.

We have learnt so much from the meeting that we felt it was important to note this down, so that it can be shared. We have therefore appended a short note to this letter.

It was great to hear first-hand about how the cluster are working as a team, as well as listening to the successes and the challenges they face and importantly how they are working together to overcome these. We are very grateful to the team at each school for taking the time to join us. Also, we wished to give a big thank you for their enthusiasm and for the fantastic work they are doing.

Since the meeting, I have taken the opportunity to personally telephone each headteacher who attended to thank them on behalf of the panel and stressed how much we appreciated the work they are doing.

Your Response

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter but could we please have your formal written response to the following questions raised by 22 February 2023.

- How is this and other good practice in relation to cluster working being shared across schools in Swansea?

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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