



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
Cabinet Member for Education 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 and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 17 November 2022 where the Panel looked Additional Learning Needs Reform, the Pupil Development Grant spend, the New Curriculum for Wales implementation and the School Improvement Service.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 17 November 2022

We would like to thank you and your supporting Officers for attending our meeting. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

Additional Learning Needs Reform

We thanked Kate Phillips (Head of Vulnerable Learners) and Alison Lane (Head of Additional Learning Needs Team) for their detailed report giving us some background to and a position update on, Additional Learning Needs Reform in Swansea. We heard about progress to date, successes and challenges, the revised strategy and support, post 16, the Local Health Board and early years activity.

We asked whether the Welsh Government expectation that implementation should be cost neutral was an optimistic one and whether that expectation was affecting our implementation of the reform programme here in Swansea. We were told that managing the complexity of pupils coming through is difficult to anticipate but that schools and the Education Department do work closely with social services and early years services to manage this, which is proving to be hugely beneficial.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TRUSLOW A CHRAFFU

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We heard that the reform programme includes all our further education partners in Swansea and that we also work with those in our neighbouring local authorities' areas, like for example Neath College.

We also wanted to understand what sort of training is available for schools and practitioners, how this was being managed and how we are ensuring consistency of approach. We heard that there is a significant training menu available that is open to all key stakeholders including schools, further education colleges, local health board and also includes independent schools. Moderation events are being held in and across schools to help to ensure consistency of approach. We were keen to emphasise the importance of consistency in the offer available to pupils with ALN in whatever school they may attend.

How schools differentiate between the needs of ALN pupils and children that may, for example, need catch up support after covid was raised. We heard that identifying ALN is a staged process and short interventions are not normally identified as ALN. ALN requirements are usually more longer-term. You told us that the benefit of the new reformed system is the flexibility it affords if implemented at its best.

We asked how learner support requirements are identified and the length of time it takes to put support in place. We were pleased to hear that pupils are screened as early as possible in their school journey. Hearing that often support or interventions can be put in place immediately, although where a diagnosis is required, this may take longer and entail a waiting list. The Council works closely with the Local Health Board to manage this.

Pupil Development Grant spend on vulnerable pupils

We thanked Kelly Small (Head of Planning and Resources Team) for her PowerPoint presentation that helped us understand the pupil development grant (PDG) use in Swansea schools, as well as outlining progress with the previous Policy Development Committee supported Cabinet recommendations. We were pleased to hear that that the school improvement advisers considered school PDG plans as part of their Autumn visits to schools.

We asked how prepared we and schools are for the potential increase in pupils requiring support because of a projected drop in disposable income of families because of the cost-of-living crisis. We heard that as we are moving to universal free school meals, the free school meals proxy data will be less reliable and currently it is difficult to predict how many parents will sign up to it. The Director told us that it is important to also look at all the costs of a school day, she explained that the council does have representatives from the department on the Poverty Forum where this is considered.

School Improvement Service

David Thomas, Principal School Improvement Adviser introduced the report giving background to and outlined the current position with the regard to the School Improvement Service.

We emphasised the importance of inspiring children in the world of work and, in particular, the opportunities that will and are being afforded by the City Deal. We were pleased to see that the Swansea Skills Partnership was focussing on developing the digital competence of not only pupils but teachers and school staff. We were also pleased to hear that good links with the higher and further education settings and examination boards have been made.

New Curriculum for Wales Update

We thanked David Thomas, Principal School Improvement Adviser for providing the first of the scheduled updates this year. He gave an outline on progress with regard to the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales into schools in Swansea.

We were interested to explore the quality and cost of the training programme supplied by Partneriaeth, asking whether it is proving to be beneficial and value for money. We heard that the cost is free to schools at source but schools when they release a teacher, may have to pay supply teacher costs. The Partneriaeth training offer is currently good and broad. The Council makes a contribution to this partnership of £123,000 a year, which works out at approximately £30 equivalent per teacher per year, making pooling of resources for professional learning a cost-effective solution.

Your Response

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter 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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