



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 Learning following the meeting of the Panel on 15 June 2023, where the Panel looked at Additional Learning Needs Reform, Curriculum for Wales, progress with Estyn recommendations and the education scrutiny work plan for 2023/24.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 15 June 2023

We would like to thank you and Helen Morgan Rees (Director of Education) for attending the meeting and providing information for the Panel. 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 Update

We thanked the Head of Vulnerable Learners for attending and taking us through the update on Additional Learning Needs Reform.

We heard that the ALNET strategy has been reviewed and finalised, with a new strategy drafted that aligns to the regional strategy with outstanding actions being transferred to the new strategy. It now covers the period 2022 to 2027 and has 4 priority areas: Schools, Post 16, Collaboration and Early years.

We heard about the successes and the challenges being experienced. The Panel noted that despite the Welsh Government's wish to establish a less adversarial system the council has seen an increase in the number of requests for tribunals and that this has placed pressure on services and has highlighted a need for an internal review into processes and procedures to ensure there is an appropriate level of resource.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TRUSLOW A CHRAFFU

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We were pleased to hear that extensive work is underway to moderate, quality assure and support schools to achieve a consistent, equitable offer to all learners. Also, that collaboration with the local health board is strengthening with a productive partnership developing.

We asked about post-16 education and whether we ensure that the organisations that deliver services are fulfilling their roles effectively. We heard that we do work with our key delivery partners to ensure they are as strong as they can be to deliver what is required and we are doing this in a joined-up manner.

We agreed that ALN reform is an ongoing process and we would like to continue to keep a watching brief on progress.

Curriculum for Wales progress update

We thanked the Head of the Achievement and Partnership Services for the verbal update on progress with the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales.

We heard that there are so many different things to work on, but that it is a positive story here in Swansea. We were told that the Welsh Government do recognise the curriculum design is an ongoing cyclical process of engagement, design, planning, training and evaluation, and this is something that continues with us here in Swansea. Also, that it is an ongoing process, with each school's curriculum continuing to evolve to meet the needs of their learners. You said that this was an evolving piece of work and you are very pleased with how it is progressing.

We were interested to hear about some of the next steps for implementation, including:

- The School Improvement Team focusing on the effectiveness of school curriculum plans. Supporting schools to ensure they have been able to define how they will measure pupil progress and provide the graduated approach to professional learning so that schools can access support equitably and when they require it.
- Maximising the available funding to support key areas like on numeracy and digital competency frameworks.
- Securing additional support to deliver the Welsh in education strategic plan.
- Promoting and sharing effective practice through head teacher meetings.
- Strengthening our focus with our secondary colleagues to make sure that they have the support they require as they move on that journey for the curriculum for Wales.

We asked whether teaching staff were getting enough support and whether schools are taking all staff on the journey with them/us. We heard that this is the case and what is being seen on the ground now is distributive leadership across schools and how they and staff are working collaboratively. So, it is not just head teachers and senior leadership team alone driving this work but teams within the schools taking it forward.

We also asked about the workload in schools in relation to the new curriculum, especially when you include the pressures of working and assisting other schools across clusters. We were told there has been plenty of national discussion on this, but that we are also looking at this at a local level. We have been working with our schools to look at what that burden is looking like and seeing what we as a local authority can do to support our schools in that area. The sharing aspect is really important and in

the strong clusters we see that. What we see with the cluster working is rather than everybody trying to do everything, they are taking what worked in another area, looking at how they can adapt that to work in their own schools.

Education Estyn Inspection - Progress with recommendations

We thanked the Team Manager for Education Strategy for outlining progress with the two recommendations made following the Estyn Inspection of Local Government Education Services in Swansea in June 2022. We heard that progress in the following areas has been made:

Recommendation 1 - Review post-16 provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners.

- A three-year post-16 strategy is now in operation for Swansea.
- A memorandum of understanding for successful transition of all school leavers has been developed.
- Meetings with all headteachers has taken place regarding sixth form pupils accessing most suitable provision for them.
- An extensive learner voice survey has been carried out.
- Opportunities for online/hybrid models of curriculum delivery at post-16 have been explored.
- Joint professional learning activities have taken place with Gower College and schools with sixth forms.
- Transition funding has been allocated to schools with sixth forms to ensure collaboration.
- Seren Academy continues to deliver sessions and opportunities.
- A partnership between several South Wales education institutions called Reaching Wider has been developed with the aim of raising aspirations for young people.
- Work to support skills needs as part of Swansea Bay City Deal is ongoing and the next step to undertake a mapping of progression routes through a targeted area of health and wellbeing provision offered at pre-16, post-16 and beyond.

Recommendation 2 – Strengthen Welsh-medium provision across all ages and areas of the local authority.

- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) was approved by Welsh Government and a delivery plan has been developed outlining the key work streams. Progress with the plan is being closely monitored and first annual progress report will be submitted to Welsh Government in July 2023.
- Discussion on key priorities regularly takes place with Partneriaeth Addysg Gymraeg Abertawe.
- Since adoption of the WESP, options have been explored for increasing the equity of the offer Welsh Medium childcare and primary school provision.
- Pilot taking place for primary latecomers continues until the end of this academic year.
- Swansea schools Siarter Iaith journey continues to move forward with a number of schools receiving bronze, silver and gold accreditations.
- Additional information to be added to the councils website around benefits of Welsh-medium education.
- Welsh-medium clusters have been working together with the council to identify potential models for Welsh-medium specialist provision in the future.

- Staffing through the medium of Welsh was raised as a significant challenge in all key priority areas, including early years, teaching staff, support staff and staff with ALN expertise.

We also thank you and Director of Education for outlining the key issues facing education currently and we have aligned our work plan for 2023/24 to reflect this.

Your Response

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter but on this occasion, we do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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