



**To/
Councillor Jen Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning and Skills**

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrchol:*

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

Scrutiny

01792 637256

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

10 January 2020

BY EMAIL

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 19 December 2019. It is about the Additional Learning Needs Reform and progress in Swansea.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 19 December 2019

At our meeting on the 19 December 2019, we looked at Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform and progress in Swansea. We would like to thank you and Mark Sheridan, Head of Vulnerable Learners Service for attending and discussing the issues with us. We were pleased that the report provided us with an update on the Additional Learning Needs Strategy, progress over the 2018/19 academic year, projected pressures and the revised plan to mitigate them.

We heard the local authority is facing unprecedented change in the area of ALN following the introduction of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET Act 2018). We understand that the Welsh Government have created five ALN Transformation Lead posts to work with the four regions and the further education sector to support and challenge preparations for the implementation of the ALNET Act in September 2021.

We were told that Swansea has engaged well at a regional level with the five other authorities in the South West Region, which covers the same footprint as ERW. Also that an ALN Strategy and Implementation Plan has been developed along with an ALN Strategy Steering Group. We were pleased to hear that this includes parent/carers who will help to oversee its implementation.

The progress made under the seven themes identified in the regional implementation plan were outlined, including that:

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- good progress had been made under the Awareness Raising Theme.
- mixed progress had been made with regard to Workforce Management.
- mixed progress made under the theme of a Person Centred Practice and Individual Development Planning (IDP). We heard that further work is needed to embed the use of the person centred approach into the culture and ethos of schools and other providers (training has been provided but this needs to be further embedded into schools practice). We also heard there are concerns regarding the capacity of the team to manage the conversion from Statements of Special Education Need to LA maintained IDPs (essentially the running of two systems until transformation is completed).
- good progress has been made in understanding the range of early year's settings and providers and that the integration of these services have been initiated under the Pathfinder programme.
- Swansea continues to have significant concerns regarding the extending of the age range from 19 to 25 years, including the need to ensure integrated working between the colleges, health, adult social services, youth offending, education, employers and training providers.
- early dispute resolution and parent partnership is key to avoiding escalating needs, provision and therefore costs, the contract for development of this process has been awarded to SNAP, a parent partnership website for Swansea has gone live and Education are engaging with parents and carers forum. Swansea has also created two Family Liaison posts and these have made a significant impact on the number of tribunals being lodged. We heard however, this work is time consuming and raises capacity issues moving forward.

We were pleased to hear that the authority now has a better understanding of the impact of the new ALNET Act and the draft Code that indicates the likely statutory obligations on us. We heard staff have been mapping demand and volume of work over the past four years so Swansea has a good knowledge base on which to build upon. The Panel heard that there are concerns about the capacity within education to deliver such a large plan. Presentations have been made to the Corporate Management Team to emphasise a joined up approach and to bolster the capacity of the Education team to deliver all the projects in the plan.

We were encouraged to hear that Swansea is keen to progress the development of a new special school provision and that it is looking to review the number and range of specialist teaching facilities in line with changes in demand.

We recognise the ALNET Act and the implementation of the associated Code will be a huge challenge not only for our education team but also for schools, health, adult social services and a raft of other partners. We are pleased to hear that Swansea had made good initial progress in raising awareness and starting to work with other agencies to develop an integrated local offer that will meet the needs of learners 0-25. The Panel believe two things will be central to making successful progress, firstly be the necessary funding to enable these projects and, secondly good partnership/integrated working. We did express our concern that the Welsh Government have said they expect it to be cost neutral exercise. The Panel plan to follow progress closely and will ask for regular updates, as the planning and implementation of this Act progresses.

We welcome your thoughts on any of the issues raised in our letter but can you please provide a formal written response to the following issue by 31 January 2020.

- How you feel that other internal council departments are engaging and progressing with what is a clearly cross cutting agenda?

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk