



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning 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 Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 15 March 2022 where they looked at the Panels watching brief items.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 15 March 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.

Refugee and Asylum Seeker Education Briefing

We heard that this service is funded by Welsh Government and is part of the wider service for pupils who have a first language other than English/Welsh English (EAL learners). We heard EAL learners are a hugely diverse group and includes settled families, economic migrants, Roma, asylum seekers and refugees. Swansea is a very diverse city with over 140 languages and dialects spoken amongst our school population. We heard that the key support lies within individual schools and the role of the central service was to guide and advise schools.

We asked about the provision that was being made for the arrival of families from Ukraine. We were informed that what we have in place currently and how we can best prepare in advance for any arrivals was being considered. Also, that it is difficult to know at this stage how many children will come into the city, which is different to other schemes the council has managed, as we are usually informed of numbers in advance. We recognise this will be challenging because of the unpredictability of where families may be hosted in the city. This could impact on some schools that are not traditionally use to EAL pupils. We agree with you that sharing of good practice across schools will be important.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We understand that Swansea has been a Refugee and Asylum Seeker dispersal area for over 20 years and that we are a City of Sanctuary. We were pleased to hear that Swansea Council, has the experience to and has many systems in place for supporting families and their children, which should provide a good grounding in this challenging time. We are pleased to hear about the work currently being done across the city and agreed with you when you said it is vital that we get this right.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform Update

We heard that this is a wide-ranging reform and the biggest shake up for many years in ALN. Also, that the Council had been concerned about the implications of the pandemic on making progress but we agreed that staff need to be congratulated on the huge amount of work that has been completed in the last two years to keep this on track through such a difficult time. We look forward to seeing further developments as it progresses in the future. We were told that the biggest challenge will be managing expectations and working together on a shared vision to get the very best model for our ALN pupils.

We welcomed the overall progress that has been made in relation to ALN reform. We were reassured that although we are in the early stages of this legislative reform, we are well positioned to face the challenges that lie ahead.

Education Other Than At Schools (EOTAS) Update

We were told that the service is now being reviewed and this has included looking at the following key areas:

- *A new EOTAS policy* - this is being finalised giving refinement to recommendations made to Cabinet in 2016, which is needed as five years have now passed. During the intervening years, it has been recognised that only referring children and young people with the most severe Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) needs to EOTAS provision may not be sufficient to meet the needs of Swansea. The effectiveness of prevention and early intervention by Swansea schools and central services mean that there are less children and young people requiring Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provision. However, there are a greater number of children and young people with long-term SEBD needs and an increase in pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presenting with challenging behaviours. The new EOTAS task and finish group has identified the need to develop provision to meet the needs of this complex cohort above and beyond the current curriculum offer which is tailored to a reintegration model.
- *Delivering improved outcomes within Maes Derw* - this includes attendance, exclusions and the part time provision at Maes Derw. It has been identified that these are all areas which can be improved. The need to ensure all pupil placements at Maes Derw are appropriate, in order for learners' needs to be met has also been highlighted. Now that it has been a whole year since the opening of Maes Derw, it is appropriate to consider how well the changes are meeting the needs of Swansea children and young people.
- *EOTAS funding* - there is a continual need to ensure that the funding available for EOTAS provision, which in Swansea is targeted at need. Currently, the majority of the funding for EOTAS provision is with Maes Derw PRU, however, as needs change and those learners who meet the remit of Maes Derw reduce, there is a need to look at bespoke, multi-agency packages of support, which do not currently have dedicated funding. It would also be beneficial to target resource at earlier

intervention and prevention. The effectiveness of the devolved money to secondary schools suggests targeting resource early is effective in reducing the number of learners requiring EOTAS provision.

You told us that the 2016 report had provided a firm foundation for this service and we are now starting to build upon that. We recognise that the needs of pupils in Swansea will change and evolve, so we are pleased to see the ability to flex and review our model of delivery here in Swansea therefore enabling us to meet those changing needs.

New Curriculum for Wales Update

We welcome the overall progress that has been made in relation to the introduction of the new curriculum for Wales but our concerns still remain with regard to the readiness of all schools to introduce the new curriculum. We were told that some comprehensive schools would be ready by September, while others would not be. Also, that all primary schools in Swansea would go ready or not in September. We felt this was very concerning and emphasised the importance of getting this right, otherwise pupils will suffer.

We were told the Welsh Government recognise that curriculum design is a cyclical process of engagement, design, planning, trialling, and evaluation. Also, that it is an ongoing process with each school's curriculum continuing to evolve to meet the needs of their learners. We agreed and emphasised the importance of the role of School Improvement Advisers and Curriculum Advisers in advising and getting those schools who may be finding it more challenging, up to speed with their curriculum development. We also agreed with officers when they said school to school collaboration will be particularly beneficial in relation to curriculum development.

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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