



**To:**  
**Councillor Robert Smith**  
**Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

**BY EMAIL**

*Please ask for:* Michelle Roberts  
*Gofynnwch am:*  
*Scrutiny Office* 01792 637256  
*Line:*  
*Llinell*  
*Uniongyrchol:*  
*e-Mail* [scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk)  
*e-Bost:*  
*Date* 12 December 2023  
*Dyddiad:*

**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 23 November 2023. The Panel discussed looked after reducing disadvantage in schools, the School Improvement Services and Cookery in school.

Dear Cllr Smith,

### **Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 23 November 2023**

We would like to thank you, the Director of Education, Head of Planning and Resources, Principal School Improvement Officer and Head of Achievement and Partnership Service 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.

#### **Reducing disadvantage in school**

We heard about how the Education Directorate and schools work to reduce disadvantage in schools including the use of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG), the roll out of free school meals, the cost of the school day and school uniform. The main aim of this is to raise the attainment of pupils from low-income households by reducing the barriers they face in achieving their full potential.

We were told that the PDG received by schools can vary greatly depending on the number of pupils eligible. When using the grant, it has been found that some interventions are more successful than others and the best approaches are not always the most expensive. We were pleased to hear that approaches used should be research and evidenced based.

We asked how the level of pupil development grant to schools will be determined in the future, given the free school meal (FSM) proxy may no longer be as accurate due

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to parents having less incentive to register because of the roll out of FSM. We were told that schools are constantly reminding parents to register, also because it enabled them to access the possibility of a grant for school uniform.

You told us that the FSM indicator is probably not the ideal proxy for deprivation in schools, but it is the best we have for now. A two-pronged approach will need to be used, firstly, continuing to get parents to register but also, secondly, to look at other indicators of deprivation.

We also asked whether good practice examples in reducing disadvantage are being shared across schools. We heard that PDG guidance to practitioners and leaders in Wales on the use of this grant is predominantly around whole school approaches. So those approaches, once embedded, are shared in a variety of ways. One way is through our SIT sharing that knowledge across the system as they visit schools. We also heard that this is done via case studies and at head teacher seminars, where we invite our school leaders to present some of their good practice. Partneriaeth share practice as well and Estyn published case studies once they have inspected schools.

We were interested to hear how awareness is being raised across schools about the barriers faced by pupils caused by deprivation. We agreed that the poverty proofing of the schools day is a good way to identify and make practical changes in schools based on what pupils really need to enable them to partake fully in their education.

### **School Improvement Service (SIT) Update**

We heard that SIT support schools in a number of ways through the school year but the core of the work centres around annual support visits. The agenda for visits are co-constructed with headteachers in order to support high levels of ownership and engagement. One of the key objectives for the last academic year was to support schools in self-evaluation. Schools were encouraged to self-evaluate in the areas of vision and leadership; curriculum, learning and teaching and wellbeing, equity inclusion. We heard that this year SIT is focusing on

- A differentiated/graduated approach to the number of school visits per school depending on the level of need.
- Supporting schools and settings to have a clear rationale for their priorities.
- Supporting schools to plan for improvement in a more focused manner.
- Improving the quality of school-based evaluations.
- Supporting schools to undertake purposeful quality assurance that promotes an improving view of pupil progress, the impact of their curriculum plans and the provision to promote positive wellbeing.

We asked what the differing roles are between the SIT and Partneriaeth. We heard Partneriaeth provide curriculum support and development in aspects of the national leadership programme including training that enables practitioners to do what they need to do at the chalkface. While the SIT is a separate team that sits within the local authority whose role it is evaluate schools and their improvement journey.

We thanked the SIT and wished to note that we appreciate the excellent support they are providing to our schools in Swansea.

## **Cookery in Schools Briefing**

We heard that cookery within schools falls within the Health and Well-being area of the Curriculum for Wales, where learners are helped to understand factors that affect health promoting behaviours. As a result, learners should be taught the importance of a balanced diet, nutrition and the impact of choices on well-being; how to plan and prepare basic, nutritious meals and applying a range of techniques to prepare meals. The report also provided us with a snapshot of where we are now in both the primary and secondary sector in Swansea.

We agreed that Penclawdd was a shining example of what can be done and asked if there was any strategy at this stage to consider rolling out that learning more widely. Although we do recognise some of the difficulties with that, not least the finding of the physical space in each school. We heard that there is not a specific strategy but it does sit under a much wider strategy in relation to poverty and is about how we support our families. In the longer term, it may need to be a Welsh national strategy rather than an individual local authority that pushes some aspects forward.

We also asked how often a child actually gets to cook in school. We were told that there would not be any data specifically saying how often it is. It would be down to individual schools to determine, as part of their design of the curriculum and how they blend that in. Although we were told there is more anecdotal evidence similar to Penclawdd Primary School in how schools in their work as community focused schools are making it a much wider offer and bringing the families in.

We were encouraged to hear that it is part of the new curriculum but do feel that cookery and nutrition is a serious issue and an important life skill. Schools should ensure that it is clearly part of their curriculum planning. A start needs to be made if we are to be serious about this work.

## **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 response.

Yours sincerely

## **COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES**

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

[Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk)