



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
e-Bost:
Date 26 February 2024
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 19 February 2024. The Panel discussed School Organisation, the amalgamation of special schools in Swansea.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 19 February 2024

We would like to thank the Director of Education and the Education Funding and Information Officer 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.

We were given a PowerPoint presentation covering why the amalgamation is needed, the high-level vision and aims, the extent of the consultation and what it told us, the proposed location, the statutory notice period and the next steps.

We asked about the number of consultation responses that were received in relation to the proposal. We heard that, from the survey, 25% had concerns and 75% were supportive. We were told that the survey was just one part of the consultation exercise, with a range of other tools being used to gain views, including face to face meetings. Also, that there were a large number of statutory consultees contacted as part of this process, including for example Estyn, Childrens Commissioner, governors and elected members.

We heard that several sites were initially considered, but after investigations into those, one clear option emerged and this is the site adjacent to the current Pen-y-Bryn Special School.

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We were interested to hear that the new school would cater for up to 350 pupils, which will mean a further 100 places. This should enable Swansea to cater for those pupils coming through who may have had to go out of county in the past to stay closer to home.

We asked what state and/or category were the current two buildings being used for special schools in Swansea. We heard that they are not designated as category 'D' but it was the suitability for purpose that was the key issue in relation to the two special school sites. Whether other works elsewhere had been put back in order to progress this proposal was also asked and we were told that this was not the case and in fact, this proposal had been put back previously due to more urgent need coming forward in the past.

We asked whether the entry criteria and the process used for ALN pupils will be reviewed in light of the different types of pupils that may be coming through in the future. We heard that the ALN referral panel, currently used, will likely need to be recalibrated to accommodate the numbers and types of pupils coming through.

We were interested to explore how the proposal is being 'future proofed' to ensure future needs are built in early. We heard that the special school would form one part of the offer provided to ALN pupils, alongside mainstream schools and special teaching facilities. It is understood that there is a growing need for ALN provision across Swansea and this amalgamation will form part solution for that need.

We were pleased to hear about the wide-ranging consultation exercise that was completed but did want to emphasise the importance of telling consultees that if they wished to object, they had to do that separately within the statutory notice period.

We asked whether this proposal would have an impact on jobs and particularly in job losses. We heard that this could not be ruled out because we currently have two leadership structures and only one would be required.

We asked whether it was likely that the home to school transport costs would increase because of this proposal. We were told that it is probable that the need for transport will increase but the council is working to mitigate this by preparing for that now. This is being done through the mini bus pilot, increasing the councils mini bus stock in the specialist sector and providing more transport in house.

We welcome and are supportive of this exciting new proposal and look forward to seeing how it progresses.

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