



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel – Education**

Committee Room 3A, Guildhall, Swansea

Thursday, 12 September 2019 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C Anderson
L James

Councillor(s)

L S Gibbard

Councillor(s)

D W Helliwell

Co-opted Member(s)

A Roberts

Co-opted Member(s)

Co-opted Member(s)

Officer(s)

Helen Morgan – Rees
Judy Marks
Julie Rees
Michelle Roberts

Head of Education Achievement & Partnership
Education Welfare Service
Education Welfare Service
Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): A M Day, M Durke, S J Gallagher, B Hopkins, S M Jones,
M A Langstone and L J Tyler-Lloyd

Co-opted Member(s): D Anderson-Thomas

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

None

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

None

3 Conveners Letters and Minutes

Further to minutes of 11 July 2019, the Panel asked the Head of Education Achievement and Partnership about the difficulties experienced by Dylan Thomas Community Secondary School around the size of the catchment area. She explained that there is currently no plans to review catchment areas but did recognise that difficulties can arise for secondary schools that find it hard to work with primaries due to catchment issues.

Letters and minutes were accepted.

4 Elective Home Education

Panel thanked Judy Marks and Julie Rees from the Education Welfare Team and Helen Morgan Rees for attending and discussing the issues with the panel.

The Panel heard that the aim of Swansea Council in relation to EHE is to provide guidance for parents who are considering or have decided to Elective Home Educate their children. That Swansea Council respect and accept the rights of parents to educate their children at home and we endeavor to foster good relationships with the home educators. That currently there are 167 families that that we are aware of who are EHE but that these figures change frequently.

Councillors were assured that Swansea EHE procedures are in line with the Welsh Government (WG) Non-Statutory guidance for local authorities. They heard that the guidance says that the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause them to receive efficient full-time education suitable (a) to their age, ability and aptitude, and (b) to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

The guidance also says that the Local Authority needs to be satisfied that every child in its area is receiving suitable education (as stated in Section 437 of the Education Act 1996). Parents must provide their child with an 'efficient' and 'suitable' education. Parents may educate their children at home providing they fulfil the requirements of section 7 of the Education Act 1996. The Panel were pleased to hear that Wales Government are in the process of updating this to become Statutory Guidance.

Councillors recognised that the Local Authority is not responsible for the provision of EHE or under any statutory obligation to support it. However, Councillors were encouraged to hear that under section 436A of the Education Act 1996, the LA does have a duty to make arrangements to identify children not receiving a suitable education. Also that while there is no legal framework for the LA to regularly monitor provision of home education, we in Swansea are mindful of our wider duties of care, and we will contact parents to discuss their ongoing home education provision. Councilors also understand that there is provision to take legal action if a child of compulsory school age is not receiving suitable education or by regular attendance at school. They heard that Swansea has not yet had to do this for EHE.

Councillors asked if there was any pattern in the reasons why parents might be taking the decision to home educate. The Panel were pleased to hear that there has been no adverse pattern identified and that our data shows that similar to a wider picture across Wales.

The Panel were concerned to hear that if a child has never attended school and is any therefore not in the system then we may never know about them and therefore any safeguarding issues that may come along with that. Councillors did note, however EHE children should be being seen by other professionals like, for example, doctors and health visitors who can alert the authority to any concerns.

The issue of the ability for home-educated children to sit exams was discussed. The Panel were concerned to hear that local schools and colleges are often unable to accommodate EHE children and therefore parents have to arrange for exams to be taken in other locations that is much more expensive and may be a barrier to children being able to sit the exams. The Panel would like to see local colleges working with home educators in order to provide space for those children to be able to sit exams at a reasonable cost.

The Panel heard that the relationship with Health around home-educated children was not great. Youth Services and Carer's link in with Education Welfare but Health only do so when there is a concern. Councillors agreed that it is important that all agencies are working effectively together with the education welfare service and would ask further work is done to attempt to get Health more fully engaged.

5 Performance of pupils receiving Free School Meals

Helen Morgan Rees was invited to the panel to provide a briefing on the work that is being completed to improve the educational outcomes of children receiving free school meals. A gap in performance between pupils receiving free school meal and those that do not had previously been identified as a challenge to education locally and also across Wales and the UK as a whole. The Scrutiny Programme Committee also identified this as an issue that the Panel should consider this year. The following issues have been noted from the discussion:

- At Foundation Phase, the overall picture of performance is of decline with a sharp decline in FSM pupils. Panel heard that this is because the areas of learning changed in last two years, which have become harder and with new milestones introduced. Performance is based on teacher assessment and schools are being much truer and more secure in their assessments than ever before. It is important that this is happening in all schools across not only Swansea but also the ERW region so there is a level base.
- At Key Stage 2, there have been fewer changes for KS2 pupils and this is reflective in the data. It does show progress being made, although there has been declining performance but this is within reason.
- At Key Stage 3, there has been a big decline in all pupil performance but this has also been reflected across Wales and is within tolerance levels. The full comparative performance data produced later in the year should help identify reasons for the decline. The Panel have scheduled that into our work programme as we have in previous years.
- At Key Stage 4, the gap in performance between FSM and non-FSM has narrowed a little. However, performance has fallen this year and this is because a new suite of exam that are harder were introduced. It is expected that this will be reflected at a national level.

The Panel heard that data is important but we must look at the improvement that individual pupils are making year on year, demonstrating progress for them individually. Councillors agreed that we must make sure all schools tracking processes for pupils is sound, hearing that this is discussed in the challenge adviser visits to schools.

The Panel heard that key to improving to performance of FSM and vulnerable pupils is ensuring the teaching and learning is meeting the needs of all pupils including those who have dealt with difficult issues in their lives. That good quality teaching and learning is vital and for each learner to be treated as an individual and the curriculum is shaped for them. How schools spend the Pupil Development Grant is also important, monies must be targeted appropriately. Councillors were pleased to hear that work is being done with schools around the most effective ways to spend their PDG.

The Panel were encouraged to hear how the New Curriculum for Wales will better serve all pupils, with greater potential to promote good and exciting learning for all. Councillors are looking forward to learning more about this at our meeting in November.

6 Work Programme 2019/2020

Work Programme reviewed.

7 For Information

Accepted

The meeting ended at 5.40 pm

Chair