



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Teams

Thursday, 21 January 2021 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C Anderson
S J Gallagher
L James

Councillor(s)

A M Day
D W Helliwell
S M Jones

Councillor(s)

M Durke
B Hopkins
M A Langstone

Co-opted Member(s)

D Anderson-Thomas

Co-opted Member(s)

A Roberts

Co-opted Member(s)

Other Attendees

Jennifer Raynor

Cabinet Member - Education Improvement, Learning & Skills

Officer(s)

Helen Morgan-Rees
Michelle Roberts

Interim Director of Education
Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): L Tyler Lloyd

1 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Cllr Susan Jones declared a personal interest.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

None

3 Letters and Minutes

The Panel reviewed the letters and minutes following the Panel meeting on the 17 December 2020.

4 Public Questions

No public questions were received.

5 Verbal update - Covid Education Recovery Plan

The Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills and the Director of Education gave the Panel a verbal update on the current Covid situation in Education. The following was noted from the update and the discussion had.

- Still hampered with Covid situation but other strategies continue to be developed including, for example, the Additional Learning Needs Reform, New Curriculum, professional development and the behaviour strategy.
- The position we are in is still a volatile one. Schools are open for vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers. A wide range of critical workers have now been identified so we have due regard for this but we have to risk assess our schools to ensure that we can accommodate them safely.
- We have switched back to remote learning for the majority of pupils. There is an expectation for years 10, 11, 12 and 13 for four hours of synchronous learning a day. We as a local authority are not prescribing what schools should be doing. The reason for that is that we have a diverse communities. We believe that our head teachers know their communities best. They know what kind of blended learning or remote learning offer should be provided for their pupils.
- Most of our pupils across Swansea have a blend of recorded lessons, some live lessons, paper packs and work books. The blend will depend on pupil's age and aptitude. The Swansea virtual school has been enhanced and reviewed this term.
- Devices for pupils, digital learning and digital inclusion. We have invested through the infrastructure project more than 5 million pounds in terms of both kit and connectivity. To date we have delivered over 8,000 devices to our schools in Swansea and on top of that we have 2,000 being prepared for distribution, with delivery of a further 2,000 devices awaited. Proud of that achievement. The situation will also continue to be monitored, as we are aware that some of our families do not have the most appropriate devices and there are children that are sharing devices.
- Panel asked whether the people who have previously used devices can donate them to schools. The Director said yes if the device is appropriate they can contact secondary schools directly as they have the ICT staff to prepare them for use by pupils but if someone wants to donate to a Primary School then can they contact education@swansea.gov.uk inbox as Primary Schools do not have ICT staff to do this.
- Announcement made on the 16 January about examinations and assessments in our schools was raised. The assessment for this summer term will be in the form of teacher assessment, no exams but assessment within schools with no external assessment. Pupils would likely therefore to be assessed used mock examinations/past assessments. The examination boards will assist by providing an assessment framework which will give first stage standardisation. Thereafter, there will be a degree of moderation across schools and across pupils but the authority is awaiting further information from the Welsh Government on this. Cabinet Member agreed to keep the panel updated as things progress.
- Panel raised issue of national digital poverty and the need for this to be addressed at a national level in the future. The Panel heard that the Local

Authority is working with Welsh Government on these matters. Definitely a need to look at connectivity in the future.

- The Panel asked how many pupils did not have devices currently. The Panel heard that from recent survey approximately 2000 pupils do not have appropriate devices, for example gaming devices, but are able to access learning to some extent. This number is likely to be much reduced as things have moved on a little from that survey and with more equipment starting to go out to schools. The Panel would like to see the current information when it is available including how many pupils on Free School Meals who need equipment or connectivity.
- Need to build confidence back in our school workforce to return to buildings after hearing about the new variant being far more contagious and more susceptible to children. We have evidence that the workplace itself is not unsafe and there is a need to use the same control measures as before but these need to be enhanced. Discussions are being had with Welsh Government about the return of pupils. Some of what is being discussed includes which age groups will return first but it will depend on the R rate. Welsh Government has pledged to have discussions with the profession to enable this.
- If the R rate does not drop significantly pupils will not return until after the 22 February. What that will look like currently we have no idea but we will keep the Panel informed as we learn more.
- Staff working with vulnerable children who do intermit care will be able to be vaccinated along with those working with vulnerable pupils at the Pupil Referral Unit.
- Key priorities continue to be progressed including:
 1. safeguarding and engaging on wellbeing pastoral care
 2. building programme including handover of new PRU next week
 3. ALN programme implementing Act by Sep 2021
 4. key strategy around blended learning strategy
 5. positive behaviour strategy and implementation plan
 6. curriculum implementation plan locally 2019-2022 3rd phase; and
 7. improving leadership capacity across schools in Swansea (national programme to develop leaders currently ERW).
- LAC PDG spend, why is there an underspend and how will it be used. The Panel would like to find out a little more about that underspend and why, if clusters not drawing down funds and why. The Panel heard that not all claims will have come in for the monies spent but will do so over this quarter of the year, the underspend shown will likely therefore reduce.
- Thanks to Director and schools based staff for their work through this challenging time.
- How we support schools to communicate expectations to parents and pupils was raised. Panel told that it is a matter of balance and what suits a particular school and particular age group, important to have an acceptable learning offer. LA guidance on blended learning was given to school and they can communicate this to parents. Each school has different language and accessibility needs, so given schools tools with good clear guidance so they can communicate to parents that is supported by local authority.
- Pressures on Teaching and education support staff, what resources needed to ensure appropriate support for teachers who are finding it tough going and also counselling. Are additional resources required? Schools forums raised this also.

We providing a good list of resources and how they are accessed. No just about signposting but do more than that offering session education psychologist offered a positive psychology model that can be used in a crisis and opportunities from national academy to have Headspace discussions and education support helpline (also has welsh medium offer)

- Cabinet Member said that Schools and Education Department most heartened by the Estyn report recently published that gives a number of cameos. Scrutiny may wish to schedule this in to go through in detail. Includes a letter specific to Swansea and the national report on how education has responded to the pandemic. Panel will schedule this into their work programme.

6 Education Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/2021

The Panel reviewed the work programme.

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm

Chair