

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – SPC Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching purpose of the Panel is to provide ongoing challenge to school's performance to ensure that *pupils in Swansea are receiving high quality education and the authority is meeting its objectives in relation to improving school standards and pupil attainment.*

2. Key Activities

The Panel is currently meeting on a monthly basis and the work completed since June 2023 includes:

Meeting	Topic(s)
15 June 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional Learning Needs Reform Update 2. New Curriculum for Wales Update 3. Estyn Inspection – progress with recommendations 4. Key issues affecting education and discussion of work plan for education scrutiny for 2023-2024.
13 July 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managing and improving school attendance 2. Managing and Improving school exclusions
14 Sept 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Looked after children, support and progress in school 2. Following up on 10 Cabinet Development Committee recommendations 3. Feedback on Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group meeting on 19 June 2023.
19 Oct 2023	School Session and Visit 1 – Gorseinon Primary School (look at progress with the Schools Development Plan and their Estyn Inspection recommendations)
23 Nov 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reducing disadvantage in school, including PDG spend, roll out for free school meals, cost of school day and uniform. 2. School Improvement Service Update 3. Cookery in Schools
14 Dec 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual Education Performance and Cabinet Member Q&A 2. Feedback on Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group meeting on 23 October 2023.
18 Jan 2024	Introducing the New Curriculum for Wales (meeting with a Gowerton secondary school Headteacher and it cluster of primary heads teachers)
12 Feb 2024	Annual Budget as it relates to education matters
19 Feb 2024 (Extra)	School organisation – amalgamation of special schools in Swansea.
22 Feb 2024	School Session 2 - Clydach Primary School – looking at progress with their school improvement plan
13 Mar 2024	Schools Session and Visit 3 – Bishopston Comprehensive School (To look at progress with the Schools Development Plan) Postponed until July 2024

3. Achievements / Impacts

Nine letters to the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning have been sent since our first meeting this Municipal year in June. Find below some of the views and issues raised following on from the previous update in October 2023.

Gorseinon Primary School meeting and visit in October

From our discussions with the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and the School Improvement Adviser, we are reassured that progress is being made across the School Improvement Plan and with the Estyn recommendations and that there is now a good base for the school to continue to build upon those improvements.

We were encouraged to hear from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, that the support received by the local authority has been excellent as well as from Partneriaeth, particularly in the areas of Science and Maths.

We were very pleased to see the fantastic facilities provided in this new school building and that it was clearly designed for pupils to get the best out of their day at school including good outside space, well designed classrooms and useful shared areas.

Reducing Disadvantage in 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.

We also 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 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, because it also enabled them to access the possibility of a grant for school uniform. The Cabinet Member told the Panel FSM indicator is probably not the ideal proxy for measuring deprivation in schools, but it is the best we have for now. A two-pronged approach will need to be used in future, firstly, continuing to get parents to register but also, secondly, to look at other indicators of deprivation.

Cookery in Schools

We were encouraged to hear that cookery does form part of the new curriculum for Wales. We did wish to emphasise the importance of cookery and nutrition, feeling that it is a serious issue and an important life skill. We agreed that schools should ensure that it is clearly part of their curriculum planning.

Cluster working – New Curriculum for Wales

We met with the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors from the Gowerton Comprehensive School cluster (called North Gower Partnership) to discuss how they are progressing the implementation of the New Curriculum for Wales across their cluster. We were keen to hear from the schools about how they are developing a shared understanding of what they mean by progression and we recognise that this must be challenging, because each school will have their own approaches in many aspects.

We were pleased to hear about the support provided to teachers and school staff, the use of a number of researched key principles and the development of shared policies in relation to key areas like safeguarding and attendance. We agreed that the development of a North Gower Partnership website was a particularly useful reference point and resource for pupils, parents and teaching staff and should help in continuing the consistency of approach across the cluster. We asked how the development and maintenance of the website and shared other resources are funded. We heard that currently they are funded via the comprehensive school budget and that the NGP apply for any relevant grant funding that may be available to help progress this. We found a number of learning points from this session which will be passed to the Cabinet Member in the Convener's letter.

Annual Budget as it relates to Education matters

We met on the 12 February to discuss the annual budget as it relates to education matters, we raised a number of points that were submitted to Cabinet in a letter from the Service Improvement, Finance and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel. Some of these included as an example:

- We were concerned about the continual reduction in the level of reserves held by schools. Whilst we recognise the need for the money to be spent wisely, it is important for schools to have a good level of reserves to act as a buffer if and when needed.
- We welcomed the news about the ALN mini bus pilot and look forward to hearing more about this as it develops.
- We noted the overspend in Home to School Transport again this year. We will keep a scrutiny eye on how this progresses over the coming year.
- We welcome the enhancing of 'in county' provision, thereby reducing the potential for so many out of county placements. However, we did notice that there are large savings projected for ALN and felt it was important that this does not affect the overall ALN outcomes in Swansea moving forward.

Partneriaeth

The Convener of the Panel who is also the Chair of the Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group updated the Panel on progress with regard to the regional partnership.

The Councillor Group met in both October 2023 and February 2024 where they spoke to the Lead Director, the Lead Officer and relevant strategic directors progress with two of the partnerships key priorities. They also met with a headteacher at each of the meetings to discuss a National and Professional Enquiry Project linked to those priorities to find out what has been learnt. They group received updates on the both the New Curriculum for Wales progress and the Partneriaeth Risk Profile.

4. Education Scrutiny Performance Panel - Future Work Programme 2023/24

Meeting	Topic(s)
18 Apr 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion, Values and Ethics Education • Hearing the Voices of Children and Young People • Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Update

9 May 2024

- Quality in Education (QEd) / Sustainable Communities for Learning Update
- Swansea Skills Partnership Annual Update
- End of year review in Education Scrutiny