



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

BY EMAIL

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Date 7 October 2024
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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 September 2024 at Bishopston Comprehensive School. This letter does not require a response.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – visit to Bishopston Comprehensive School

On 19 September the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel visited Bishopston Comprehensive School. We are grateful to the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, other senior staff, the Director of Education, the Service Improvement Officer and yourself for attending. We thanked the Head for her detailed overview and for answering our questions. We also extend our thanks to the students who took part in the tour and the wonderful orchestra performance. Some of the points noted from the school's presentation include:

- The school focus heavily on sharing effective practice with other secondary schools, cluster primaries and external partners. This includes a cross-phase transition project.
- The school is using a robust and honest self-evaluation process, the outcome being a "what is best for us" approach.
- Triangulation of data has given a clearer picture of strengths and areas to improve.
- Profession learning opportunities are offered and the GROW method is used in professional dialogue.
- There is a whole school focus each half term on a different ALN, providing strategies to staff.
- New curriculum development continues with focuses on innovation, collaboration, creativity and shared ownership.
- The wellbeing of pupils remains central with a focus on pupil voice. The school have been a lead professional inquiry school for Partneriaeth and have received £15m investment for building improvements.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TRUSLOW A CHRAFFU

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- Finances are challenging and the school are struggling to make further cuts to meet the current budget.
- Additional challenges include staff recruitment, minibus transport, stretched ICT Hwb grant and site challenges, including flooding, a lightning strike and ground movement.
- Post 16 education remains a challenge. Travel is a barrier due to the school's rural catchment, along with transitioning pupils from a school to a college environment. The school feels not having a 6th form offer is a disadvantage for both pupils and the school.
- Attendance figures continue to be below pre covid levels however this is true for all schools. The school continues to offer nurture provision and engagement as well a new EWO and rewards for good attendance.
- Metacognition is valued and helps support self-regulated learning.

We enjoyed seeing the new facilities and were very impressed with the pupils who took part in the tour. We noted the pride and positive feeling felt by both pupils and staff. We were pleased to hear of the school's progress in introducing the new curriculum and the support the school have received from the local authority, the school improvement service and Partneriaeth. We felt the school have blended the new curriculum in well through a pragmatic approach, that builds on previous developments and does not overload staff.

We have taken on board the current challenges outlined by the school. We note the challenges with attendance and feel that in the current climate 91.3% is reasonable and the school are clearly actively addressing concerns.

We asked the Director of Education about any plans to extend the schools offer beyond 16 and heard that there would not be funding for this. We also queried the schools budget challenges and were concerned this could limit their ability to meet the needs of the new curriculum. The Director of Education discussed the process of narrowing that all schools must undertake, although acknowledged that schools have differing starting points, and that the priorities were, being realistic and getting the basics right. You highlighted that education is the biggest budget item and the Council face continual challenges with balancing priorities and a rise in additional costs. The Head highlighted the that way ALN funding is granted can cause challenges for the school. The Director of Education stated that how ALN funding is distributed will be considered.

Overall, it was clear to the Panel that the school is working hard to meet its challenges and demonstrates excellence in all areas, particularly with its commitment to shared learning and the work with cluster primaries.

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 written response.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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