



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel –
14 November 2024

Briefing on progress on the Vulnerable Learners Service Inclusion Strategy (including an update on the behaviour strategy)

Purpose:	To brief the Scrutiny Performance Panel on progress on the Vulnerable Learners Service Inclusion Strategy (including an update on the behaviour strategy)
Content:	The report sets out the progress against the Vulnerable Learners Service Inclusion Strategy, including detailed information relating to the development of a new behaviour strategy.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and provide comments and observations
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Robert Smith, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
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1. Background

The Vulnerable Learner Service covers a range of services for vulnerable learners which include Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team, Maes Derw Pupil Referral Unit, services for pupils Educated Other than at School, Home Tuition Team, Pupil Engagement (promoting inclusion/reducing exclusion), School Admissions Team, Looked After Children Education, Education Welfare Service and Education Safeguarding and Child Protection.

Some learners are identified as vulnerable due to a specific additional learning need or personal situation for example children who are looked after. In addition, all children and young people can potentially experience periods of vulnerability at different points in time.

Creating an education system which is inclusive and responsive to need is critical in meeting needs and ensuring all children and young people have the best chance to access education opportunities and progression. This will

contribute to achieving the Education Directorate aim of creating an Excellent Education for All by Working Together.

The Vulnerable Learners Service Inclusion Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in May 2023 and aims to bring together the key priorities across all areas of the Vulnerable Learners Service which will support us to meet the needs of vulnerable learners to achieve the aims of the Education Directorate and Swansea Council.

These priorities are:

- Promoting attendance
- Promoting inclusion
- Embedding effective universal (whole school) provision while supporting sufficient specialist places
- Embedding a shared inclusion ethos
- Emotional health and psychological wellbeing (EHPW) whole school approach

Within the priority of inclusion there is a current workstream focusing on developing a revised behaviour strategy for Swansea schools. This work is being considered as part on the Education Service Transformation Committee and additional detail will be provided as part of this report to update the Education Scrutiny Panel on the progress to date and proposed next steps.

2. Update on progress against each priority.

Promoting attendance: Attendance remains challenging however, since 2022 there has been a slow but steady increase in attendance across all sectors of education in Swansea. This improving picture has been supported by the work of the Education Welfare Service (EWS). A full review and team restructure has been undertaken to ensure that EWS are able to work in the most effective way possible. All schools are now supported with individual action plans and some schools with the most challenging attendance rates have been supported by the Family Engagement Grant. Family Engagement Officers have been appointed by school and meet regularly. EWS are represented at all Family Engagement Officer meetings and attendance is a standing item. EWS are also moving away from punitive approaches wherever possible and focusing on learner welfare using trauma informed approaches and considering appropriate responses to Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

Promoting Inclusion: This priority aims to reduce exclusion from schools and minimise the use of part time timetables, unless they are part of a planned reintegration strategy. In line with national trends there has been an increase in the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions over the last 5 years in Swansea. It is recognised that there are a number of factors that have contributed to this which include, but are not limited to, the impact of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis, the increase in learners with additional learning needs and learners who are neurodiverse. These factors have contributed to reduced emotional health and wellbeing which in turn can create emotional responses to environments which may be perceived as challenging

behaviours. These societal and demographic changes require a different response or different environment for learners and this has led to the need to develop a revised behaviour strategy for Swansea schools. This work is being co-developed with schools and wider stakeholders and is the focus of the Education Service Transformation Committee. More detail will be provided in Section 3 of this report.

Embedding effective universal (whole school) provision while supporting sufficient specialist places. There has been significant progress in relation to this priority which focusses on provision for learners with additional learning needs. The priority is about achieving the right balance between supporting learners in their local schools via whole school and targeted approaches wherever possible while also recognising that for some learners a more specialised provision is required.

This priority has been progressed via our Specialist Teaching Facility (STF) review. The STF review has been ongoing for a four year period which has included an extensive period of stakeholder engagement and co-design. The output of this engagement period was a set of proposals to remodel and redesignate the STF offer in Swansea. These proposals include the:

- redesignation of 25 Special Teaching Facilities.
- change the specialism of 3 STFs.
- opening of 5 new Special Teaching Facilities and expansion of a further 4 STFs.
- the closure of 5 Special Teaching Facilities.

The net gain will be 61 additional places if the proposals proceed.

The consultation period ended in October 2024 and a report with the outcome of the consultation and final recommendations will be considered by Swansea Cabinet in December 2024.

In addition to the work supporting the increases of specialist places there has been significant work undertaken to support the universal offer at whole school level. There has been a focus on building capacity and using inreach and outreach offers of support to both learners and as professional development. This work has included:

- A pilot 'cluster enhanced provision' model in the Dylan Thomas cluster, the pilot is ongoing at the time of reporting. The provision provides short term interventions for learners and specialist advice for professionals on an inreach / outreach basis.
- A sensory resource base has been established at Grange Primary School to provide new opportunities for learners with sensory impairment. The base will also offer training opportunities for school professionals.
- A new Welsh Medium Additional Learning Needs provision has been opened in Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Bryniago to support learners with additional learning needs through the medium of Welsh and provide a transition to a new STF model if agreed.
- Pen y Bryn Special School are working with the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team to provide an outreach support offer to STFs

- The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team have also commissioned Occupational Therapy support for STFs

While many of these workstreams are still in early stages of development our ongoing monitoring and evaluation indicate good success in all workstreams and the feedback to date is positive. We will continue to review and measure the impact on learners.

Embedding a shared inclusion ethos. The intention for the priorities in the Inclusion Strategy is that they will support the embedding of a shared inclusion ethos by ensuring inclusive approaches and a commitment to meeting the needs of vulnerable learners. The work on the behaviour strategy is an example of this and, as outlined in Section 3 below, agreeing shared, consistent approaches which place learners at the centre are critical.

In addition to this, an Accessibility Strategy has recently been approved by Cabinet.. This strategy will support the local authority with the aim of ensuring an inclusive, equitable and positive education experience for all disabled learners. Alongside this strategy there has been a focus on using the Welsh Government ALN Capital Grant to improve accessibility in schools by making physical improvements to buildings or purchasing additional resources.

The Welsh Government ALN Capital Grant has also been used strategically to support the embedding on an inclusion ethos. The grant was used to ensure every school was able to purchase sensory equipment to support learners. In addition to this, the grant has been used to future proof spaces in schools for learners with additional learning needs, aligned to our strategic programmes. The grant was also used to purchase minibuses to ensure more equitable experiences for learners with additional needs particularly in relation to home to school transport.

Emotional health and psychological wellbeing (EHPW) whole school approach. This priority is led primarily by the Education Psychology Service (EPS) but as with all elements of the Inclusion Strategy there are important interconnections. An example of this is the work undertaken in relation to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). EPS has developed this important training package for schools and also shared the training and strategies with EWS to ensure consistency in approach. The small improvements in attendance and shift to a less punitive approach reflect this. EPS have also led on the development of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme. This was initially challenging to establish due to recruitment challenges but the innovative use of Assistant Educational Psychologists has ensured that ELSA is now an embedded initiative within schools in Swansea.

A significant milestone in this priority was the recommissioning of the school based counselling service which resulted in the commissioning of a new provider who is able to align services to the approaches within the Inclusion Strategy. Stakeholders were involved in this process. This priority area is also overseen by the Emotional Health and Psychological Wellbeing Forum which is a multi-agency forum.

3. Progress on development of a new behaviour strategy

As detailed in Section 2, work on developing a new behaviour strategy is aligned to the priority of Promoting Inclusion and also incorporates elements of the other priorities.

It is reported nationally that behaviour in schools is becoming more challenging and this is reflected in Swansea schools and feedback from school-based colleagues.

The increasing trajectory of exclusions indicates that new approaches are required.

Societal and demographic changes have been identified and these include (although are not limited to):

- The impact of the pandemic
- Poverty and cost of living crisis
- Social media
- Substance use
- Increase in violent crimes
- Recruitment challenges in schools
- Challenging budget positions

We also know there is an increase in learners with Additional Learning Needs and an increase in Neuro Diverse learners who require different approaches from those that may have been traditionally offered. Practice differs between schools.

The LA has a Duty to Promote High Standards of Education in accordance with Education Act 1998 and we also have an obligation to support schools and governing bodies to meet their obligations, including those specified under the Education and Inspection Act 2006. In addition to this we have responsibilities in relation to the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child and the Wellbeing of Future Generations. For these reasons we are in the process of developing a behaviour strategy and policy for schools in Swansea. The work will be co-designed with schools and multi-agency partners. It is being overseen by the Education Service Transformation Committee who have been valuable contributors to the workstream.

The progress to date is as follows:

- Two multi agency workshops were held face to face with over 120 attendees.
- Attendees represented a significant breadth of stakeholders including schools, education officers, Local Health Board representatives, Public Health Wales representatives, social workers and social services

representatives, Welsh Government, Service Transformation Committee members, trades unions and Swansea Parent Carer forum and others.

- Attendees provided detailed feedback to five key questions.
- The feedback collated and themed.
- A questionnaire was circulated and complete by 22 schools.
- The results were analysed and themed.

The partnership work has enabled us to be clearer about the issues and the approaches needed to address them. The emerging feedback is as follows:

Issues:

- Dysregulation and emotional responses
- Increased physicality
- Gap between home and school expectations
- Insufficient resource for LA to provide support
- Children with 'complex' needs and ALN
- Issues of respect

Approaches needed:

- Early intervention and support
- Training and development
- Parental involvement and support
- Consistent policies and procedures
- Positive reinforcement and relationships
- Funding and resources
- Specialist support and training
- Parental and community engagement
- Support from external agencies
- Consistent and clear guidelines

The next steps in progressing this work will be to hold follow up workshops to begin to design the strategy. The proposed next steps will be to:

- Collate all findings and reshare at follow up workshops
- Produce draft policy with our stakeholders
- Consider producing a toolkit
- Identify best practice
- Draw on experts within schools and identify relevant research
- Draw up a delivery plan

The Service Transformation Committee will continue to oversee this work and the aim is to conclude by Easter 2025.

4. Legal implications

4.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report

5. Finance Implications

5.1 There are no financial implication associated with this report

6. Integrated Assessment Implications

6.1 The report is for information and not for decision.

Background papers:

Vulnerable Learners Service Inclusion Strategy. [08 - Appendix A.pdf](#)