



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 10 April 2025

Hearing the Voices of Children and Young People

Purpose:	To brief the Panel on work undertaken during 2024-2025 to hear the voices of children and young people in Swansea.
Content:	An overview of work undertaken by the Education Directorate and work undertaken by the Partnership and Involvement Team based in the Social Services Directorate.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views.
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Robert Smith, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the work undertaken to listen to the voices of children and young people since April 2024. The Education Directorate and the Partnership and Involvement Team in Social Services engage with children and young people, both in educational settings and also in the community to ensure their voices are heard. The Partnership and Involvement Team have also facilitated events linked with Education.
- 1.2 In 2014, Swansea Council launched its Children's Rights Scheme, which sets out the arrangements that Swansea Council will put in place to ensure compliance with its duty to have due regard to the UNCRC. The Council continues to uphold its statutory commitment to facilitating County-wide mechanisms to hear the voice of children and young people, as set out in Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and Article 12 of the UNCRC.

- 1.3 The importance of hearing the voices of children and young people is reflected in the 2023/2028 Corporate Plan. This is detailed in the plan '*Involving all of our citizens in what we are doing* – Schools' pupils are involved in their education through school councils and through 'Pupil Voice', which is directly aimed at increasing pupil participation as set out in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Swansea was the first UK council to adopt and embed UNCRC. The council's 'Big Conversation' events give children and young people an opportunity to discuss that matter to them and to influence council policy'.

Under the Education & Skills Objective in the 2023/2028 Corporate Plan, this is detailed under '*Involving people* – Involving learners in their education through a range of engagement mechanisms in order to demonstrate we value these key stakeholders.'

Specific strategies also refer to learner voice, e.g., the Inclusion Strategy will promote learner participation in decision-making.

2. The Children's Rights and Human Rights City Schemes and the Pupil Manifesto

- 2.1 A second version of the Children's Rights Scheme was published in 2021. This was updated from the 2014 scheme following public consultation and ensures the scheme compliments the 'Right Way' principled approach that is being embedded nationally and led by the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

- 2.2 As part of the Children's Rights Scheme, children and young people identified seven County-wide priorities to be addressed by Swansea Council and its partners of the Public Service Board in 2021. In February 2024, a Big Conversation event was held with children and young people to revisit the original priorities. Six renewed priorities were set for Swansea Council to address:

- Protecting the Environment – Develop resources and projects aimed at protecting the environment, whilst lowering our own carbon footprint within schools and communities.
- Health and Wellbeing – Improve mental health awareness and support (within and outside of Education), help us to manage our health and wellbeing and teach us how to look after our physical and mental health.
- Equality – Ensure equality for LGBTQIA+ and disabled children and young people. Work to tackle stereotypes of young people and give us opportunities to go to intergenerational events.
- Safety – Ensure Swansea is a safe place for all children and young people. Develop safe spaces for children and young people, tackle domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour, and work towards ending violence against women and girls.
- Listening to learners – We want to have a say about what we learn in school. This includes school dinners – we want healthier options, we want sex education to include LGBTQIA+ sex education, we want to learn about politics, and we want you to ensure all children and young people have their voices heard.

- Technology – Technology is a big part of our lives now and we want to make sure we're staying safe. We want you to run sessions around social media, gaming and internet safety.
- 2.3 Targeted training is provided to schools around the rights of children and young people, with several quality checks in place to provide assurance around schools promoting these effectively. Many schools embrace the principles that underpin the work of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- 2.4 As part of the development of the Human Rights and Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028, the Strategic Equality and Future Board reviewed engagement and consultation undertaken in relation to equality and diversity issues to inform its objectives. This included engagement undertaken with children and young people in 2022 and 2023. An action plan is in place to deliver the objectives of the plan, with specific areas of focus shared monthly. The first annual review will be published in March 2026.
- 2.5 In 2024, the secondary schools Pupil Voice PLC developed their priorities for their next Swansea Pupil Voice Manifesto. A final draft of the Manifesto has been prepared, with plans to present this to the Cabinet Member in the coming weeks with the hope that it can once again be presented to full Council before the end of the academic year.
- 2.6 The key themes identified in the Manifesto are:
- Feeling Safe in Our Community – Focusing on safety measures, education and resources to ensure pupils feel secure both in school and the wider community.
 - Celebrating Diversity and Anti-Racism – Promoting cultural awareness, inclusivity and celebrating diverse backgrounds.
 - Barriers to our Learning – Addressing issues like poverty, nutrition and educational equity to ensure all pupils have equal opportunities.
 - Protecting the Environment and Minimising Waste – Emphasising sustainability practices such as eco-gardens, recycling and environmental awareness.
 - Mental Health and Emotional Well-being – Supporting mental well-being through counselling, peer mentoring and well-being initiatives.
 - Accessibility – Ensuring all pupils, including those with disabilities, have equal access to education, community activities and safe environments.

Each theme highlights specific school-based actions and broader community initiatives to improve the well-being and opportunities of learners in Swansea.

3. Universal Children's Day

- 3.1 Following the successful events in November 2022 and 2023, the Council held another event to mark Universal Children's Day at the Waterfront Museum on 20 November 2024. The theme for World Children's Day in 2024 was 'Listen to the Future'.

- 3.2 During the 2024 event, the Council celebrated 10 years of the Children's Rights Scheme, highlighting the work done over the last decade and set plans going forward. A podcast was launched that included learners who were invited to take part during a Big Conversation around Health and Wellbeing. Feedback in the form of 'You Said / We Did' was given for the seven priorities set by children and young people.
- 3.3 An interactive marketplace was also held with a number of organisations that work with children and young people across Swansea.

4. School Councils and Beyond

- 4.1 The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 sets it out clearly that the governing body of a school must establish a school council, the purpose of which is to enable pupils to discuss matters relating to their school, their education and any other matters of concern or interest and to make representations on these to the governing body and the headteacher.
- 4.2 The headteacher of a school must ensure that meetings of the school council are convened on six occasions during the school year and ensure that all school council meetings are supervised by at least one member of the school staff. Both the governing body and the headteacher of a school must consider any matter communicated to them by the school council and provide a response to the school council.
- 4.3 The membership of the school council must consist solely of registered pupils at the school. The governing body of a school and the headteacher must make arrangements for at least one registered pupil of each year group, from Year 3 and above, to be elected to membership of the school council.
- 4.4 The headteacher of a school must ensure that the school council has the opportunity to nominate up to two pupils from years 11 to 13 (inclusive) from its membership to be associate pupil governors on the school's governing body. The governing body must accept any pupil nominated and appoint him or her as an associate pupil governor on the governing body.
- 4.5 Swansea schools have a long history of ensuring that pupil participation goes way beyond the requirement of having a school council, with the national definition of participation being at the centre of our schools' ethos in that *participation means that it is a learner's right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing any action that might affect them. Having a voice, having a choice.* This has been evident as all our schools plan the development and delivery of the Curriculum for Wales. For example, the way in which schools engage in the long-term planning for the development of concepts within their individual curricula and on a day-to-day basis when consulting pupils over what they want to learn within a given topic or theme.

5. Partnership and Involvement Team

- 5.1 Over the last twelve months, the Partnership and Involvement Team have continued to undertake an extensive variety of activities that have provided opportunities to listen to the voices of children and young people.
- 5.2 Since 2014, there has been a mechanism called 'The Big Conversation' to involve children and young people aged 5-25 years to provide an opportunity for them to engage in accessible and meaningful sessions to shape services and to have a voice on issues that impact their lives. Three Big Conversations have taken place since April 2024, with the themes:
- Health and Wellbeing – this focused on school dinners, breathwork, play, healthy Relationships, mental health, and Swansea Councils Disability Strategy.
 - Intergenerational – this session brought children, young people, and adults together. The event challenged stereotyping and looked at creating spaces that were for everyone.
 - New Chapters – this event looked at transitions in our lives, considering tools and techniques for dealing with change in our lives.
- 5.3 During the summer holidays of 2024, six "City Chill" events were held in the city centre. These events were held in partnership with community organisation and Council teams. The aim of the events was to help signpost the community to partners and organisations. The events also provided a space for young people and families to come and take part in free activities.
- 5.4 Afternoon Teens – a partnership between Evolve and the Partnership & Involvement Team held six afternoon tea sessions where young people from the five youth hubs invited community members into their space for an afternoon tea. There was a big celebration event held at the Waterfront Museum at the end of the project.
- 5.5 During winter 2024-2025, 50 families were supported with holiday food hampers and activity packs funded by the holiday food fund grant.
- 5.6 COAST funding during summer 2024 and winter 202-2025 provided funding for children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) to take part in activities that are usually inaccessible to them. These activities included sessions like surfing, cooking, gardening, beekeeping and train rides. The sessions provided children and young people with ALN and their families safe, inclusive and accessible opportunities to socialise and try new things.

6. Learner Voice in Schools' Quality Assurance and Monitoring

- 6.1 The Education Directorate's School Improvement Team continue to speak to learners during 'listening to learner' activities as part of schools' quality assurance and monitoring.
- 6.2 Of the reports published to 26 March 2025 for schools inspected from April 2024, six primary schools and two secondary school had references to pupil

voice in their Estyn reports. Nearly all reports provide examples of the positive impact of including learner voice. Examples include:

- YGG Bryniago 'Staff provide valuable opportunities for older pupils to influence the wider life of the school by contributing to the 'pupil's voice' and participating in projects that have a direct impact on the school. For example, the school council worked in partnership with the county's catering department to adapt the school lunch menu across the county.'
- Burlais Primary 'The school values pupils' contributions and provides numerous opportunities for them to influence school life. The school's various pupil groups play an active and enthusiastic role in representing their friends. They have been responsible for the introduction of a new school prayer and a wider range of after-school clubs and enrichment opportunities.'
- Llanrhidian Primary - Pupils have a strong voice in their learning, with regular opportunities to make choices and demonstrate their skills. Close engagement with the wider community has a positive impact on teaching, learning, and pupils' well-being.
- Morriston Comprehensive 'Pupils, including those in the STF, are encouraged to take on leadership roles and the school has appropriate arrangements for pupils to develop their leadership skills. The school parliament is open to all pupils and is suitably involved in influencing school life. As a result, many pupils feel that the school listens to their opinions and adapts provision accordingly. The pupil parliament has had a positive influence on improving aspects of school life such as the price of food in the canteen, and changes to school uniform.'
- Gowerton Comprehensive 'There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills through pupil-led groups such as the 'Criw Cymraeg' and sixth form students coaching various sporting teams. Pupils across the school are not always fully aware of the council's activity and do not have enough opportunities to share their views on learning and teaching. The school has made strong progress in implementing the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act. It plans appropriate provision for pupils with ALN, taking good account of their views and those of their parents.'

7. Education Directorate

- 7.1 The Education Directorate provides direct support to children and their families. Person centred approaches are central to the work of teams that provide support, where children's views and voices are part of decision-making. Examples of this include the work of the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team and support for learners who are excluded. Schools are encouraged to display advocacy information that has been provided to them.
- 7.2 As part of the consultation for future plans for Specialist Teaching Facilities (STFs) in Swansea, the views of learners were captured and carefully considered. This included a bespoke, easy to read pupil consultation paper that was also made available in British Sign Language (BSL). For learners in schools where the proposals were to open or close a STF in their setting, a meeting was held with the pupil council or another pupil representative group. Notes were taken at these sessions and learners were provided with

anonymous feedback form. Where appropriate, learners in STFs had proposals explained to them in a way they could understand. An example of this was in Birchgrove Comprehensive School, where the school's Moderate Learning Difficulties STF learners received a bespoke session with the local authority's child advocacy practitioners. During the consultation period, 100 responses were received from learners.

- 7.3 As part of the development of a new policy for supporting positive behaviour in schools, consultation and engagement was undertaken with learners through participation in a Big Conversation event. Learners gave feedback on topics around respect, rights and responsibilities. Learners shared sensible observations and suggested empathetic and some achievable solutions. Feedback will be given in a Big Conversation event in June 2025.
- 7.4 The three-year post-16 strategy is in its final year of delivery and has made good progress against all of its aims. Progress against each of these aims were reported as part of the Education Annual Report to the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel in December 2024. A survey for post-16 learners was undertaken in the first year of the strategy and its findings were used to inform the development of future provision in Swansea, within the available qualifications offer.
- 7.5 A new Designing Destinations Strategy will succeed the post-16 strategy and will be published in autumn 2025. Learner voice will play an integral role. Feedback will be actively sought through surveys, focus groups and other interactive platforms to ensure that their perspectives are central to decision-making processes. By valuing their input, the aim of the strategy is to meet the evolving needs of learners and empower them to shape their own educational and career pathways. This collaborative approach will ensure the new strategy is both relevant and responsive to the aspirations of our learners.
- 7.6 In March 2025, young people in Swansea played a key role in the 'It's Your Swansea' event at Swansea Arena, where they attended the event to gain valuable insight into the future of the city. Through their involvement and the use of learner voice on career choices, they contributed useful feedback that will guide the direction of the event in the future. Their input will be instrumental in showcasing a vision of a happier, healthier Swansea with a thriving economy, ensuring the event highlights the aspirations and needs of young people. This collaboration will help create a more vibrant and inclusive community, where the next generation's perspectives are central to shaping the city's growth and opportunities.
- 7.7 The Education Directorate is supporting schools to develop as anti-racist learning organisations linked to the vision of anti-racist Wales 2030. The voice of those with lived experience is central to developing anti-racist practice. As an example, ten schools have participated in an in-depth action research project led by a field expert. The schools have and continue to involve learners in different ways to shape their anti-racist action plans. Some schools have undertaken questionnaires with all learners on their experiences of racism.

- 7.8 As part of the recommissioning of the schools counselling service, a series of learner workshops were held to understand views around emotional health and wellbeing. All key stages were represented, and their needs will form the foundation of the procurement framework. A new model of school-based counselling through Platform is now operational, with the aim of providing learners with an offer more in line with emotional health and psychological wellbeing approaches to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. Platform undertakes regular learner voice, which informs the direction of travel and evolves the service to suit learners' needs.
- 7.9 A new Accessibility Strategy 2024-2027 was approved by Cabinet in October 2024. As part of the Strategy's development, disabled learners shared their views via completion of a Microsoft Word or Microsoft Forms questionnaire, either independently or with support, for example, from an Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) to ensure that the draft strategy reflected what was important to them. A further wider consultation took place prior to the approval of the Strategy. The Strategy has provided a strong foundation for schools to build their own accessibility plans.
- 7.10 A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is written and developed in schools for all children who are looked after (CLA). This forms part of their wider care and support plan and focuses on their view of education and how they would like to be supported and is discussed in their wider reviews.

8. Future workstreams for learner voice / next steps

- 8.1 Continue working in partnership with the Partnership & Involvement Team to identify and deliver opportunities to hear the voices of children and young people, including those who are marginalised, those with protected characteristics and those with quiet voices. This will include Education representatives in attendance at all Big Conversation events.
- 8.2 Ensure the six priorities of children and young people and the new Swansea Pupil Voice Manifesto are considered when planning and delivering services.
- 8.3 Deliver opportunities for learner voice as part of the development of the new Designing Destinations Strategy.
- 8.4 Review and respond to feedback from children and young people through Big Conversation and other learner engagement opportunities.
- 8.5 The School Improvement Team will continue to listen to learners as part of schools' quality assurance and monitoring.
- 8.6 Develop further opportunities using digital mechanisms.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 There are no legal implications within this report.

10. Finance Implications

10.1 There are no financial implications within this report.

11. Equality and Engagement Implications

11.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

11.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

11.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

11.2 As this is an information report to Scrutiny an IIA is not required.