



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

BY EMAIL

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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 20 February 2025. The Panel discussed school attendance and exclusions and how schools improve the quality of teaching and learning in Swansea.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 20 February 2025

We would like to thank you and the officers from the Education Directorate for attending the meeting and providing information for the Panel. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

Managing/improving School Attendance and Exclusions

We looked at the comprehensive report provided which included both school attendance and exclusions. We discussed

School attendance

- Academic year 2023-2024 attendance, including primary and secondary comparisons.
- Incremental increase in attendance as a result of extensive work of schools and the education welfare service.
- Education Welfare Service action plan written to support attendance in every setting in development.
- Further research undertaken will also support future developments. This includes a scrutiny of fixed penalty notice data and pupil voice identified through the 'Big Conversation' on 28 January 2025

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TRUSLOW A CHRAFFU

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- That attendance figures for this academic year to date shows a few noticeable improvements, compared with the same reporting period last year. Specifically in Secondary schools and special schools, which show an increase of 1.2% and 0.6% respectively. There have been some exceptional increases noted in Bishop Gore, Bishopston, Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr and Penyrheol Comprehensive School
- Future developments include continuation of the attendance project with Swansea University thus allowing greater analysis at both individual and school level; liaison with the partnership and involvement team to support further opportunities to understand parent/carers and learner voice, specifically around attendance so these can continue to inform policy

Exclusions

- It is reported nationally that behaviour in schools is becoming more challenging and this is reflected in Swansea schools. During the 2023-2024 academic year, school leaders and trades unions identified the changing behaviour landscape in schools as a major priority requiring a new approach and swift action. National data indicates an increasing trend in both fixed term and permanent exclusions from schools. While Swansea data compares favourably in comparison with national data, the increasing trajectory of exclusions is mirrored in Swansea. However, every exclusion is potentially a reduced life change for a learner and we must prioritise reducing exclusions.
- Fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions data and the work being done to address this.
- Wherever possible, inclusion officers have explored creative and alternative solutions to support schools to avoid exclusions. This is in recognition of the negative impact exclusions can have on the future life chances of our most vulnerable learners
- Managed moves can be used when appropriate.
- A new local authority behaviour policy is in development and will be looked at by the Education Service Transformation Committee. The next steps will be to develop a school exemplar policy which can be adopted and personalised by schools to suit their individual contexts. This policy will mirror the local authority policy but include additional detail such as links to key documents and practical support (a toolkit) to help implementation of the school policy. A strategic implementation plan will also be developed to ensure that key strategic actions are captured and delivered effectively.

We understand that each school setting is different, but were interested to find out how the local authority and schools are sharing the good practice learned from those schools that are managing to improve their pupil attendance. We heard the strategies used are bespoke to schools and actually what would work in one school might not necessarily work in another but given this we do our best to share. All good practice that is happening in schools goes through to the school improvement team through the School Action Plans. There are also meetings every week to discuss what is happening across schools and within certain schools, in terms of specific interventions and how well these are working.

We wished to explore in more detail how we deal with absence when it becomes a concern and how we work with families to make improvements. We were told that the research both locally and nationally is around family engagement and working with the families to encourage a community based approach to try and get the children back

into school, to find out exactly what is wrong and the work outlined today gives a reflection on some of those detailed and researched based interventions.

We were pleased to hear about the detailed work that is being carried out by schools and the local authority in relation to both school attendance and exclusions, with particular reference to the development of the education welfare officers action plan and the new behaviour policy. We agree that the importance of school attendance cannot be underestimated, recognising that if a child is not in school they cannot learn.

A look at how schools improve the quality of teaching and learning including cluster and regional work

The Principal School Improvement Adviser briefed the Panel on how schools are improving teaching and learning including in relation to cluster and regional working. The Panel looked at how

- Improving teaching and learning is underpinned by robust self-evaluation and improvement planning. School improvement plans in Swansea have improved further as a result of LA professional learning and collaboration/support with our regional partners.
- Schools collaborate well within traditional clusters. These are becoming even more focussed through robust transition plans that focus on supporting pupil progress and a better understanding of individual needs.
- Schools are beginning to collaborate in non-traditional 'cluster' groups outside of their traditional secondary feeder group. In the best examples, these have a clear and common purpose, for example, improving pupils' use of vocabulary.
- Schools make good use of regional professional learning to support improvements in their pedagogical approaches. For example, high numbers of Swansea-based practitioners attend the 'teach for purpose' programme. As a result, schools' improvement plans focus more sharply on improving specific outcomes for pupils, for example, questioning skills.
- Practitioners engage well with regional subject-specific collaborative networks to support their professional needs. This includes work to upskill teachers in preparation for new GCSEs.
- Swansea's attendance at regional leadership development programmes, is proportionate. As a result, overall improvement planning is stronger and has a sharper focus on how to improve outcomes for pupils.
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We asked what success looks like and how it is being measured by both the local authority and Partneriaeth. We heard the school improvement team visit schools at least twice a year. The results of the visits to the 94 schools and settings are collated so school improvement advisors have a broad overview, where success can be compared. With regard to progress, there is the national personalised assessment outcomes. These are standardised outcomes that schools use to support them in the evaluation of their combined lesson observations. There is also a sharing of school based quality assurance outcomes. Most of the evaluation is school based and what the school improvement service do is help them assimilate that information to help inform their individual school planning.

We recognise that the change in emphasis from regional scrutiny to local scrutiny will require greater scrutiny at a Swansea level for Partneriaeth moving forward. We will factor this into our work programme for the next municipal year.

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 response.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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