

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – SPC Update March 2025

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 October 2024 includes:

Meeting 3 17 Oct 24	Schools Session and possible Visit (2) – Gwyrosydd Primary School (Pre-meeting with School Improvement Advisor)
Meeting 4 14 Nov 24	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Strategy for Poverty Proofing the school day given the cost-of-living crisis and progress with the Inclusion Strategy approved by Cabinet in 2023 including progress with regard to the Behaviour Strategy. 2. Briefing on School Admissions Policy. 3. Briefing on Career Advice in Swansea Schools
Meeting 5 12 Dec 24	Annual Education Performance against identified priorities RAG include Estyn progress against recommendations and Cabinet Member Q&A. Include an update on Post 16, Welsh in Education Strategy progress and an update on Elective Home Education
Meeting 6 23 Jan 25	Curriculum for Wales: Bishop Gore Comprehensive cluster of schools
Meeting 7 17 Feb 25	Annual Budget as it relates to education matters
Meeting 8 20 Feb 25	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managing/improving school attendance and exclusions 2. How schools improve the quality of teaching and learning – cluster and regional work.

3. Achievements / Impacts

Five letters to the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning have been sent since the last update in October.

Find below some of the views and issues raised following on from the previous update in October 2024.

School Visits and Scrutiny Sessions

The Panel welcomed the progress that has been made by Gwyrosydd Primary School with the School Improvement Plan and were particularly keen to hear about the progress being made in relation to the three recommendations made by Estyn in 2023. It was evident that the school is clearly now on a path to improvement. The school, the governing body and local authority are working to continue to build upon this. The Panel praised the progress made at the school and look forward to those improvements bedding in. The developments in relation to pupil voice at the school should be applauded. The Panel look forward to seeing continued improvement in the stability at the school, particularly with the appointment of a permanent Headteacher, the continued reduction in staff sickness levels and a full and functioning Governing Body.

Cluster Working and the Curriculum for Wales

The Panel were keen to hear from the Bishop Gore cluster of schools on how the Curriculum for Wales was being implemented on the ground and how the work being done within each primary school in the cluster was being brought together, as pupils made the transition from primary to comprehensive school. We heard that so far the cluster has been on a bespoke journey and that there is a shared vision and a commitment to regular dialogue, support and unity.

The Panel particularly enjoyed hearing from the pupils via video and in person giving their personal experiences of taking part in transition activities and their first experiences of Bishop Gore. We were encouraged by our visit and shared our thanks to all the schools and praised the way the cluster has addressed its unique challenges. We also noted the nurturing environment, team effort and genuine collaboration that was evidenced by the cluster. Overall it was evident to see the work that has gone on to make this cluster a success.

Elective Home Education

The Panel did feel that schooling is about the all-round experience not just exam results. They believe it is also about mixing with friends and others. By being educated at home people can lose that and it could mean they are more nervous later on in life. The Panel asked if home visits were announced or unannounced, hearing that visits tended to be planned in advance but on some occasions they are unannounced. We also asked how exam results compare in relation to home-educated children. We heard that this is not currently measured.

Managing School Attendance and Exclusions

The Panel were interested to find out how the local authority and schools are sharing the good practice learned from those schools that are improving their pupil attendance. We heard the strategies used are bespoke to schools and what would work in one school might not necessarily work in another, but given this, schools and Education Department do our best to share. All good practice that is happening in schools goes through to school improvement team through each School Action Plan.

The Panel 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 an education welfare officers action plan and the new behaviour policy.

Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group

The Panel heard that Cabinet has approved a plan to move from a legal agreement (in terms of our collaboration as three local authorities) to a less formal collaboration agreement. This means that the levels of governance that were in the legal agreement will disappear. The governance arrangements will now be on one tier rather than a three tier system. The Joint Committee and the Scrutiny Councillor Group will no longer be required. There will be a reduced level of running costs involved and this reflects a change in how the workforce has reduced. Local Authorities now commission to the level they want, so Swansea Council has chosen to continue to work with its partners in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, but on a much reduced scale. We note that moving forward scrutiny of the work undertaken by Partneriaeth, in relation to Swansea, will be undertaken by this Panel.

4. Education Scrutiny Performance Panel - Future Work Programme 2024/25

Date	Items to be discussed
Meeting 9 26 Mar 25	Schools Session and visit (3) – Dylan Thomas Community Secondary School (Pre-meeting with School Improvement Advisor 11 Mar)
Meeting 10 10 Apr 25	1. Additional Learning Needs Reform Update 2. Education Other Than at School services 3. Pupil Voice Manifesto and the pupil voice in education
Meeting 11 8 May 25	1. Swansea Skills Partnership Annual update 2. Quality in Education (QEd) / Sustainable Communities for Learning 3. Religion, Values and Ethics education update 4. End of Year review in Education Scrutiny