



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the Education & Skills Policy Development Committee

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 13 January 2021 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor R V Smith (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

J P Curtice
M A Langstone
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

O G James
M B Lewis

Councillor(s)

L R Jones
S Pritchard

Officer(s)

Damien Beech
Gareth Borsden
Rob Davies
Stephen Holland
Sarah Loydon
Helen Morgan-Rees
Rob Phillips

Head of Primary Phase Unit
Democratic Services Officer
Head of Secondary Phase Unit
Senior Solicitor
Challenge Advisor
Interim Director of Education
Challenge Advisor

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): B Hopkins

7 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

8 Minutes.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2020 be approved and signed as correct record.

9 Update/Feedback from Challenge Advisors.

Helen Morgan-Rees outlined that following the meeting of the Committee held in December and following Welsh Government advice, schools had been required to close a week early and completed the term with remote learning.

Since the Christmas break schools had been instructed to remain closed (other than for vulnerable children and children of key workers) initially until 29th January, with a possibility of this being extended to the February half term if the current Covid infection rates continue.

She outlined the excellent work done in schools during the autumn term to keep schools open, maintain learning and reduce the risks to a minimum and maintain a safe environment for both pupils and staff.

She reported that many schools had been planning for a potential January lockdown and had prepared virtual lessons and paper packs in readiness.

School risk assessments have been updated following the most recent SAGE advice.

Further to the information and statistics provided at the December meeting, she updated the committee on the issues around digital inclusion and outlined the results of the survey which identified how many pupils did not have appropriate devices. This number although higher than the department would like, reflected only a small percentage of the overall school population, and it was important to note that this wasn't a figure of pupils having no devices, just not the most appropriate for learning. The development of allowing children to access learning via their gaming devices was one to be welcomed.

The department in response had recently distributed another 1000 laptops and chrome books to secondary schools, and several hundred devices for primary schools are currently being prepared by departmental staff for distribution in the next week. Additional MIFI devices had also been distributed to those pupils identified in need of having connectivity issues.

In total nearly 10000 devices will now have been distributed since the start of the pandemic.

The non-engagement of some pupils remains an issue of concern, but schools are monitoring use and work submitted and contacting parents where required.

The issue around the non-use of devices is being monitored and information can be provided to committee members when available.

Damien Beech and Sarah Loydon then verbally updated committee on issues around the primary phase and detailed and referred to various issues and matters including the following:

- Support visits had been undertaken to schools in the autumn term, some in person, but mainly via Teams and over the phone;
- Advisors dealt with all schools individually but with a common approach, looking at areas including blended learning, well-being of pupils and staff, curriculum for wales preparation and spending of accelerated learning grants;
- Common concerns and issues raised and highlighted by schools included the disruption to learning of year group isolation;
- Blended/distanced learning problems, staff/pupil absences and anxiety and pressure on senior staff;
- Operational issues – such as staggered start/finish times, one way systems, class/year bubbles, increased hygiene procedures and cleaning, less physical contact with parents/guardians;

- 27 schools had been audited by the Authority's health & safety officer – some minor improvements identified and implemented;
- Excellent feedback and positive reports from both LA officer and the Health & Safety Executive from their visits;
- Awareness and understanding from both pupils and staff of the issues being faced in schools due to the pandemic;
- Increasing of virtual and phone contact with parents/guardians;
- Expansion of outside activity in schools as a result of the need for social distancing etc;
- Whole school approaches/family learning ideas to aid pupil engagement;
- Slimmed down curriculum with increased focus on numeracy, literacy and information technology;
- Issues around marking and assessment;
- Monitoring of staff by senior management within schools;
- ALN – improved contact with pupil and parents, online and paper based tasks prepared and circulated, review of progress with parents, work of specialist teaching facilities to assist young people at home;
- IT – pupils, parents & staff all been upskilled through necessity, shared experiences and information, advice and guidance given and distributed;
- Blended learning reviews and surveys undertaken by schools with both pupils and parents;
- Improved communication with parents via e mail, text, phone, social media and online platforms;
- Assessment and review of pupils on return to school in autumn term to assess their learning needs;
- Issues arising from initial lockdown identified with pupils on return to school including a lack of resilience, independence, stamina and concentration and initiatives and ideas used to address these by various schools;
- Different ways that schools have developed and used both asynchronous and synchronous approaches;
- Use of grants to improve provision going forward and address needs and areas identified by pupil review and develop new ideas and initiatives to aid learning;
- Well-being issues affecting pupils such as bereavement, adverse childhood experiences, anxiety, depression and self-harm that staff have had to deal with and the support given to young people;
- Continuity & blended learning programmes that have been developed and are now well used and tested due to pupil/year isolation issues, and both the impact of the firebreak and early finish of the autumn term and that the programme has improved greatly since its initial development at the start of the first lockdown but is always being revisited and re-examined to improve and adapt;
- The varied use of the recruit, recover and raise standards grant in schools was outlined including the following areas:
 - i. Equivalent of 23.1 additional teaching posts created,
 - ii. 1598+ additional hours of teaching assistant support. Divided by 27.5 hours (typical TA contract) this equates to around 58 additional FTE TA posts. Though this is an equivalent figure it doesn't necessarily mean 58 new TAs are now working in Swansea. In a number of schools,

existing staff have had hours increased. Use of existing staff often due to funding pressures but also to use expertise of in-house staff who have received training, know the pupils etc,

- iii. 5.1 teacher redundancies avoided through use of grant,
 - iv. Avoided 120.5 teaching assistant hours being made redundant through use of the grant (equivalent to 4.4 FTE posts),
 - v. No. of schools with increased capacity of teaching assistant staff: 54,
 - vi. No. of schools with increased capacity of teaching staff: 21,
 - vii. No. of schools with increased capacity of both TA & teaching staff: 12,
 - viii. No. of schools with increased capacity of learning coach: 3.
- Schools exploring the pedagogical approaches and seeking ways to maximise the learning opportunities for pupils;
 - Schools with an eye on potential future lockdowns used the return to school in September to also upskill and train both pupils and staff to better utilise their IT skills;
 - Use of outdoor learning and projects will increase when pupils return to school;
 - Health & Well-being – part of the focus of the Curriculum for Wales and Covid has reiterated the importance of this.

Rob Davies and Rob Phillips then updated committee on issues around the secondary phase and detailed and referred to various matters and areas of improvement and good practice identified including the following snapshot of schools:

Bishopston Comp

Upskilling of staff, improved parental communications, staff digital forum been developed where staff assist colleagues with IT help and training, this led to good preparation and readiness for both the firebreak and early finish to school based learning in December, survey of pupils undertaken, mixture of live and recorded lessons, development of protocol for online lessons relating to meeting chat/feedback etc which has been shared as good practice, paper based learning also available.

Penyrheol Comp

Adopted a more asynchronous approach following feedback from pupils which indicated that almost 50% were sharing devices, staff had prepared work pre-firebreak so were well placed to deliver online lessons, blended learning included full curriculum, testing and feedback regime, very low levels of non-engagement and procedures in place to contact pupils and parents.

PRU

Issues relating to some of the most vulnerable learners who have hugely challenging backgrounds and highly specialised needs and conditions, increased level of support and contact from staff to support and engage pupils and parents, initiatives and work undertaken to overcome the barriers to learning, initial lockdown actually improved relationships with families through more regular contact, good links developed with education welfare officers, targeted learning and sessions for individuals, specialist resources distributed to pupils, blended learning provision.

Bishop Vaughan Comp

Since pupils returned to school in term autumn term a series of enrichment and engagement activities, groups and clubs have been established and introduced, improved support to families especially those who were previously shielding and have health issues, evidence based appraisals, education endowment foundation fund approach, staff supporting each other particularly with IT issues via twilight events, staff surgeries and walk through sessions, effective use of quiz's to monitor progress of pupils.

Special Schools

Real challenges to introduce blended/distance learning due to the extreme vulnerability of the pupils due to both their physical and emotional conditions, both schools had to undertake a huge amount of liaison, contact and training with parents just to ensure that learning could take place due to the extremely complex and challenging needs of the pupils, individual IEPs developed for pupils, provision of both live and recorded sessions, specialist equipment sent home to aid learning, parents developed a better level of understanding of pupils learning needs and progress due to increased involvement, re-opening of hydrotherapy pool aided physical progress, excellent reports from HSE and Estyn on Crug Glas which has been identified and shared as examples of best practice.

Members of the committee discussed at length the issues and matters raised above and both made comments relating to the issues and asked a series questions of the Officers who responded accordingly. They commended both the schools and the education department for the work and efforts they had made to enable learning to be continued for young people.

Councillor J A Raynor, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills supported the comments of the committee and indicated that BBC and S4C are starting programmes next week to support parents of children in welsh medium education. She indicated that schools had been planning and preparing for the current lockdown from the middle of the autumn term and schools have developed a mix and range of live/recorded/paper based learning which best serves their pupils.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the presentation and update.

10 Workplan 2020/2021.

The Chair indicated that due to the ongoing significant implications of the Covid pandemic and its huge impact and pressure on both staff centrally within the department and in schools it may be prudent to pause the current review of the implications of Covid and the provision of blended learning.

He suggested that the committee, following on from the updates they have received at their last few meetings receive an update on initiatives and issues around the well-being of pupils, particular around the wider vulnerable learners group.

He outlined that the People PDC were currently looking at well-being issues around young carers, so he would invite the Chair of that committee to attend the meeting in order to input into the discussion.

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Cont'd

Resolved that the next meeting receive a verbal presentation on issues around well-being relating to vulnerable learners.

The meeting ended at 5.35 pm

Chair