



To:
Councillor Jennifer Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning 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 Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 18 March 2021 looking at the Covid recovery in Education, Pupil Development Grant spend, remote learning and regional scrutiny.

Dear Cllr Raynor,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 18 March 2021

We would like to thank you, the Director of Education Helen Morgan Rees and Damien Beech the Head of Primary, Partnership and Achievement Team for attending our meeting. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

Blended and Remote Learning

We were pleased to hear from the Headteacher and four pupils from Bishopston Primary School about their thoughts on remote and blended learning. It was interesting to hear about how they stayed healthy during lockdown, the challenges they faced learning from home, the home learning highlights and how they made progress. We were also pleased to hear how they were now glad to be back in the classroom.

Education and Schools Recovery from Covid

We were encouraged by the positive update about pupils returning to school and the ongoing recovery in Education. We heard primary pupils had fully returned. That secondary schools had partially opened with more pupils returning in the week of this meeting. We are pleased to hear that a full return of secondary pupils will start from 12 April. We also understand that 100 Primary pupils and about 400 secondary pupils

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have had to self-isolate because of a few cases that had come into schools from the community.

You paid tribute to schools on their management of the phased return, saying it had required risk assessments, redesigning of spaces and, with the secondary sector, the introduction of lateral flow testing. You also said that wellbeing will be central in the first phase of the return. We appreciate the efforts made by schools and the education department in the management of a seamless as possible return to school and for the important focus on pupil and staff welfare.

Pupil Development Grant - Summary of the spend to support vulnerable pupils

We heard about the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) spend last year and how it has helped schools to improve the outcomes of vulnerable pupils across Swansea. We were told about the guidance from Welsh Government and Estyn and past good practice on 'what works' and how that helps schools to decide how best to spend their allocated grant. Also how each schools PDG spend is discussed when Challenge Adviser's make their autumn visits to schools. We were interested to hear about the many ways in which the money has been spent by schools and how we evidence the impact of that spend. You did emphasise that we must look at pupils' ongoing progress and achievement and not just end outcomes. We heard that wellbeing has been central to a lot of the monies spent including for example in supporting families. We did hear that the PDG grant for the next year has not yet been allocated from Welsh Government. However you stated your concern about the year on year allocation of the grant making it difficult to plan ahead.

Regional Education Improvement Service (ERW)

We heard that a report has gone to the Councils Cabinet asking them to defer removal of Swansea from ERW, meaning Swansea will continue to be a member of this regional body until 31 August 2021. This is to enable more time for the region to set up the arrangements for a new regional body that will commence from 1 September 2021. We understand that Carmarthenshire, Powys, Pembrokeshire and Swansea Councils have agreed to remain within the interim partnership until 31 August. That Neath Port Talbot and Ceredigion Councils will not form part of this arrangement but may buy in services until 31 August.

We heard that some impediments have slowed down entering into a new regional agreement including, for example, Covid and expectations of Welsh Government. Also, that a lot more work needs to be done and discussions had with all stakeholders to establish what they want from this new partnership. We were told that in the new model we will be able to select what Swansea wants and needs the Consortium to deliver, rather than a one size fits all model we have had in the past. We agreed that it is important that there is clarity of roles and responsibilities and avoidance of duplication between what Local Authorities do and what the regional body will do moving forward.

We asked what the governance arrangements of the new partnership will be and how scrutiny will fit into this new model, what its key objectives will be and how will success be measured? We were told that the new arrangements will be taken to each local

authorities Cabinet for agreement and that these plans and the governance model will also be shared with scrutiny locally.

Your Response

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised but on this occasion do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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