



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning and Skills

BY EMAIL

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Date 26 May 2021
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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 13 May 2021 looking at the Education Other Than At School services and progress with the 21st Century Schools Programme.

Dear Cllr Raynor,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 13 May 2021

We would like to thank Cllr Jennifer Raynor, the Director of Education Helen Morgan Rees, Brian Roles (Head of Education Planning and Resources) and Louise Herbert Evans (Head of Capital 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.

Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Services

Cllr Raynor told us that it was important to recognise that the improvements in EOTAS were not just down to the opening of the new Maes Derw Pupil Referral Unit and that this was just one part of a wider EOTAS strategy. We heard however that the bespoke facility is having a beneficial impact on both pupils and staff. We were pleased to hear that there was a sense of pupils feeling settled, with a reduction in acts of aggression towards staff and pupils being able to better regulate their anxiety.

We heard about progress being made in integrating support across schools and how important it is to support schools, pupils and their families in returning pupils to their mainstream school setting, when possible. We recognise this will depend on a number of factors and pupils should only return when they and the school are ready. Sometimes rebuilding the relationship between the pupil and the school is required. We were pleased to hear that they are kept on the role at the PRU for half a term so they can go back if necessary.

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We were concerned to hear about some of the emerging themes following Covid, of for example, younger pupils struggling to engage at school with their peers and this is happening to much younger pupils than previously. We agreed it was important to keep these pupils in mainstream school wherever possible. We also heard the biggest impact has been the increase in mental health and anxiety issues and re-engaging with some of our older young people. We were pleased to hear that we are working closely with other partner agencies like social services and the youth offending team to help re-connect with these young people.

It was also noted that some pupils who had suffered with anxiety prior to the pandemic preferred the online/at home provision throughout Covid and may find it difficult to return. Ways to use the experiences learnt through this period will be important with this group of pupils moving forward.

We heard the PRU is under capacity at the moment following the disruption over the last year and pupils being at home but it is anticipated these numbers will increase in due course.

We were encouraged to hear about how the space now available in Maes Derw will help staff build upon the relationships and work more closely with parents. We recognised the importance of this and would encourage a fuller involvement of parents in pupil's education in EOTAS.

We agreed with the Headteacher of the PRU when she said it will take the whole of Swansea, all of education and all schools to work together to make EOTAS and the Behaviour Strategy work and that we are at a very exciting moment, at the cusp of change.

We would like to thank you and Amanda Taylor along with all the other staff who contributed in making this huge change in our EOTAS services. We look forward to hearing how this exciting change continues to improve the education of some of the most vulnerable pupils in Swansea.

Update on the 21st Century Schools Programme

We heard the Band A part of the programme is £51.5m and has improved 9 schools in Swansea. That the Band B is a much larger with £149.497m spent on schools. We were told there had been a seamless transition from Band A to B and it is hoped that will be the case when Band C is introduced (although what that will be is unknown at the moment).

We understand the Band B programme is almost 3 times the size of Band A and is being delivered with less capacity and in spite of impact of Covid, with the total spend delivered or committed as £54.8m (including WM & RICS). Also that a detailed business case development has been made for a further £52.5m. This represents 73% of the total programme (excluding the aided sector).

The number of schools that have or will have benefited from capital maintenance was outlined including 89 plus schools in the Band A period (1/4/2012 to 31/3/2019) and schools with a total spend of £22.754m. And through Band B period (1/4/2019 to 31/3/2022) was 63 plus schools with a total spend of £14.374m. The remaining Band

B works include the business cases for YGG Bryntawe, Gowerton School, Special Schools and options are being scoped for the remainder of the programme.

We understand the programme risks include capacity and resilience within the council, capacity and resilience outside of the Authority, possible funding risks especially in relation to Welsh Government capital and also developer contributions and timing uncertainty.

We were pleased to hear about the work to reduce infant class sizes that includes a funding envelope of £1,919m which has included internal remodelling to create new classroom bases and classroom extensions.

We would like to thank officers for their hard work in moving the programme forward efficiently and keeping the programme to time, wherever possible, through the difficult Covid period.

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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