

Councillor Lyndon Jones
Convenor
Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

BY EMAIL

Please ask for: Councillor Robert Smith
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Our Ref: RS/CM
Your Ref:
Date: 23 August 2021

Dear Councillor Jones

Thank you for your letter dated 2 August 2021.

I am pleased that you found the presentations from the two schools interesting and engaging. Like you, I am concerned about the impact the pandemic has had on the social and emotional health of children and young people and can reassure you there will be a strong focus on this in all the key plans and strategies of the Education Directorate over the forthcoming academic year and beyond.

I am able to provide some specific details in relation to the points you raised in your letter, firstly in relation to the Cynnydd project:

The Cynnydd project aims to meet the requirements of Specific Objective 2 (To reduce the number of those at risk of becoming NEET, amongst 11-24 year olds) under Priority 3 of the 2014-2020 West Wales and the Valleys ESF (European Social Fund) Operational Programme, by providing a number of interventions targeted at young people who are identified as being at the very greatest risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). It is a collaborative ESF funded initiative between five local authorities across the South West Wales Region, for which Pembrokeshire County Council is acting as the lead beneficiary.

Cynnydd in Swansea is delivered in 15 schools across Swansea, with each school having access to a Learning Coach. Learning Coaches have been employed by the schools, through the Cynnydd budget, to support the most vulnerable students. Previously in the project this support been predominantly academic focused but since COVID and the changes to education, delivery has become a mix of both educational and mental health/wellbeing support. Within Cynnydd, the Learning Coaches are able to access a procured framework of external providers for those most at risk of becoming NEET, which is funded through the project. Some schools have also used their own budgets alongside to increase delivery or for additional elements, not supported by Cynnydd. The response to the project has been overwhelmingly positive. To date, the project has supported 925 participants in Swansea, of which 126 have gained a qualification (over achieving on our target of 56) and 258 are at reduced risk of becoming NEET.

Currently, project delivery is due to end in September 2022. It is understood there may be the possibility of bidding for funds from the Shared Prosperity Fund next year, however at the moment the terms and conditions for this are unknown. The Directorate would welcome the opportunity to bid for any additional funding to continue the valuable work of the Cynnydd project and if this is not possible officers will seek strategies to build and embed the good work wherever possible within existing provision.

In relation to the second point and third question you raised, I can confirm that upskilling staff and providing training in approaches to supporting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing will be a key focus of the work of both the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team and the PRU (Maes Derw) and Behaviour Support Team. The plans to roll out training for Emotional Support Learning Assistants (ELSA) are progressing well and it is anticipated this will begin from September 2021. Alongside this the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) strategy and policy is being reviewed and co-produced by the EOTAS Steering Group. The new strategy will focus on supporting schools with whole school approaches to managing behaviour, prevention and early intervention, reducing exclusions and supporting social, emotional health and wellbeing. In line with the recently published Welsh Government framework, support for emotional health and wellbeing will focus on whole school embedded processes that place value on supporting wellbeing. This in turn reduces the dependency on grant funded projects by ensuring a holistic, embedded approach. Support services such as the Behaviour Support Team or Prevention and Early Intervention Team will work to facilitate strategies and upskill staff so the expertise is developed within schools thus becoming a more sustainable model.

It is also an objective for the forthcoming year to develop a greater working synergy between Maes Derw Support Work Team and Early Help Hubs with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to allow support for individuals to be most effectively delivered.

In essence, the plans are for Education Directorate policies, strategies and services to focus on upskilling, sharing resources and expertise, facilitating strategies using an enabling approach to ensure sustainable support for children and young people. Our strategic groups such as the EOTAS Steering Group and Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group will provide the oversight and direction of travel based on analysis of emerging trends and patterns. This work will be undertaken on a multi-agency basic to ensure a holistic approach which in turn will inform our support for schools in embedding strategies.

Yours sincerely



Y Cynghorydd / Councillor Robert Smith
Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Wella Addysg, Dysgu A Sgiliau
Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills