

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – SPC Update

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 June 2023 includes:

Meeting	Topic(s)
15 June 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional Learning Needs Reform Update (watching brief item) 2. New Curriculum for Wales Update (watching brief item) 3. Estyn Inspection – progress with recommendations 4. Key issues affecting education and discussion of work plan for education scrutiny for 2023-2024.
13 July 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managing and improving school attendance 2. Managing and Improving school exclusions.
14 Sept 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Looked after children, support and progress in school 2. Following up on the 10 Cabinet Development Committee recommendations 3. Feedback on Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group meeting on 19 June 2023.

3. Achievements / Impacts

Three letters to the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning have been sent since our first meeting this Municipal year in June/July and September, these have given the Panels views and raised any concerns. Some of these issues discussed include:

Additional Learning Needs Reform

We heard that the ALNET Strategy has been reviewed and finalised, with a new strategy drafted that aligns to the regional strategy with outstanding actions being transferred to the new strategy. It now covers the period 2022 to 2027 and has 4 priority areas: Schools, Post 16, Collaboration and Early years.

We heard about the successes and the challenges being experienced. The Panel noted that despite the Welsh Government's wish to establish a less adversarial system the council has seen an increase in the number of requests for tribunals and that this has placed pressure on services and has highlighted a need for an internal review into processes and procedures to ensure there is appropriate level of resource.

We were pleased to hear that extensive work is underway to moderate, quality assure and support schools to achieve a consistent, equitable offer to all learners. Also, that collaboration with the local health board is strengthening with a productive partnership developing. We asked about post-16 education and whether we ensure that the organisations that deliver services are fulfilling their roles effectively. We heard that the work is done with our key delivery partners to ensure they are as strong as they can be to deliver what is required and this is being done in a joined-up manner.

The Introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales

We asked whether teaching staff were getting enough support and whether schools are taking all staff on the journey with them. We heard about what is being seen on the ground which is including distributive leadership across schools and staff are working collaboratively. So, it is not just head teachers and senior leadership team alone driving this work but teams within the schools taking it forward.

Improving School Attendance

We were encouraged to see the slight improvement in the school attendance figures, so far in this academic year and would expect this to continue with the introduction of the new absence policy and the securing of the right support and interventions.

Improving School Exclusion rates

We recognised the importance of Local Area Co-ordinators working in communities and asked how they may be involved in both improving school attendance and reducing school exclusion, for example, in their role talking to parents/families. We asked the Cabinet Member via letter how Local Area Co-ordinators will engage with this process.

The Panel heard from the Cabinet Member that the Local Area Co-ordinators (LACs) support families by giving them a voice, helping them make new connections within the community and 'walking with them' when they most need it. Therefore, there could be a number of ways in which the LACs could work with families relating to the issues of school attendance and exclusion. Strategic collaboration has taken place between the Tackling Poverty Service manager, Local Area Coordination Implementation Manager and Education Officers. All officers are keen to work together to ensure families are supported when needed.

Looked after Children's Education support and progress

The Panel were pleased to hear that a child's access to appropriate education should not be determined by their personal circumstances, and the Council's recently agreed Inclusion Strategy aims to drive equity of experience by removing barriers to education for vulnerable pupils, including those who are looked after. We also heard that children and young people in care have personal education plans and the intention is for the child's voice to be captured in them. Also, that all schools in Swansea have a designated teacher and governor for looked-after children.

The Panel were particularly pleased to hear that all looked-after year 11 pupils, who were in mainstream school, educated at home or in a pupil referral unit, went on to further education, employment or training last year. We were interested to explore how their progress post-year 11 was then monitored, hearing that the new Swansea Virtual School will help to do this more effectively.

Partneriaeth

The Convener of the Panel who is also the Chair of the Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group updated the Panel on progress with regard to the regional partnership.

The Councillor Group in June spoke to both the Chair of the Partneriaeth Joint Committee and Directors from each of the local authorities in order to provide reassurance that Partneriaeth is operating according to the Legal Agreement, its Business Plan and that's its timetable is being managed effectively. The Group found it to be a positive picture at this juncture saying in their letter to the Chair of the Joint Committee '*we were pleased to hear that everyone had a positive picture of Partneriaeth, whilst recognising that many challenges do still exist for both them and each of the three local authorities. From this discussion, we felt reassured that Partneriaeth is operating in accordance with the Legal Agreement, its Business Plan and that its timetable is being managed effectively*'.

4. Education Scrutiny Performance Panel - Future Work Programme 2023/24

Meeting	Topic(s)
19 Oct 2023	School Session and Visit 1 – Gorseinon Primary School (to look at progress with the Schools Development Plan and their Estyn Inspection recommendations)
23 Nov 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reducing disadvantage in school, including pupil development grant spend, roll out for free school meals, cost of school day and uniform.• School Improvement Service Update• Cookery in Schools
14 Dec 2023	Annual Education Performance and Cabinet Member Q&A
18 Jan 2024	Introducing the New Curriculum for Wales (a meeting with a secondary school Headteacher and it cluster of primary heads teachers)
Feb 2024 tba	Annual Budget as it relates to education matters
14 Mar 2024	Schools Session and Visit 2 – Bishopston Comprehensive School (To look at progress with the Schools Development Plan)
18 Apr 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hearing the Voices of Children and Young People• Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Update
9 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality in Education (QEd) / Sustainable Communities for Learning Update• Swansea Skills Partnership Annual Update• End of year review in Education Scrutiny