

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 21st May, 2019 at 10.00 am**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor T.Thomas (Chairman)  
County Councillor L.Jones (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: M.Groucutt, L.Brown, M.Lane, M. Powell and J.Watkins

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Kath Bevan	Wellbeing Lead
James Kent	Curriculum Reform Lead
Ed Pryce	Challenge Adviser, Interim Service Strategic and Policy Lead

## **APOLOGIES:**

County Councillor D. Jones

### **1. Election of Chair**

The election of County Councillor T. Thomas as Chair was noted. On behalf of the Children and Young People Select Committee, the new Chair paid tribute to the previous Chair, County Councillor M. Groucutt for his work and expertise in leading the Committee.

Following introductions, County Councillor Groucutt expressed his disappointment and concern that minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019 were not presented.

### **2. Appointment of Vice Chair**

County Councillor L. Jones was appointed as Vice Chair.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

County Councillors M. Groucutt and M. Powell declared personal, non-prejudicial interests as Governors of King Henry VIII Comprehensive School.

### **4. Public Open Forum**

No members of the public were present

### **5. Presentation on Educational Attainment ~Strategy for improving the performance of Free School Meals pupils: Kath Bevan, Wellbeing Lead, EAS**

**Purpose:**

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To consider a new strategy that has been developed to improve the educational performance of pupils who are in receipt of free school meals (FSM).

#### **Key Issues:**

A presentation was provided by the Education Achievement Service (EAS) Challenge Adviser (Interim Service Strategic and Policy Lead) and Assistant Director, Professional Learning (Excellence, Equity and Wellbeing).

Data showing the performance of FSM learners compared to non-FSM pupils at each of the phases from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4, in Monmouthshire compared with all Wales was explained. Information was also provided about attendance of FSM learners compared to non-FSM.

EAS is supporting schools to improve and accelerate the performance and attendance of all learners but particularly more vulnerable FSM learners.

Information was provided on the regional Wellbeing and Equity Strategy which will have specific focus on FSM learners.

Schools and Governing Bodies have been provided with support on how best to write effective Pupil Development bids to benefit FSM and Looked After Children (LAC) learners, and to fit within School Development Plans.

#### **Member Scrutiny:**

Following the presentation, Members of the Select Committee were invited to ask questions:

- A Select Committee Member asked how real the gap is in Monmouthshire in comparison with other authorities questioning if better performing authorities have more vocational courses or a better suited curriculum for FSM pupils, if it was to do with lower grant levels or demographic reasons. It was responded that the gap over time would be expected to widen from Foundation Phase (FP) to Key Stage 4 but not to the extent seen in Monmouthshire. Similar profile counties have smaller gaps suggesting that some adjustment is required. Regarding vocational subjects, at the Level 2 threshold (English, Welsh and Mathematics), it is English (particularly the Literacy element) and Maths where there is underperformance and not necessarily connected to vocational subjects. Earlier on in FP and KS2 those elements are overcome but the improvement is not being sustained into secondary phase. It is clear that where secondary schools get it right for FSM learners, it is right for all learners not just FSM.
- Considering vocational qualifications, it was queried if schools that provide an effective learning package improve Maths and English skills better. It was responded that there is evidence that learner engagement is an important factor. Select Committee were advised that there is a move to a broader measure with the use of the Capped 9 points score that will include Literacy, Numeracy, Science and Welsh Baccalaureate.
- A Member was disappointed that there was no representative from the Children and Young People Directorate at the meeting as the authority has a statutory duty for standards and works in partnership with schools and the EAS. The Member also emphasised the need to hold schools to account and expressed disappointment that the majority of reports reviewed by the professional grant panel needed additional work.
- Referring to the research of Professor D. Egan, it was queried if teachers' language used at KS4 is more complex and consequently too much of a challenge for

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disadvantaged children. It was suggested there is need for input from EAS on this. It was responded that there are multiple factors affecting disadvantaged learners. EAS can provide links to schools that are successful in providing for disadvantaged learners. It was added that there is a need to provide the scaffolding to enable FSM learners to perform well against their peers e.g. using the PDG to ensure that Y7 children have the equipment to start their secondary school life and provide access to enrichment activities.

- Referring to distinguishing disadvantaged from low ability learners, a Member suggested that a more positive message could be used to encapsulate the expectation for every child to attain highly. This point was agreed.
- It was noted that data on the performance of Faith schools is available.
- Noting that 60% of the grants are in respect of Key Stage 3, it was queried if there is some discretion to allow schools to allocate funds where needed. It was confirmed that grants are awarded in accordance with the terms and conditions set by Welsh Government.
- Regarding areas of double deprivation, it was queried if Welsh Government could be contacted to better support these areas. It was noted that areas of deprivation are determined by a Welsh Government formula.
- In response to a question, Members were informed that the EAS is working with schools to provide earlier career advice for learners to provide pathways information. Secondary schools are also working with cluster primary schools to encourage better parental attendance at school events.
- A Select Committee Member commented on the very low FSM learner numbers and lower funding. It was questioned how the EAS is operating differently in areas of higher funding. It was confirmed that the EAS supports all schools in the same way regardless of FSM numbers.
- A Member asked about the Wellbeing and Equity programme and asked about the link with improved outcomes. It was explained that the learning environment is key, that the teaching and learning is accessible and that schools address any barriers to learning. Further information was provided about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the variety of nurture and wellbeing programmes made available by schools to provide support for vulnerable learners and those in need of emotional support. The EAS can provide support in finding peer schools to link with.
- A Member enquired if the LAC cluster grant includes adopted children. It was confirmed that the grant supports looked after children and known adopted children.
- A Member commented that FSM learners are likely to be in mixed ability classes in primary school but may be placed in bottom sets in secondary school disproportionately leading to lower expectations.
- It was confirmed that better performing secondary schools work with less well achieving schools and that this is built into the leadership programme.

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#### Committee Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the representatives of the EAS for their attendance, presentation and for providing reassurance through answering questions. Results after the summer examinations will be an indicator of the success of strategies employed.

It was concluded that schools are ultimately responsible for standards and suggested that the Select Committee would welcome the opportunity to invite schools not green to explore their results and strategies, and also similarly, a green school.

It was also suggested that the authority should work together with other similar authorities that are achieving better results with FSM learners.

#### **6. Presentation on the New School Curriculum: James Kent, Curriculum Reform Lead, EAS**

##### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the presentation was to examine to what extent the new curriculum for Wales could address the skills gaps in SE Wales.

##### **Key Issues:**

- The draft curriculum was published on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019. The final publication will be in January 2020.
- The new curriculum for Wales will become part of the statutory guidance for schools from 2022.
- New qualifications will be available for learners from 2025, with the first assessment in 2027. These learners are currently in Year 3 (will become part of the workforce from 2027 – 32 and beyond).

##### **Member scrutiny:**

The Children and Young People Select Committee received a presentation from the EAS Assistant Director, Professional Learning (Curriculum, Collaboration & Research). Following the presentation, questions were asked:

- A Member asked how the new curriculum has affected the number of vocational courses offered. It was explained that the new curriculum is not part of the statutory framework until 2022 and consequently the offer has yet to be defined but there is commitment to provision of high quality, robust courses.
- A Member asked about the new qualifications (digital and technology) referring to the need for more teachers and the budget constraints in secondary schools. In terms of skills gap, it was explained that new employees are sought through a part time PGCE. It will also be vital to ensure existing ICT staff have appropriate training
- A Member commented that he was reassured about the Welsh Baccalaureate. It was noted that two of the four secondary schools are located on the Wales/England border and that the curricula will be very different. It was asked if there is any evidence of resistance from parents who may prefer the English offer. It was explained that there is no evidence so far and that there will be a need for an effective change management programme to allay concerns about e.g. future qualifications.

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- A Member commented on the migration of demand across the border to England, referring to the movement of people from Bristol to Chepstow.
- A Member asked how the projected demand for caring, nursing and service industries would be addressed. It was responded that there would be nothing in the new curriculum or new qualifications that will prevent any pathway to any career. Schools will be able to develop some areas and the curriculum will allow schools to be more outward looking.
- It was explained that more information is available on the link: <https://hwb.gov.wales/draft-curriculum-for-wales-2022/> . Members were informed that the governors' training session was filmed and will be available soon to view. There are also opportunities to provide feedback.
- A Select committee member asked how workload issues will be monitored as some teachers are not coping with the workload with some leaving the profession. It was responded that teachers are currently required to provide large amounts of evidence and this level of accountability will need to change. School need to have the time to develop the new curriculum. Professional learning and collaboration will also be key.
- A Member emphasised that there must be recognition that whilst the new curriculum in development, teachers will still need to be in front of a class.
- A Member asked about transition to new qualifications and was reassured that there would be natural progression as learners participate in the new curriculum from Year 3 and progress.
- A Member asked for input from Pioneer Schools.

#### **Committee Conclusion:**

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the EAS Officer for the presentation and for answering questions. He commented that it would be useful to return to the topic later in the year to keep up to date with the changing position.

It was agreed that it would be beneficial to invite a primary and secondary Pioneer School to a future meeting.

#### **7. Children and Young People Select Committee Forward Work Plan**

The Forward Work Plan was noted as follows:

##### **9<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

- Corporate Plan and Chief Officer's Annual Report (Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health)
- Partnership Agreement (deferred from today's meeting)
- Budget Monitoring Report

##### **17<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

- EAS: New Curriculum
- Primary and Secondary Pioneer Schools

##### **12<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

- Secondary and Primary schools (not necessarily green schools) representation to discuss their perspective on FSM,

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A Member asked for the Committee to be provided the dates of the decision making process for the proposal to close Mounton House Special School. A Member referred to the process date changes and agreed that the key dates must be available. The Chair will make this request to the Chief Officer, Children and Young People.

#### **8. Council and Cabinet Work Planner**

Select Committee Members were reminded that the Council and Cabinet Work Planner is included to enable Members to identify topics to be brought forward for scrutiny

#### **9. Next Meeting: 9th July 2019**

It was noted that it was Leanne Wakerley's last meeting. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Leanne for her input representing the view of Monmouthshire Association of School Governors.

**The meeting ended at 12.10 pm**