

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 27th May, 2021 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor T.Thomas (Chairman)
County Councillor (Vice Chairman)

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

Officers in Attendance

Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Sharon Randall-Smith, Head of Achievement and Attainment
Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES: None

1. To note the appointment of County Councillor T. Thomas as Chair.

2. To appoint a Vice-Chair.

Councillor Brown was proposed by Councillor Powell, seconded by Councillor Lane.

3. Declarations of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Public Open Forum.

No members of the public were present.

5. Presentation regarding the New Curriculum for Wales - Discussion with the Education Achievement Service.

James Kent (Assistant Director: Professional Learning) delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions, with Darren Jones (Principal Challenge Adviser) and Sharon Randall-Smith.

Challenge:

From September last year, schools were meant to have a full year of preparation for the new curriculum. Where are Monmouthshire schools now in relation to the preparatory steps?

We've spoken to a number of schools over that last 5-6 months, regarding distanced and blended learning. There's a continuum, in terms of preparedness: some schools are in a strong position because they had done a lot of work before the pandemic and some will require additional support as we move forward. We are currently talking to Estyn and Welsh Government about the 'Journey to 2022' document because we want to ensure that schools aren't rushing – it's important that this be done properly. We know that curriculum design

development takes years to get right, and we don't want there to be unintended consequences of not getting that engagement right. How that is framed is important, and making sure that schools feel supported. It is important that every member of staff has that opportunity for engagement, understands the key aspects of the curriculum framework, and has time to trial and develop.

There are two aspects. Every school was in a slightly different place before the pandemic, and each has developed according to individual circumstances. Some schools have been significantly affected by Covid, with bubbles of pupils away for significant periods, while others haven't. There have been many positives during this time as well. The way that virtual learning is now delivered, through virtual provision, has enabled more schools and practitioners to take part in the engagement sessions. Also, the fact that sessions are now recorded means that professional learning can be accessed at a time that is convenient, and watched several times, if that is helpful. Over this time, there has been a big focus in schools on pedagogy, leading to more collaboration in schools, networking, etc. The pandemic has affected the timeline for some schools, of course, but there has been a development of new skills and understanding in this time too. For those schools that have been unable to move forward at a fast pace, there will be bespoke support and the framework around them to continue the progression at their own pace. It takes time to build and embed a curriculum for our children.

Schools will have support from their school improvement partner or their school-to-school link. We have provided school development planning guidance to help with strategic planning over the next year. There is a national professional learning programme for senior leaders, headteachers and middle leaders that we have made available live and asynchronously. We will have professional learning support available for HLTAs and TAs. We have a secondary curriculum design network to support our deputy heads, and area learning and subject networks that are looking at planning within and across areas of learning. Moreover, if schools require bespoke support we will provide that as well.

It's important that when the new curriculum comes in, schools are allowed the time to embed it. Would you agree that this challenge will be more difficult for secondary schools, and that in a cross-curricular approach, there are pitfalls that need to be avoided?

It is going to be challenging for secondary schools. One of the anxieties for them is always what the qualifications will look like. This curriculum doesn't dictate the model that schools use to deliver their curriculum. We want specialists to teach in their specialisms but there are approaches that schools can take. Arts subjects, for example, are highly specialised but there might be a common theme or common set of processes. It almost becomes a multi-disciplinary approach as links and connections are made, but teachers are still teaching within their specialism. We need to think about curriculum design before timetabling, but that's challenging because of the number of hours that need to be allocated for GCSE and Key Stage 3, etc. Departments need time to think about how things will work, and to trial different approaches, evaluate them, and get pupil feedback. Looking at cross-curricular themes like climate change, for example, it's hard to see how a rounded understanding of it can be achieved without involving science, wellbeing, and other aspects.

With the increased challenge will come increased support. It's also a case of knowing the schools well, in order to know whether that support will fit them. It will be helpful moving forward to have the reduction in high stakes accountability to which schools have previously been

subject. It gives schools a bit more flexibility to experiment. Though the new curriculum will be a challenge for secondary schools, it is also an exciting opportunity. When schools presented to members about blended learning they noted that they looked at the range of skills and cross-curricular themes. In delivering blended learning to students, staff have had to be in contact with other departments to maximise the offer.

Can you further explain the flexibility of the curriculum and the timescale in which to deliver it?

Over the summer, Welsh Government will ask schools about preparedness, to support any decision about the curriculum. Our understanding at present is that the curriculum will proceed from September 2022, but we would reassure that members that Estyn and EAS are listening and feeding back to Welsh Government about schools' concerns and needs regarding timescales and expectations. We know that there needs to be flexibility because we have to get this right. Curriculum design and implementation is an iterative process, taking years to get right.

Can we ensure that every subject has the same wealth of resources?

Absolutely, there will be support across all areas of learning and experience, and disciplinary areas that feed those areas of learning. There has to be, in order to support our teachers to do the best job that they can. There will be plenty of networking opportunities to share practice, that we will facilitate, so schools can see other models in practice and work with practitioners. As part of the planning, schools will audit subject areas as part of that designing of the curriculum, and look at the coverage of skills and 'what matters' statements. As schools go through their trialling of the curriculum, they will review and audit those. Neither subjects nor skills will be lost – they will be taught in a more exciting and multi-disciplinary way.

If schools are self-assessing, will there still be standard tests relating to literacy and numeracy?

Unless the minister decides otherwise, our understanding is that we will continue with those international tests. In fact, our performance in those is why the curriculum reforms were introduced in the first place.

How are we actually going to assess where schools are in the process?

Assessment will continue, with emphasis on the formative development. Any inference we make about progress is either summative or formative, the former being a perhaps reflection on progress across an entire period of work. That information is for the school, to feed into its self-evaluation. We will still have to make those inferences in our teaching and capture that information, so that we know where the learners are. That information will still exist in the system but we won't look at it at a local authority or regional level. One of the key reasons for that is that it hasn't always been helpful when it comes to the conversation around learning and supporting learners in their progress – the focus has been too much on the numbers. There will be a period of review and self-evaluation for schools for a number of years after September 2022. From EAS' perspective, there will be professional learning, the development of case studies and sharing of practice; schools will undertake these themselves too. Collaboration will increase significantly. Working in hubs during the pandemic brought schools closer together, sharing resources to reduce the workload, etc. Within the schools themselves, the self-evaluation process will be vital.

From the local authority's perspective, we meet with schools regularly to look at their progress. The focus in the last few years has been on the self-evaluations and school development plan. We will have the opportunity to understand how schools are progressing in relation to those

priorities, what the challenges are, and how we can help them, but also to celebrate the progress that they have made, and view it in the context of other schools.

Consultation is ongoing for the opening of a new all-through school, starting from age 4, with a private contractor providing for the 3 year olds on the site. But the rationale brought to this committee and to full council was for a 3-19 school. When was that age range in the consultation changed, and who was consulted when the 3-19 became a 4-19?

The document is under consultation; therefore, what has been shared is the document for the local authority to consult on. Across the site, there is provision for 3-19 and therefore, within that, whatever the model is when the decision is made, we will still make sure that there is provision from 3 to 19 on that site. How the element for 3-4 year olds is delivered will be determined as a result of the consultation but it won't change provision from 3-19 on that site.

Can we ensure that this will be covered the next time this committee meets?

We can't pre-empt what will happen in the consultation – we will have to wait to see how people respond. By the July meeting of CYP, we will have hard evidence of what people think about the new school proposal.

Can you confirm that when you spoke to the governing bodies at Deri View and King Henry VIII about the new provision, the inference was that the current staff in Deri View who provide the nursery education would continue to do so, and what would happen to them if they lose that nursery provision within the school curriculum?

We weren't in attendance at that meeting so can't say what the inference was. We can say that on the site there will be 3-19 provision. We will know what the feedback to the consultation is by the time of the CYP meeting on 8th July, and committee members will have the opportunity to make their feelings known, which can then be fed back into the consultation.

Could the claim that Welsh history isn't compulsory be clarified?

As part of the bill achieving its passage through the Senedd, there was a requirement to strengthen the position of Welsh history in the curriculum. So that will now come through more strongly within the statements of what matters, which will be a mandatory part of the framework. The group responsible will work on the detail through the summer term.

What does a bigger Welsh GCSE mean?

It was a proposal, which has gone out for consultation, to strengthen the Welsh GCSE by having a 1.5 equivalent GCSE, whereas currently it's 1 GCSE equivalent. We'll see what the feedback is on the consultation, at which point Qualifications Wales will need to respond.

Will a 1.5 GCSE squeeze out something else?

Other GCSEs are adapting too i.e. Maths and English also potentially becoming 1.5, rather than 2 as they are currently, so we will need to look at the entire consultation in that light.

What does the Skills Challenge Certificate involve, and what type of qualification is it?

This is the current Welsh Baccalaureate, which will be reformed. It has 4 elements: an individual project, Enterprise Challenge, Community Challenge and a Global Citizenship aspect. It's a level 2 qualification now, equivalent to a GCSE, and there's a level 3 pathway at A level too. There are also going to be additional skills qualifications in other areas but the detail on that isn't clear yet.

Is there a chance of it including things like training in how to write CVs?

Within the curriculum framework there is scope for schools to do that, but there is generally less that is prescribed in this curriculum, in order to give that flexibility. There will be an element of choice for schools.

In the terms of the Wellbeing Act, how much resource will be available for the pastoral care of those pupils who might need support?

There will certainly be a continuation of funding from Welsh Government through the Accelerated Learning Plan funding and Pupil Deprivation Grant funding that will go on to support programmes of intervention for pupils. Across Monmouthshire, there has also been a significant amount of professional learning, and schools now have practitioners who are better able to support pupils. A number of schools have increased practitioners in ELSA support and Thrive support, so for those pupils who require that support, there are more practitioners on the ground to provide it. Under the new curriculum, the health and wellbeing area of learning puts it at the heart of school life. Schools have never been so aware of wellbeing – for the staff as well as pupils.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to officers for their hard work. This curriculum is a sea change for staff and pupils, but there is also a huge job to do in terms of involving the parents. Teachers have adapted so well during Covid, with regard to blended learning etc. We will call on EAS to come back, as the curriculum progresses. Councillor Brown requested that a link to the current consultations be made available.

6. Children and Young People Select Committee Forward Work Plan.

The next meeting will cover the new school in Abergavenny. Councillor Edwards proposed putting 21st Century Schools back on the agenda for a meeting later in the year. He also reminded the committee that the Chief Officer offered in the previous meeting, to give an update to the committee on his schools visits. Mr McLean confirmed that these are ongoing and he could be available at the next meeting (8th July), if the committee wishes.

7. Council and Cabinet Work Planner.

8. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes were confirmed and signed as an accurate record (proposed by Councillor Groucott and seconded by Councillor Powell).

9. Next Meeting: Thursday 8th July 2021 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at **11.50 am**