

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 17th March, 2020 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor T.Thomas (Chairman)
County Councillors: L.Brown, 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
Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES: County Councillors M.Groucutt, L.Jones, D. Jones, M.Lane, P. Strong NEU, Thomas and Harris

1. Declarations of Interest.

Councillor Powell declared an interest as a Governor at King Henry VIII.

2. Public Open Forum.

No members of the public were present.

3. Chief Officer for Education Annual Report - To scrutinise the performance of the service over the previous year and to consider the strategic direction for 2020-2021 (to follow).

The Chief Officer presented his report. The purpose of the report is to inform the council of the education system's progress in the last 12 months. In 19/20 significant milestones were reached. Many schools are on a continuous and secured improvement process. Estyn outcomes are improving – 'Good' is the most common outcome, but there are too few 'Excellent' outcomes. There has been an emergence of significant grant funding through Welsh Government. Attendance is very strong, but exclusions is an area of concern. There is an increase in the days lost per pupil at primary level. At Secondary, there is a significant increase in episodes of fixed-term exclusions and days lost in total. Richard Austin, Principal Officer for Inclusion, will come in to give further detail and explanations of what is driving them. Note that individual schools are not named in the data/graphs.

Challenge:

Since the work has taken place with Cluster primary schools, are Key Stage 3 pupils better off with the change from primary to secondary – has the gap lessened?

Yes, the Councillor is referring to the work between King Henry VIII and its cluster of schools. We are seeing a concerted effort across that learning continuum in establishing the right types of skills very early in the primary schools that then allow a much smoother transition, and a continued rate of progress through secondary school. We want children to be doing really well up to the end of Key Stage 2 and transition well – it's important not to underestimate how huge the transition can be from primary to secondary, especially emotionally. There is a good example with regard to maths in King Henry and its cluster: there were children in one of our primary schools who were achieving a level 6 in maths at the end of primary, but the teacher didn't feel confident in declaring that they were performing at that level in a sustained fashion – but having the maths expertise from the secondary school allowed them to do that. Once that is then modelled into the next level of their education, we can begin to raise expectations i.e. if a child is working at Level 6 at the end of primary, you can expect that they will be A/A when they come to GCSEs.*

Are schools which are doing well being taken as models for how to achieve higher than expected standards elsewhere?

There is a huge amount of work on this across the region. EAS has established 'Leading Network Schools': they advise and support other schools, there are visits to see how they work (including those outside the county). The new approach to the curriculum is predicated on that, with significant success. Many of our schools are becoming leading network schools, and are now reaching out to help others.

Is there more liaison with Gwent schools, or is it generally for SE Wales? Where's the focus?

The focus is very much on the work in SE Wales. In education terms, 'SE Wales' is the 5 Gwent authorities. They own the EAS, which is our school improvement, so that's the vehicle for identification and arrangement for many of those support agencies which are brokered between schools. There are times when we look outside the region; for instance, the Executive Headteacher at Caldicot is also the Executive Headteacher at The Bishop of Llandaff in Cardiff. The Challenge Advisor in Chepstow School is also the Headteacher at Cardiff High School, which is a very high-performing school. We are drawing in a plethora of talents to support all of our schools. Secondary at EAS is not our strength currently, and there are schools that find themselves in challenging situations – therefore we sometimes have to look outside the region to find that support. But for primary, it's almost entirely geared within the EAS footprint.

Is there a lot of liaison between EAS and the central consortium covering the Cardiff area?

Yes, the 4 managing directors of the regional consortia area meet regularly. Since Christmas, I and the Managing Director of the EAS gave evidence in the Senedd, alongside the Managing Director and Lead Director of Central South. As Directors of Education we meet as 22, and as 5 in SE Wales as well.

The report mentions improving the rates of progress for ALN, in particular, in the next period.

Can you outline how you intend to do that?

One of the interesting things as we prepared and presented through our Estyn inspection (which will be published on 21st April), was that our learners who are in our SNRBs make good progress. We want to maximise the values that our SNRBs as a system within Monmouthshire can bring to bear on the wider system as well. We are continuing to discuss regional approaches to the very high tier needs that exist within our population, and we will continue to do that in collaboration, for all of our children. The ALN piece, as we transition into the new

legislation, is about understanding the impact of that and making sure that our schools are prepared for that. It would also be a good opportunity for this committee to have a presentation from the Regional Lead on preparedness for the new legislation, because there will be a significant change for parents: we've seen a huge increase in parents requesting statements. The whole landscape of ALN is changing very significantly. We want to make sure our whole range of ALN learners make that progress. We need to make sure we're meeting the neurodevelopmental need which we've identified.

What is the latest regarding Coronavirus?

There is a tele-conference tomorrow for all 22 Directors about Coronavirus. The first consideration had been children returning from foreign travel, following Public Health Wales advice. We met all Headteachers last Tuesday to discuss business continuity and shared contingency plans amongst all schools. There's been escalation just since yesterday, so we're continuing to support schools, and discuss ratios of teachers to children. Pregnant women self-isolating will be a challenge for some schools. There's been a spike in children and staff absences. The decision to close schools will be led by Welsh government. Provision for FSMs is being discussed with counterparts in Gwent. The Joint Council for Qualifications will make a decision around exams. Google Classroom and Hwb are being supported for learning from home. The key concerns for us are around the ratios, and when it's safe to have children in school, vulnerable learners, exams, and special schools.

How is learning for primary children being ensured? Home learning seems to make more sense for secondary children.

Hwb is a very good resource for primary children, and we're continuing to work with all of our schools to make sure that that work is accessible to everybody. Clearly, there is a concern that vulnerable learners/FSM need to have access to the necessary kit for that learning. That's one of the things that will be discussed further today, and as the situation proceeds.

What support is being put in for lost pay for supply teachers?

The Chief Officer doesn't have that information.

Chair's Conclusion:

Members need to scrutinise this report further and think of any other points that will add value before it goes to council. We need to commend schools for attendance, and those which are high performing. It is a concern that there are schools with very low numbers of FSM which are not hitting that level. Another area of concern is finance, which is a concern for people in our wards, as well as the matter of exclusions. Exclusion needs to be near the top of the agenda. We will welcome Richard Austin coming in.

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4. Scrutiny of the performance report on School Development Outcomes (to follow).

The Officer presented the report on the quality of school improvement processes. The last few years has seen an increasing and improving trend in our performance in a number of areas, such as national categorisation (more schools classed as 'Green', none as 'Red') and in the outcome of Estyn inspections, with more schools achieving 'Good', and a few as 'Excellent'. But we expect to see more. In order to secure this, we are looking at a wider range of measures and work that the schools do, in order to support that move towards further improvement. That is the basis of the report.

Challenge:

Why is there no comparison with SE Wales on the report for the year 19/20?

The data regionally for 19/20 is not available, but when it does become available we will update the report. But we wanted to share our own schools' progress in this period as soon as we possibly could.

How can it be ensured that self-evaluations are of the same standard?

The quality of the school development planning and self-evaluation processes: there is no requirement now for a school to write a self-evaluation report, but it's the quality of the process that the schools have to give them accurate judgements are evaluated through the Challenge Advice visits. Therefore, over the year, Challenge Advisors will work with the school to moderate the work that they do. For example, if there's a learning walk, the Challenge Advisor may well be involved in that. They may well look at the moderation of Headteachers or Senior Leaders' judgements on teachers' observations, but they will compare those with book scrutinise, and listening to learners. The judgement overall, therefore, is that of the Challenge Advisor based on the very rich evidence-base provided by the schools.

Taking that into account, if a school self-evaluated as 'Good' but EAS deemed it to be 'Adequate', who would be the external moderator of the standard levels?

The National Categorisation Process is used as a summary – a point in time – of where the school is. The information that's collected by the Challenge Advisor feeds into that report, and the information from the National Categorisation report will reflect the quality of self-evaluation processes that we've used here. So it has been through a process itself. Estyn will come to a school and look at it in a snapshot of time, and not necessarily focus on everything in this current model. There is a degree of assurance from our point of view that the judgements we're looking at here are made by the Challenge Advisor based on what they've seen and worked on within the school, and that will then be moderated within EAS through their discussions with their principal Challenge Advisor in order to make sure there's consistency within that team as well.

What things will be put in place to help schools to drive towards excellence?

Last year a regional protocol was initiated for looking at school development planning. Schools were invited to workshop sessions, which were very well attended by Monmouthshire schools. School development plan surgeries were attended, with secondary schools being offered advice and particular support being identified. As a result, there was additional Challenge Advisor support. In the Autumn term, we met formally with secondary schools, and reviewed the plans again, if any further work was needed. We scrutinised the 'schools causing concern' plans. The correlation between self-evaluation processes and their plans has been discussed and modified as a result of their work with Challenge Advisors.

It seems that secondary schools aren't doing as well as primary. Could this be shown in more detail in the graphs? As it stands, do the primary figures raise the overall level, glossing over the true picture at secondary level?

Yes, there are only 4 secondary schools in Monmouthshire, and the regional picture will have a lot more. The schools are all adequate or better now, the plans for all the schools are fit for purpose and meet statutory requirements. We can break the figures down further for the future.

Chair's Conclusion:

It's good that there are no schools in red. It's concerning that only one secondary is in green. Secondary schools are large organisations; it seems harder to move them. The Officer presented the report on the quality of school improvement processes. The last few years has seen an increasing and improving trend in our performance in a number of areas, such as national categorisation (more schools classed as 'Green', none as 'Red') and in the outcome of Estyn inspections, with more schools achieving 'Good', and a few as 'Excellent'. But we expect to see more. In order to secure this, we are looking at a wider range of measures and work that the schools do, in order to support that move towards further improvement. That is the basis of the report.

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5. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 28th January 2020 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

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

Richard Austin will be invited to discuss exclusions. The Chair notes it is important in the future to have more input from schools in this committee. There is a concern about the loss of pupils to schools outside Monmouthshire – Chepstow to Wyedean and Abergavenny to Crickhowell, for example. We would want to retain as many primary pupils as possible at secondary level. Cluster working helps with this, though. For example, there will be more Goytre children in secondary schools from September due to the Cluster working.

For the ALN update in April, Councillor Brown has requested an update on the pupils from Mounton House regarding their alternative learning arrangements. For 'Progress on Curriculum reform', it would be helpful to ask pilot schools to come to committee. Regarding the Welsh medium, the Chair notes that the new school is something the public has asked about, but that might have to be pushed back as an agenda item given current events.

7. Council and Cabinet Work Plan.

Nothing was discussed.

8. Next Meeting: Tuesday 28th April 2020 at 10.00am.

The next meeting is on Tuesday 28th April 2020, pending any changes in light of the coronavirus.

Though there was a constitutional amendment for members' remote attendance at meetings, there are still some technological limitations to be overcome. There is some money in the budget available for improvements. This is being looked at, especially in light of Coronavirus and its possible implications for attendance.

The meeting ended at **11.55 am**