

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

Date: 26 September 2023

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors W Routley (Chair), J Cleverly, C Townsend, B Davies, P Drewett, D Jenkins, M Al-Nuaimi, R Howells and D Mayer

In Attendance: Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer) Sarah Davies (Deputy Chief Education Officer) and Cllr Deb Davies (Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years).

Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Adviser), Emily Mayger (Governance Support Officer) and Simon Richards.

Apologies: Councillors P Bright

1 Apologies

Councillor P. Bright

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Committee asked for supplementary information to be requested from Officers regarding the response given on the Youth Service, detailing how much time is spent working face to face versus admin work.

The minutes of meeting held on **25th July 2023** were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

4 Estyn Inspections Outcomes Report 2022-23

The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years introduced the report. The Deputy Chief Education Officer gave an overview of the report.

- The Committee noted the theme of the necessity for Welsh second language improvements across the reports' recommendations and felt it was important for children to have a greater level of Welsh language. The Committee asked what thought had been given to the improvements required. The Chief Education Officer assured Committee that there was support for schools to address recommendations. They highlighted the 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan which linked to

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improving Welsh second language in English medium schools and provided support packages for schools. They highlighted the opportunities for teachers to attend a range of courses to improve Welsh language skills. They noted that the Education Achievement Service (EAS) are able to attend schools and work with teachers to improve lesson plans and delivery. The Deputy Chief Education Officer highlighted that these had been the first inspections since Covid, and that the pandemic had affected Welsh language development. It was highlighted that most schools were taking part in Cymraeg Campus.

- The Committee noted the improvement in Welsh Standards but asked whether Newport City Council could be doing more to ensure improvements. The Chief Education Officer assured Committee that they were confident about the opportunities for support for Welsh language skills. They noted the improvement of Welsh language skills was a national theme in similar areas. The Chief Education Officer assured Committee that they would be continuing to monitor engagement levels.
- The Committee asked whether the recommendation regarding healthy eating had been recognised prior to the inspection and if so, what had been done to address it and were similar schools being looked at for best practice to support Pillgwenlly Primary. The Chief Education Officer assured Committee that a development plan had been created and signed off, with the school being monitored every half term. They informed Committee that there would be a visit to the school to review monitoring evaluation processes and give further support and advice. They assured Committee that they would be able to provide updates to show progress. The Committee stated that they would normally meet with schools to discuss development plans and priorities and ensure robust monitoring policies but were unable to do this currently with primary schools due to action short of strike. They assured Committee that EAS would visit and review the same evidence as the authority to see whether the same conclusions are drawn, and that EAS had visited the school and found no issue with the healthy eating angle. They assured Committee that now the school was in review, they were able to visit and monitor the school in order to demonstrate confidence to Estyn. They informed Committee that if there was concern about a school, the Chief Education Officer can legally intervene.
- The Committee were pleased with the inspection outcomes and congratulated the Cabinet Member and Officers. The Committee asked whether it was easy to compare Newport's outcomes to similar local authorities and to national results. The Deputy Chief Education Officer felt that it was difficult to compare as they must be cautious when stating figures as the new focus was innovative and interesting practice. They highlighted that they did not have data to compare as they had previously. They felt it was important to look at leadership as it was integral for strong schools. The Chief Education Officer highlighted the stigma around schools that had been in special measures needed to be broken and informed Committee that Estyn can review recommendations in isolation. The Cabinet Member highlighted that Estyn had taken a more supportive approach to enable improvement and welcomed this.
- The Committee congratulated schools for their performance and highlighted the three schools that were removed from special measures.

- The Committee asked what progress had been made on attendance in schools and Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) and what support was available for pupil and staff well-being and mental health. The Chief Education Officer noted the strong outcome for NEETs, highlighting Year 11. They agreed that these figures had not always been as strong but had been above the Welsh average for a significant time. They highlighted the Aspire Project in Lliswerry and John Frost schools, the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), the Wellbeing Coordinator and their partnership work with the Aneurin Bevan Health Board (ABHB), and the Youth Progression and Engagement Officer. They explained that a small number of young people were not engaged with to protect their mental health and wellbeing. The Deputy Chief Education Officer confirmed that Newport was sixth in Wales for NEET figures and the highest ranking in South East Wales. They highlighted the available support for schools regarding discrimination and explained that attendance was an important indicator of well-being. They informed Committee that attendance was not reported nationally as a KPI or published on a national basis. They noted a downward trend in pupil attendance post pandemic on the national level.
- The Committee asked whether the increase of term time holidays has had an impact on attendance in Newport. The Chief Education Officer agreed that term time holidays were more prevalent, but informed Committee that Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) had been reintroduced. They assured Committee that FPNs were only issued when there was sufficient evidence and reasons for absence were explored and support for families offered before they escalated to FPNs. They informed Committee of the increase in elective homeschooling. They assured Committee that these families and communities are engaged with, and Attendance Officers provided support with events. They informed Committee that data was collected and analysed to track any trends that highlighted underlying issues.
- The Committee acknowledged the difficulties for young people returning to education post-pandemic and felt that more parents needed to engage with the services on offer. The Chief Education Officer explained that not every pupil was suited to a “normal” classroom experience. The Committee requested further information on the work undertaken regarding outreach work with pupils and their families.
- The Committee asked whether the data for children not in education or the school system were available and asked whether legislative change would encourage parent engagement. The Chief Education Officer highlighted that it was a parent’s right to electively homeschool their children and could not comment on a change of the law. They assured Committee that they engaged with parents to ensure their understanding of what homeschooling entailed, and to ensure that there were no underlying issues that were influencing the decision which the Education team could provide support to resolve. The Cabinet Member highlighted that the concern for the local authority was learning and safeguarding.
- The Committee asked what monitoring and evaluation was completed regarding homeschooling. The Chief Education Officer informed Committee that there was an annual visit to children who were registered, and they were monitored. They assured Committee that questions were asked about what children were learning. They highlighted that there was no set national curriculum for homeschooled children and that support was offered to facilitate examination spaces when homeschooled families required it. The Committee questioned whether there was any detriment to pupils’ social skills due to homeschooling. The Chief Education Officer stated that

they would not make this presumption. The Deputy Chief Education Officer highlighted that there were family-established networks for homeschooled pupils and their families which were supported by the team with networking opportunities such as workshop sessions. The Chief Education Officer noted that research suggested that electively homeschooled families often feel judged, so it was important to engage with them in a supportive way. The Cabinet Member highlighted that the support provided to electively homeschooled children was grant funded by Welsh Government which they hoped would continue.

5 **Conclusions of Committee Reports**

- The Committee thanked Officers and schools for their continued hard work.
- The Committee were content with the report.
- The Committee highlighted the importance of progression and improvement within the Pillgwenlly Primary School after its inspection report.
- The Committee highlighted the importance of the continued work to promote the use of Welsh second language in schools and asked for further information about what resources are available and used in schools to promote this.
- The Committee asked for an information report on what outreach is done with pupils and families who are struggling with returning to school post-Covid, those who are struggling with attendance and NEETs.

6 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

a) **Actions Arising (Appendix 1)**

The Scrutiny Advisor presented the action sheet.

b) **Forward Work Programme Update (Appendix 2)**

The Scrutiny Advisor informed Committee that there had been no changes to the FWP.

c) **Information Reports (Appendix 3)**

The Scrutiny Advisor noted that there had been one information report this month regarding Child Exploitation. The Scrutiny Advisor stated that there had been no questions forwarded regarding this, and that the Chair had expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to Officers and commended their work.

7 **Live Event**

[Please click here to watch the recording of the meeting.](#)

The meeting terminated at 11.10 am