

EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

25 January 2018

Chairperson: Councillor A.L.Thomas

Councillors: S. ap Dafydd, S.Harris, N.T.Hunt, H.N.James, R.Mizen, M.Protheroe, R.L.Taylor, D.Whitelock and A.J.Richards

Co-opted Voting Members: M.Caddick and A. Amor

Officers In Attendance A.Evans, C.Millis, J.Burge, I.Guy and Miss.C.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.R.Lockyer and P.A.Rees

1. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

The Chair requested a workshop session in the next Cycle of Meetings, for the Committee to populate the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme for 2018/19.

2. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

2.1 **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan**

Members received information on the draft Neath Port Talbot Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017/2020 as detailed in appendix to the circulated report, following re-consultation and for Cabinet Board to commend to Council.

Members highlighted that the Welsh Governments aim of achieving a million Welsh Speakers by 2050 is ambitious and

asked whether the officers were confident in the Primary Sector reaching the standards of the Welsh Government. Officers explained that the Welsh Language Strategy would be key at looking in to this.

Members asked whether the Parental Survey for Coed Darcy had been produced in a form of a letter. Officers confirmed that it had not yet been configured.

Members highlighted to officers that there is no education in the Medium of Welsh in the Afan Valleys and asked officers to include in the broader strategy to explore schools taught through the Medium of Welsh in the Afan Valleys.

Members highlighted that Children being educated through the medium of Welsh is not just within school, it also can be done at home and queried how parents and guardians can have help and support for this. Officers highlighted that they are currently working with Mentair Iaith and would want the the background and culture of Welsh to be taught to make it more appealing. It was noted that there will be a pop up shop in Port Talbot Swansea University opening soon which would be of interest to parents and adults.

Members commended the comment on having Welsh Language being taught in a more appealing way and asked if there was any flexibility on the curriculum. Officers mentioned that there is flexibility and may increase with models going forward, however, it takes confidence and therefore would need to consider training for staff.

Members asked how officers will aim to reach the action 'increasing current take up of pre-school Welsh Medium provision by 100% during the lifetime of the plan' as detailed on page 24 of the circulated report. Officers said that they would look to work with Flying Start and Cylch, look at where the current demand is for Pre School and look at decisions to meet that demand.

Members asked that with the new School coming to the county there will be a surge interest for Welsh Medium School in the Afan Valley. Officers highlighted that they are aware of pupils crossing the border to go to Ysgol Maesteg and would look in to this.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that Cabinet Board be asked to consider the following recommendations:

That having given due regard to the responses to the consultation and the impact assessments in relation to equality risk, Welsh Language, legal and workforce. Approval be granted for the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020 to be commended to Council for approval prior to submission to the Welsh Government and for implementation on the 1 April 2018 subject to the inclusion that exploration is undertaken into the use of Starter classes in English Medium Schools as a measure to increase Welsh Medium Education.

2.2 Annual Pupil Performance

Members were provided with a summary of the Performance of Neath port Talbot Schools and its pupils during 2016/17.

Members asked officers if they have a broader movement of Pupils. Officers confirmed that, that would be included in the admissions policy.

Members commended that Schools celebrate that children receive a GCSE and not if they have Grade's A/B or C, as all grades equal a GCSE.

Members queried why Key stage 4 level 2 had dropped from 1st to 14th over the last 5 years. Officers highlighted that there had been major changes to exams and qualifications with limited support from WG to our schools.

Members asked for a breakdown of the data for each school. Officers confirmed this could be done through a workshop session.

Officers highlighted to the members of this committee that they are invited to attend the School Standards Partnership Group to engage with the presentations that are delivered by each School.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

2.3 Pupil Attendance Update

Members were provided with information and data in relation to Neath Port Talbot Pupil attendance covering the 2017/18 academic year to date.

Members queried whether the data caters for sickness bugs that may affect pupil attendance. Officers highlighted that there was a sickness bug that affected numerous schools in December 2016 and that every illness will effect figures.

Members asked whether the authority can encourage good attendance by offering rewards. Officers confirmed that some schools do offer awards for good attendance however would raise it in a Senior Management team meeting and inform members of the discussion.

Members queried whether the traveller unit affected the attendance percentage in Llansawel Primary School. Officers highlighted that it did affect the figures slightly, however, as there are a small number of children if 1 or 2 children are off sick for a week it really affects their figures.

Members asked how Rhyd-y-fro Primary School had such a high percentage. Officers confirmed that their attendance had decreased significantly the autumn before which has shown an increase this year.

The Cabinet Member for Education highlighted to Members to make Attendance the top of their discussions to improve attendance.

Members queried that some parents take their children abroad for cultural and education reasons and asked do schools take this in to consideration. Officers confirmed that it is the Head Teachers discretion on each Childs own merit for absence.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON