



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
Neath Port Talbot Council

## **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Education Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee**

**19 November 2020**

### **Report of the Head of Participation**

#### **Matter for Information**

#### **Wards Affected: All Wards**

#### **Blended learning in key stage 4 and examinations for 2021**

#### **Purpose of the Report:**

To provide Members with an update on Blended Learning in Key Stage 4 and examinations for 2021 following a request from the Members Forward Work Programme session.

#### **Background:**

Since March 2020 all schools in NPT have had to evolve their teaching to incorporate a range of approaches including distance learning, live streaming, recorded lessons and more regular face to face. Collectively these approaches are referred to as blended learning. All schools have developed blended learning policies, with guidance for pupils and parents. Many schools have developed parent help sheets that are clear and outline expectations. There are positive examples of where pupils have clearly influenced the way this policy has been constructed, with a real feeling of co-construction. At key stage 4 all schools are relying on a blend of these approaches with a clear focus on 'catching-up' for lost time.

Schools face an additional challenge in that social distancing and other national guidelines designed to keep pupils safe can limit certain approaches in the classroom such as one to one work and small group work so much of the teaching tends to be very direct. All schools managing a new set of operational measures, including staggered break and lunchtimes, reorganised lesson times to support this, and reduced pupil movement around the school. In some cases pupils are remaining in one base room and teachers are moving around the school. This approach has often seen improved behaviour, but is challenging for staff who do not teach in their own base rooms, with all their resources readily available. A minority of schools report that this model can be difficult in delivering all areas of the curriculum without the access to specialist rooms and facilities.

A good example of how schools have adapted is where a school has recently created a Live Lesson protocol for staff, pupils and parents. This has been shared and staff have had professional learning and time to trial leading live lessons. During the 'firebreak', a few staff have trialled the live lessons with pupils in years 9, 10 and 11. Initial feedback is that there is greater engagement in live lessons compared to asynchronous (learning that pupils engage with in their own time and not 'live') tasks that pupils have to complete independently.

Staff have had to develop their understanding of how pupils learn remotely so that they can gauge the amount and type of tasks that pupils can complete without the face to face interaction and guidance. Leaders have trained staff in the use of different platforms and tools to create interesting asynchronous sessions. This includes voice overs using video, PowerPoint with voice recordings and streamed videos. Pupils have been set a range of tasks to engage and motivate them to continue to learn in challenging situations.

An example of a schools documents and guidance videos are available via the school Blended Learning Website:

<https://sites.google.com/hwbcymru.net/dyfbledlearning/home>

One of the main challenges is delivering face to face lessons to a class where 1 or 2 pupils are absent. The expectation to then set work for remote learning for individuals places a strain on staff. Despite using a variety of platforms extensively, it is very difficult to replicate a lesson face to face and remotely. All schools have mobilised resources to ensure pupils have access to equipment and connectivity, however engaging all pupils in learning has been an issue, particularly those in the higher deprivation groups. Following up non-engagement of pupils in the remote learning is adding another task that is increasing the workload of teachers (to phone home or email parents). It is also adding to the workload of admin staff to contact home to check pupils are well and that they are learning. One school is trying to ensure that all pupils participate in the home/school learning. Where pupils have not engaged, the Youth Workers at the school contacted the parents of these specific pupils in order for them to try and encourage their children to engage in their learning. They are offered help and support in every way.

There is enhanced support for individuals and small groups of learners. Many schools are employing additional members of staff as a result of the Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS), accelerating learning programme so that additional classes can be created particularly in Mathematics and English/Welsh but also around pupil wellbeing. This is particularly the case in Welsh medium schools where pupils from homes where Welsh is not the first language need additional support. Many schools are operating additional mentoring for pupils. This provides additional support to vulnerable pupils who may require a greater level of additional support (e.g. children who are looked after, those eligible for free school meals and pupils with additional learning needs). One innovative approach has seen a teacher designated with the task of supporting the hardest to reach pupils through a 'virtual school' approach to try and re-engage these learners. This has provided school-phobic pupils with an opportunity to access their learning.

It is worth noting that there has been considerable disruption to learning due to the need for year groups to self-isolate as the result of positive tests within the school. All schools have been affected in some way. Also there are individual learners who have to isolate due to household positive cases. These have sometimes been up to 3 weeks in length. These periods of time away from school have caused difficulties in pupils being able to engage in their learning. Finally, not being able to find a suitable replacement for a subject specialist who has to self-isolate is very disruptive and can have a considerable negative impact on pupils. However, when a period of self-isolation begins, schools have adapted extremely well to moving towards a blended approach.

On November the 10th The Education Minister outlined that in place of exams, the Welsh Government intended to work with schools and colleges to take forward teacher-managed assessments. This should include assessments that will be externally set and marked but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision. The Minister's expectation is that this work will form the basis for centre-based outcomes which will be linked to an agreed national approach to provide consistency across Wales. The announcement has been made after considering detailed advice published by Qualifications Wales on the delivery options available as well as the interim findings of an independent review into this year's exams process.

The Minister said Welsh Government would work with teachers to take forward teacher-managed assessments and that they should include assessments that will be externally set and marked, but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision. Teachers would have flexibility when it is best to undertake them, in the context of results timelines. The situation for Vocational Qualifications is more complex and is still being worked on. The Minister confirmed Welsh Government officials would continue to support Qualifications Wales as they work closely with other

regulators to ensure a 'pragmatic approach that works in learners' interests and gives them clarity about the way forward.'

**Financial Impacts:**

No Implications

**Integrated Impact Assessment:**

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for information purposes

**Valleys Communities Impacts:**

No Implications

**Workforce Impacts:**

No Implications

**Legal Impacts:**

No Implications

**Risk Management Impacts:**

No Implications

**Consultation:**

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item to include the full consultation report as an appendix.

**Recommendations:**

That Members note the report

**Appendices:**

None

**List of Background Papers:**

None

**Officer Contact:**

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