



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 Transformation**

##### **Matter for Information**

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

##### **Inclusion Service Report on Overview of Support for Children and Young People with Additional learning Needs**

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

To provide Members with an update on the continued safe and effective service that the inclusion service has provided during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

##### **Background:**

The Inclusion Service has continued to provide a safe and effective service during the Covid 19 pandemic. Teams across all services have worked both physically in schools as well as remotely, to support children and young people (CYP), school staff and families. The service has also evolved and expanded in order to meet the needs of children, young people and their families who may have experienced mental health issues as a result of the pandemic.

The service has co-ordinated work across teams and with wider agencies to support schools, Children, Young People and their

families. This has included providing specific support, advice, strategies and resources relevant to the needs of the children and young people. Online training, advice clinics and new telephone helplines have been created and continue to operate, to ensure support continues to be accessible during any future periods of lockdown.

Grant funding made available by Welsh Government for pupils with complex needs and for school based counselling has been utilised to extend the offer of appropriate counselling and support to primary age pupils and to develop outdoor provision and opportunities for further education. This additional grant money has enabled the service to significantly reduce the waiting times for children and young people to access counselling support.

### **Overview of service delivery**

All statutory services for pupils in receipt of a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN), continue to be delivered within schools following appropriate risk assessments and protocols. These include provision such as speech and language therapy (SaLT) and support for pupils with hearing and visual impairment (HI & VI). There has been close collaboration with colleagues within Health to ensure that therapies are delivered effectively.

All teams have prioritised support for the transition of pupils who have changed placement and/or those who are experiencing difficulty in returning to the school environment. Resources have been developed including transition packs and social stories, to assist in alleviating anxieties and preparing Children and Young People for a successful return to school. Cynnydd in particular continued to support post 16 transition over the initial lockdown. The team ran virtual sessions with Careers Wales, facilitated interviews, liaised with college and work based learning providers, helped set up bank accounts, enabled young people to apply for EMA and provided equipment (see appendix A; case study 1).

School visits have been undertaken to advise school staff on how best to adapt the school and classroom environment to reduce anxieties and behaviours, including advice on structure of the day and individual visual timetables. Team Teach training, delivered by the Wellbeing Service, has continued taking a blended learning approach. The Wellbeing Service has continued to provide forest/coastal school sessions to children and young people. The service are now supporting schools to develop their outdoor areas and providing support on activities so that outdoor learning can be embedded even more into the curriculum going forward.

The Educational Psychology Service developed lesson plans, to help staff and pupils manage the return to schools following the initial lockdown. The lesson plans were developed as a reflective resource to enable and support any concerns that children and young people wanted to discuss following the crisis. The feedback regarding these resources from schools was very positive.

The School Based Counselling Service (SBCS) has delivered face-to-face counselling for children and young people and three new services have been created, including support for staff, parents and telephone counselling to children and young people.

- The staff service has worked with 11 clients and provided 16 counselling sessions
- The parent service helped 26 clients and provided 42 counselling sessions
- The telephone serviced worked with 228 clients and provided 1394 counselling sessions
- The total number of clients who have been supported is 265, based on 1452 counselling sessions.

The SBCS is also piloting a peer support programme with three school clusters, with the aim of providing well-being support and advice to schools staff, including Head Teachers.

In addition to this, the SBCS has worked collaboratively with the Wellbeing Service to utilise grant funding to extend the offer of counselling to primary school pupils from year 1. The counselling offered is age appropriate in the form of play therapy and drama therapy.

The Inclusion Service has also created a telephone service for parents / carers of children with Additional Learning Needs. To date, 34 families have received support through this helpline.

The Educational Psychology Service has continued to offer regular supervision and training for Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) staff within schools. ELSAs are a valuable resource and many worked during the initial lockdown and in Hubs with vulnerable learners. Support was provided through regular phone calls, video calls and social media platforms for ELSA staff, to ensure they were enabled to support the children and young people safely.

Inclusion Service officers have undertaken garden visits, in line with Covid guidance, to build relationships with families, undertake assessments, work through effective strategies and interventions and sign post to other agencies for support. This was particularly effective for vulnerable young people supported by the Wellbeing Service and Cynnydd who struggled to engage over the phone and online. Work was also provided for young people to complete the qualifications they started prior to lockdown with Cynnydd. As a result of this, no young person missed out on the qualification they had been working towards and NPT Cynnydd are 37% over our profile target for numbers of qualifications gained.

The Wellbeing Service and Cynnydd used innovative ways to continue to support their caseload and schools, virtually over the phone and through physically staffing hubs during lockdown. The Cynnydd team worked closely with their link schools to ensure they were feeding into the school processes for supporting vulnerable learners (see appendix A; case study 2). Wellbeing links for schools

kept in contact, providing information, advice, resources and support when needed. The virtual support and 'garden visits', have led to increased support being available to the wider family along with the individual pupil. Multi agency working, including attendance at key panels, during this period remained strong and this has resulted in some really positive outcomes (see appendix A; case study 3).

On return to school in September, teams have continued to make contact with schools, through individual meetings and / or consultation clinics. Discussions have focused on how best to support the current caseload, along with any new concerns or referrals. Cynnydd are back in school full time and have already started a project with Swansea City Community Trust focusing on health and wellbeing. The Community Trust have recognised Cynnydd as a key partner who have supported the projects and enabled young people to take part and stay committed to re-engage with their education and nominated Cynnydd for a Premier league Inspires Award.

Requests for statutory assessments have continued in line with the LAs statutory duties and the Additional Needs Support Service (ALNSS) has continued to provide advice and support for families going through the statutory process.

The Inclusion Service training menu, a comprehensive training menu for schools, has been adapted to ensure that almost all training can be delivered effectively online, to ensure school based staff have access to mandatory training and continual professional development.

With the growing body of research on the long term impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how relevant this is in the current climate, training on trauma informed approaches with schools has been developed along with Youth Mental Health First Aid.

Mental Health Panels are being offered in all clusters. These multi-agency meetings are attended by Educational Psychologists, School Based Counsellors, Wellbeing team, CAMHS and school staff.

**Attendance:**

Attendance for September and October in the primary sector was 89.3% incl. special schools (89.4% excl. special school). Whilst in the secondary sector it was 86.7% incl. special schools (87.8% excl. special schools). It is not possible to accurately compare these figures with the rest of Wales at this moment in time as Welsh Government have not yet released aggregated attendance data by local authority. However, Welsh Government is publishing weekly attendance statistics by local authority and from these figures the average attendance rate of each local authority across Wales has not risen higher than 88% since the beginning of term. We can, therefore, determine that both the primary and secondary sectors in Neath Port Talbot are doing very well in overall terms of attendance. The rates of attendance include the many pupils who have followed TTP advice and been required to stay at home to self-isolate when someone they know or within their school 'bubble' has tested positive for COVID.

Attendance between boys and girls of both primary and secondary sectors varies by less than 1%. Attendance of LAC and EAL (English as an additional language) children is better than average in both sectors. Attendance of pupils recorded as having ALN is around 6% less than those without ALN in the primary sector and around 8% less in the secondary sector. However, pupils with FSM currently have below average attendance rates in both sectors (83% primary and 77% secondary).

During the period until October half-term more than 1,600 individual communications were made with parents by the Education Welfare Service. This was a combination of home (or garden) visits and telephone/email contacts. Since the beginning of the pandemic EWOs have adapted the focus of their support for pupils with a far greater emphasis on the welfare element of the role. There remain a small

number of families where attendance continues to be a cause of concern with no justifiable reasons for absence. In ordinary times these families would, after all other support and engagement has been exhausted, be subject to a fixed penalty notice or commencement of Court action; however, punitive routes have currently been temporarily paused by Welsh Government at this time. The Education Welfare Service continues to support these, and all families, with various methods of engagement and encouragement and act as that vital link between school and home.

### **Elective Home Education:**

Since schools resumed in September a number of parents have made the choice to deregister their child in favour of educating them at home themselves (Elective Home Education). There are currently 215 children within Neath Port Talbot who are subject to elective home education. 54 were added to the list since the beginning of the school year.

The number of boys/girls subject to elective home education is more or less evenly split with marginally more boys than girls being deregistered. Approximately a third of those deregistered since September have sighted COVID related concerns as reasons for choosing elective home education, whilst approximately a half have not providing any reason at all other than the required notification of deregistration.

The Elective Home Education Co-ordinator continues to work with all families choosing to educate their child at home; however, for the time-being this support is being provided via telephone and email rather than home visits. When this pandemic eventually does come under control and passes-by, it is hoped that some of those families who deregistered with concerns of their child contracting COVID whilst at school will re-register back at their former school.

**FSM Payments:**

Members will be aware that the Welsh Government determined that pupils who are entitled to free school meals (FSM) will either receive a meal or payment for the parent to purchase a meal during each school holiday period until, and including, Easter 2021. Having been one of the first local authorities in Wales to support FSM pupils and implement 'grab bags' within the first week or two of the original lockdown in March we experienced significant logistical difficulties in ensuring a daily meal reached the home of every Neath Port Talbot FSM pupil every day; some 5,500 pupils. It was not possible to sustain this approach long-term, therefore, it was subsequently decided that financial payments direct to parents bank accounts was a better option and allowed individual parents the flexibility to purchase and provide a meal of their own choice. Since the introduction of FSM payments the Council has paid to Neath Port Talbot parents payments in excess of £2.3 million.

In addition to this, commencing from the beginning of October self-isolation payments of just over £15k have been made to 849 FSM pupils who have been instructed to self-isolate when they have had symptoms of COVID themselves, or where they have come into contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID. These payments are again to provide a meal whilst the FSM pupil is not able to attend school.

**Governors:**

With schools fully open to pupils and operating as normally as they can, the majority of governing bodies have now adapted to their new way of working and are meeting virtually. A number of governors were initially cautious and hesitant to engage in remote meetings, however, there are many examples of positive feedback being received that following initial 'get-together' meetings to trail the process confidence amongst governors has grown and new ways of working embraced.

Plans that were already in the pipeline to deliver some governor training sessions online were advanced as a result of the pandemic. Members will be aware that there is a legal requirement for governors to attend

certain mandatory training courses within a specified period of time (Induction/Data/Chair of Governors etc); failure to do so can in some instances result in automatic suspension of the governor for a period of time prior to their full removal from the governing body should they continue to fail to attend the training. Whilst Welsh Government informally relaxed this requirement during the earlier stages of the first lockdown, as schools started to return to normality so did the requirement for governors to undertake the training within set timescales. Since the beginning of the new school year we have been providing governors with remote online training. To date 9 sessions have been held remotely with some 68 governors attending. Feedback has been universally positive; however, as with any form change there have been some minor issues to resolve and technical challenges to overcome. When the pandemic is finally under control and lives return to normal, the Governor Support Team will continue to offer a mixture of face-to-face training sessions and online remote sessions in efforts to support governors from across the spectrum with working; caring or other commitments and bring an added dimension of flexibility for governors as they undertake the role.

**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:**

Appendix 1 – Case Studies

**List of Background Papers:**

None

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