



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Thursday 13th April 2023

Report of the Head of Education Development – Christopher Millis

Matter for Information

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Report Title: Equality and safe place to learn - Neath Port Talbot Equality and Community Focussed Schools

Purpose of the Report:

To provide Members with a summary of the Neath Port Talbot Community Focussed Schools Strategy.

Executive Summary:

The report provides detail of Neath Port Talbot Community Focussed School Strategy and the progress to date.

Background:

Good communication between families and school is vital for promoting clear, respectful relationships, which in turn supports children's learning. Above all it is parents who in the earliest years and beyond, shape their child's future opportunities. What parents do, has a far greater effect than any intervention in school, therefore a positive relationship between home and school is vital. It's well documented that there is an inequality between the learning achievement of children living in poverty compared to their better off peers and that, without support, this increases throughout the school years.

Over one in three children in Neath Port Talbot live below the poverty line, 33% of children in Neath and 35% in Port Talbot (End Child Poverty Network). The disadvantage gap in GCSE results between Welsh children from rich and poor families is equivalent

to 22-23 months of educational progress. This is larger than the disadvantage gap of 18 months in England (Education Policy Institute, 2021).

The Importance of Parental Engagement

Parental engagement with learning has a fundamental role to play in enhancing parental skills in supporting children's early learning outcomes and increasing confidence for children to be curious and capable learners. It provides empowerment for families by building on parent's confidence and skills to support and encourage aspirational children to thrive. The only way to continue to narrow the gap in achievement between children raised in poverty and their more advantaged peers is for schools, parents and communities to realise the burden and the responsibility rests with all of us (Goodall, Narrowing the Achievement Gap, 2017).

Through a continued process of effective self-evaluation of currently being undertaken in schools, the local authority has identified that there is a considerable need to engage with and support our most vulnerable families. This coincides with a national approach to educational equity, with Welsh Government identifying high quality teaching and community focussed approaches as having the biggest impact on our improving pupil progression.

A Welsh Government – Community Focussed Schools

Welsh Government want all schools in Wales to be Community Focused Schools:

- building a strong partnership with families
- responding to the needs of their community
- collaborating effectively with other services

They recognise the importance of the home environment and the wider community in supporting all children and young people to develop a wide range of skills, experiences and dispositions that enable them to thrive. Through working collaboratively across school, home and the community we can support our children and young people more effectively. There are three elements at the core of this approach,

- Family engagement,
- Community engagement
- Multi-agency engagement.

Further information on these approaches can be viewed on the Welsh Government website following the link below.

<https://www.gov.wales/community-focused-schools-html#:~:text=A%20Community%20Focused%20School%20places,Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Wales.>

Neath Port Talbot Community Focussed Schools Approach

A community focussed schools' approach, with family led engagement at its core, is one of the most effective ways to improve pupil's ability to learn. Parental engagement in children's learning is a powerful tool for school improvement. By working in partnerships with parents, the local community and a range of agencies, community schools promote the value of lifelong learning, and build confidence, resilience and self-esteem in pupils, parents and the community. (Estyn, 2020).

For these reasons we wish to develop all our schools in Neath Port Talbot as community focussed provisions, with a clear emphasis on developing effective parental engagement in their child's learning. To support this work NPT have appointed a Community Focussed Schools Manager, through funding directly from Welsh government, to join the Educational Support Service Team. We will look to develop a shared understanding of how schools move to become more community focussed, evaluating how they currently operate within their communities, identifying practice that is worth sharing and providing support and guidance on how to develop further. This will be undertaken through two important projects. These are:

- The Communities of Schools Project
- Community Focussed Schools Collaborative Enquiry Networks.

The Communities of Schools Pilot Project will have three key elements to its work:

- **Family Engagement** – All pilot schools will be supported to develop effective communication with families and involve parents in supporting their children's learning in both English and Welsh language contexts.
- **Training** – The pilot will provide training to all staff in schools on;
 1. Understanding the challenges of poverty on families in their communities;
 2. Effective approaches to engaging parents in their child's learning.
- **Consultation** – Engaging with parents to identify what they would engage with in school to support their wellbeing and their child's learning.

The project will be piloted in the Llangatwg School Cluster that serve the communities of the Neath and Dulais valleys. This Cluster applied through an expression of interest, demonstrating an appetite to work in collaboration within their community to meet the

needs of their most vulnerable families. The LA alongside Community Focussed Schools Manager has appointed a team of four Family Engagement Officers, to work strategically towards the objectives of the project. In line with the schools as a learning organisation (SLO) model the project will be undertaken through a research and enquiry approach. This will be done in partnership with Swansea University through embedding research and enquiry in schools project (EREiS)

Working in collaboration with the Local Authority

The project team will report to a Steering Group at strategic points over the duration of the pilot providing evidence of updates against agreed objectives. The team will also update service managers within the local authority to share information gathered and to help align existing services to support the most vulnerable families.

Third Sector Partners

The team will also work in collaboration with a range of third sector partners through a partnership agreement outlining expectations and the specific duties of each agency. We will be taking the data from Child Poverty Action Group’s ‘Cost of The School Day’ analysis to highlight the current impact of poverty on school and family life.



Federation of Community Engagement - The FCE is committed to supporting, encouraging, and assisting schools to develop quality community engagement.



Valleys Kids – Supporting settings to realise the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery



The Children - SCUK will test the project model to explore the impact of a whole setting approach to Parental Engagement on intended outcomes.

Evaluation of Progress of the Equality and safer place to learn Strategy

Proposed Timeline

Phase one: Research (March-	The project team will consult with families, staff and the whole school community during phase one. This consultation will shape the direction of family engagement across the cluster, mapping opportunities for
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June 2023)	partnership working and collaboration between cluster schools, and will provide a baseline for future success.
Phase two: Delivery (June - March 2024)	Based on the findings from initial feedback, the project team will design, produce and deliver a series of training opportunities for the whole staff team, including the delivery of a workshop co-produced with parents and family members. Additionally, the team will establish a Community of Practice to provide a network of support and resources for family engagement staff, and will deliver tailored parental engagement support to each school as a result of their initial feedback.
Phase three: Reflection (June – March 2024)	Phase three will initially run alongside phase two and will allow the project team to reflect on learning and good practice undertaken during the pilot. Staff will revisit the initial consultation (baseline assessment) and will work with partners to discuss legacy learning and next steps for future development in new clusters.

Community Focussed Schools Collaborative Enquiry Networks.

There are a number of schools who are already well on the journey to becoming a Community Focussed School. These schools have been recognised for the excellent work they are doing in promoting family engagement, and will lead professional learning networks to support schools who have expressed an interest in developing family and community engagement.

There will be three networks of practice that will each have a specific focus of collaborative enquiry. These are;

- Developing approaches to support parents in developing a shared understanding of progression.
- Developing an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to Community Engagement
- A Safe Place to Learn – Support parents with home learning activities.

There will be eighteen schools involved in these three projects, and with the lead schools responsible for providing research based evidence of effective practice, share expertise through professional learning and support leadership in developing a community focussed approach. Each school has been funded to release staff to undertake a range of activities with their networks and share findings with all schools in NPT.

Financial Impacts:

No implications. This project is funded through the Community Focussed Schools grant from Welsh Government.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to “pay due regard to the need to: eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;

- There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment as this is a matter for information

Valleys Communities Impacts:

All Neath Port Talbot schools are included within this report

Workforce Impacts:

No implications

Legal Impacts:

No implications

Consultation:

‘There is no requirement for external consultation on this item’

Recommendations:

Matter for information. No recommendations are required.

Implementation of Decision:

Matter for information. No decisions are required.

Appendices:

No Appendix

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