

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Wednesday 12th March, 2014 at 5.05pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) C Leyshon – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

M Adams	(Mrs) J Bunnage	A L Davies (MBE)	(Mrs) A Calvert
S Evans-Fear	M Griffiths	(Mrs) S Jones	R Lewis
G Smith	B Stephens	G Thomas	L Walker
C Williams			

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mr J Fish – Parent Governor

Officers in Attendance:

Mr C Bradshaw - Director, Education & Lifelong Learning
Ms E Thomas – Service Director, Schools and Community
Ms S Walker – Head of Achievement, Primary
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation
Ms W Edwards – Head of Community Learning

58 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors J Elliott, P Jarman, B Morgan and co-opted Members Mrs S Sevany and Mrs C Jones.

59 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no personal declarations of interests made, pertaining to the agenda.

60 MINUTES

RESOLVED: - to approve as accurate records the minutes of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committees of the 20th January, 2014 and 29th January, 2014. .

Members of the Committee referred to the minutes of the previous committee meeting with reference to minute 56, and the Committees request for the

Director, Community & Children's Services to attend the Committee, in his capacity as Chair of the Fframwaith Partnership Board, following Members continued concerns. The Chairman advised Members that they would have an opportunity to discuss the Fframwaith Partnership and express their concerns during consideration of agenda item seven of the day's agenda.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING.

61 SUPPORTING THE MORE ABLE AND TALENTED CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOL.

The Head of Achievement, Primary provided Members with a Powerpoint presentation outlining the support provided within Primary schools to 'more able and talented Children'.

Members were advised that in Wales, the term 'more able and talented' encompasses approximately 20% of the total school population, and is used to describe learners who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of learners. The Head of Achievement, Primary advised that providing an enriched curriculum can improve the quality of learning and raise standards for learners of all abilities and talents, giving them opportunities and encouragement to achieve their full learning potential.

Information relating to the actions needed by both Schools and Local Authorities were outlined within the presentation with reference to the Estyn Thematic Report 2011. Members were also advised of NACE, the National Association for Able Children in Education, which specialises in supporting teachers to provide excellent teaching and learning for able, gifted and talented pupils. The Head of Achievement, Primary also highlighted that two schools within the County Borough had obtained the NACE challenge award and a further three schools were awaiting assessment for the award.

The PowerPoint presentation was concluded with information relating to the activities used in successful schools in respect of both strategic management and teaching.

Members of the Committee thanked the officer for the presentation and queried which schools had achieved the NACE Challenge award and those awaiting results and also questioned what other schools were doing to achieve the award. The Head of Achievement, Primary advised Members of the Schools referred to within the presentation and confirmed that other schools within the Authority were doing lots of work in the background to achieve the award.

The Head of Achievement, Primary was queried as to the recognised best practices within schools and confirmed that recognised best practice involved having an identified 'More Able and Talented' co-ordinator within a school and not including this within the role of the Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO).

Also, it was recognised good practice that an identified governor would also be linked to the More Able and Talented agenda.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the PowerPoint presentation.

62 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PERFORMANCE IN RCT FOR THE FIRST TERM OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2013-2014.

The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning referred Members of the Committee to the report before them which provided an analysis of school attendance performance for the first term of 2013/14, to the end of December 2013, and the positive increase in attendance noted.

The Committee were advised that currently, the overall primary school attendance was 94.62% compared to 93.43% for the previous year, indicating an increase of almost 1.2%. The Director continued by advising that this performance stood at 0.42% above the ambitious Local Authority target. The report also reflected individual schools performance; results of primary school attendance performance for 2012/13 compared to the Welsh Government free school meal benchmarking tables and also outlined the work undertaken by the Attendance & Wellbeing Service, to assist with the promotion of attendance. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning commented that the Attendance & Wellbeing Service would continue to review the attendance data with school headteachers to ensure attendance remains a priority for all schools.

The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning continued to advise of the Secondary school performance results within the same period, advising that 18 of the 19 secondary schools had improved pupils' attendance, and the County Borough overall rate had increased by 1.15%. The Committee were advised that secondary school attendance now stood at 93.24%, which a rise in 0.24% above the ambitious Local Authority target. The Director commented that this reflected an excellent performance by the Council's secondary schools. Member's attention was drawn to the attendance performance details of each of the secondary schools within the County Borough and their comparisons against the Welsh Governments free school meal benchmarking indicator.

Members of the Committee were also provided with details of attendance within Pupil Referral Units, although it was highlighted that there was no statutory requirement for PRUs to submit annual attendance data. The Director confirmed that pupil attendance had improved by 0.06%, with Ty Gwyn having made an improvement of 5.82%. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning commented that the attendance performance of PRU's was heavily dependant on the cohort of pupils at a particular time.

Members of the Committee commented upon the good performance noted within the report and questioned the Authority's performance in relation to other Local Authorities across Wales. The Director, Education & Lifelong

Learning advised that for the September term there was no comparable data currently available, but advised that with the previous years increase in RCT's primary figures the Authority were now ranked as 18/22 in Wales. The Director also referred to the 1.37% improvement in attendance for Secondary schools for the previous year which was three times the Welsh average rate of improvement and commented that if the positive performance was maintained then RCT could exceed the Welsh average in the future.

Another Member of the Committee congratulated the service on the improvements noted and commented on the need for staff not to become complacent, especially in light of the forthcoming summer term, which often reflects a decline in school attendance. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning referred Members to his report which outlined some of the activities in place by the Attendance & Wellbeing Service to assist schools with their drive in attendance.

One Member of the Committee commented on the apparent trend highlighted within the report, with a noted reduction in attendance in the second term of secondary schools. Officers commented that this was attributable to the Christmas holidays and spoke of the different initiatives taken forward by schools to try to address the issue. The Director commented on the importance of the data now available which is shared with schools to highlight such attendance trends.

Another Member of the Committee commented upon the prosecution of 28 parents for non attendance of their children, and the Director was queried as to the benefits this had on attendance and potential alienation between schools and the parents involved. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning confirmed that prosecutions were a last resort after all other avenues had been explored.

One Committee Member commented on the positive improvement witnessed within the first term of schools attendance, but commented that improved attendance was only really positive if it reflected an improvement in performance and attainment.

Another Member also queried the 'internal exclusion zones' and how this impacted upon attendance figures. The Service Director, Schools and Community advised that records of pupils attendance at such internal exclusion zones were recorded and spoke of the good practice of having such facilities within schools.

Following the discussions the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

63 FEEDBACK ON ESTYN'S INTERIM FOLLOW UP ON THE PREVIOUS INSPECTION ON THE QUALITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning provided the Committee with an overview of the first feedback received from Estyn in respect of their

monitoring of the Council's progress in improving its Education Services for Children and Young People.

The Director, briefly advised Members of the background to the feedback, reminding Members that following the Estyn inspection of the Council in March 2012, Estyn had concluded that the quality of education services for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf was an 'overall' judgement of adequate and a 'capacity to improve' judgement of adequate, in addition to six recommendations for improvement. Following a recent revisit by Estyn concentrating on two of the six recommendations, a letter outlining Estyn's findings had been received.

The Committee were advised that the first letter from Estyn was positive and recognised that the Council had made a concerted effort to address the issues raised. However, there was still considerable work to be completed to ensure that the Council, working with schools, continues to raise educational standards and remove surplus places across the County Borough.

Following a query in respect of recommendation 4 and the use of 'powers' available to the Authority the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

64 **EXECUTIVE RESPONSE – SICK LIT BOOKS SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP.**

Members considered before them the response received from the Executive in respect of the findings and recommendation of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee's – Sick Lit Books Scrutiny Working Group. Members of the working group spoke positively of the work of the group and its findings and recommendations with its overall aim of further strengthening the safeguarding provisions for children. Members of the Committee commented positively on the positive response received from the Executive.

A query was raised in respect of ICT barriers in place within libraries to prevent children and young adults accessing inappropriate websites, such as those aimed at promoting self harm and suicide, with particular reference to the website 'ask.com'. The Head of Community Learning assured Members that such barriers were in place for certain websites and talked Members through the security measures in place if attempts to access such websites occurred. The Head of Community Learning advised the Member that she would check if 'ask.com' was included within the current filtered websites.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the responses received from the Executive.

65 **FFRAMWIATH CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTNERSHIP – MINUTES OF PARTNERSHIP BOARD 29TH NOVEMBER, 2013.**

Members of the Committee spoke of their concerns in respect of the lack of information received in respect of the Fframwiath Board, commenting that the

links to reports for the Board meeting on the 29th November, 2013 as provided within their agenda were inaccessible. Members also referred to previous requests relating to the Fframwaith's Boards Terms of Reference and functionality (including quorum), The Terms of Office of Board Members (including election processes, placing of adverts, office duration) and the attendance of the Director, Community & children's Services in his capacity as Chair of the Fframwiath Partnership Board to the Committee.

The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised the Committee that in light of the current absence of the Group Director, Community & Children's Services, due to ill health, the Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to answer Members queries as outlined above.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to:-

- a) note the Minutes of the 29th November, 2013
- b) Receive the Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing at its April Committee meeting
- c) That the Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing be notified of the Committees concerns in advance and be provided with the original recommendations of the Fframwaith Scrutiny Working Group.

66 ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

Through the Chairman, one Member of the Committee commented on the benefits to the Committee if further scrutiny was undertaken in relation to Able and Talented Children within Secondary Schools and the Committee **RESOLVED** that a report would be brought before the Committee at a future meeting.

The Committee Member also took the opportunity to thank the Director, Education & lifelong Learning for endorsing the letter written by 19 of the Authorities secondary school headteachers to the Education Minister, voicing their concerns over the examination system.

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.20pm