

**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, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015 at 5pm.

**Present:**

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

**County Borough Councillors:**

L. M. Adams	(Mrs) S. J. Jones
(Mrs) J. Bunnage	R. Lewis
(Mrs) A. Calvert	B. Morgan
J. Elliott	B. Stephens
S. Evans-Fear	G. Thomas
M. Griffiths	L. Walker
P. Jarman	

**Co-Opted Members:-**

Mr J Horton – Parent Governor  
Mr J Fish – Parent Governor  
Mr M. Cleverley – NASUWT and Teachers Panel  
Mrs C. Jones - National Union of Teachers & Teachers Panel

**Officers in Attendance:**

Mr C. Bradshaw – Director of Education & Lifelong Learning  
Mrs G. Davies – Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement & Inclusion  
Ms C. Jones – Acting Head of Access & Inclusion  
Ms S Walker – Head of Achievement, Primary & Senior Challenge Advisor  
Ms Z. Lancelott – Head of Engagement & Participation  
Ms J. Allen – Attendance & Well Being Manager  
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation

**69 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillors A. L. Davies (MBE), G. Smith and C. Williams

**70 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

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

## **71 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve as an accurate record the Minutes of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee of the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015 and of the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

Matters Arising (Minute No. 68 refers) – In response to a query as to whether the Music Service would continue from September 2015, the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning confirmed that the consultation was still ongoing and further updates would be provided to Committee in due course.

## **REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING**

### **72 SCHOOL EXCLUSION DATA FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2013/2014**

The Acting Head of Access & Inclusion provided Members with an analysis of school exclusion data for the Academic Year 2013/2014. The Committee was provided with some context to the background to school exclusion before being informed of the exclusion data for the period shown.

Both the number of exclusions and permanent exclusions were shown within the report and it was acknowledged that the overwhelming majority of permanent exclusions involved male pupils, an increasing trend over the last five years. Members were informed of the reasons for the majority of exclusions along with the number of fixed term exclusions across the County Borough, which have subsequently decreased by a total of 5.5%. It was reported that Welsh Government has changed the codes/categories for recording incidents of exclusions in 2013/14 which has impacted upon the way that certain data is presented.

Several comparison tables were presented within the report which served to set out those secondary schools which have excluded pupils on a fixed term basis and the number of days lost due to those exclusions. Likewise details of the Primary School exclusions were presented. Members were informed that schools are advised by Welsh Government not to exclude a learner for longer than 45 school days in any one year as this would create barriers to reintegration and potential disengagement of pupils.

Details of comparison data for both Primary and Secondary Schools were provided which highlighted those schools with the highest number of exclusions and the steps which are put in place to work alongside those schools demonstrating a trend of school exclusions. The Committee were advised of the active involvement the Access and Inclusion Service has undertaken to help support and challenge schools which display concerning trends in exclusion data such as the Restorative Approaches in Schools (RAIS) project which was launched by the service in July 2014 which currently involves four pilot schools with a four further schools to be selected in June 2015.

The Acting Head of Access & Inclusion concluded the report by stressing that although the number of exclusions between 2012/13 and 2013/14 has fallen the

exclusions will continue to be addressed across the County Borough with the Local Authority continuing to support schools with their management of exclusions and permanent exclusions.

Members asked for details concerning the RAIS project in particular those schools which will be selected to join the pilot in June 2015 by means of a nomination process. Members questioned how much family support was in place for those children who are subject to repeat exclusions and were informed that substantial work around the family is in place from multi agencies such as the Attendance & Wellbeing Service, the Re-engagement Officer (which exists in every secondary school) TAF, Action for Children as well as the school itself to provide support for the pupils and maintain their relationship with the parents. It was confirmed that the Local Authority challenges those schools which demonstrate concerning exclusion rates and continued support is provided by the Council's Access and Inclusion Service.

Members expressed concern in respect of the impact and effect of the one day exclusion on the pupil and the potential disruption to other children in the school and that the data within the report did not help committee understand the effect of the interventions in place. It was reported that a number of interventions and support programmes exist within the schools themselves and the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning added that exclusion is a graduated response of the school and considered the final step in the process of dealing with disciplinary offences following a range of other strategies. It was stressed that the Local Authority continue to work alongside schools to offer support in this area but ultimately it was the schools responsibility to have appropriate policies and procedures in place to address poor behaviour and to engage with those parents and families. He also advised that there had been a step change in the way data was being recorded by schools which will create a clearer picture of school exclusions in the future.

Discussions centred around the Behaviour Support Service funding which will be delegated to schools in September 2015 whereby schools will be able to buy into packages of support to meet their individual needs.

Following a detailed discussion it was **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the information contained within this report
- Note that a further report in respect of School Exclusion Data will be presented in the Autumn Term 2015

### **73 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PERFORMANCE IN RCT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-2015**

The Head of Engagement & Participation provided Committee with an analysis of school attendance performance for the first term of 2014/15, to the end of December 2014.

With regards to Primary schools the report highlighted an overall increased attendance rate of 0.30%, for the first term of 2014/15 indicating an overall

attendance rate of 95.01%. It was advised that of 107 primary schools, 54 schools had met or bettered their targets set to improve their attendance rates, 54 schools had achieved greater or equal to 95% and 10 schools exceeding 96% attendance. Members were informed that the 1.1% improvement has placed the authority 17<sup>th</sup> out of the 22 local authorities compared to 22<sup>nd</sup> in 2011.

Prior to reporting on the secondary school attendance rates the Head of Engagement & Participation notified Members of an error in the table reflecting the performance of secondary schools for the first term of the 2014/15 academic year compared to the same period in 2013/14, however Members were reassured that the information on which the narrative is based is correct within the report. The Officer advised that 13 of the 17 secondary schools had improved pupils attendance in the first term of 2014/15 with an increase of 0.45%. It was confirmed that secondary school attendance now stood at 93.70%, 0.03% above the ambitious Local Authority target of 93.70%.

The report further highlighted to Committee Members the attendance figures for pupil referral units, which confirmed that the PRUs have improved pupils' attendance by 8.18% in the first term of 2014/15 compared with the same period in 2013/14 which is a significant improvement.

Members were provided with an update in respect of the activity of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Attendance and Wellbeing Service for the period followed by a report on the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for non school attendance (which had commenced in Rhondda Cynon Taf on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015). A table within the report outlined the number of warnings issued and FPNs issued from the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

The Head of Engagement & Participation concluded her presentation by commenting on the improved school attendance figures by primary and secondary schools in the first term of 2014/15 and advised that if this continued focus on attendance was maintained it would impact on educational standards in the future.

Following presentation of the report Members queried the distinction between the codes used for recording unauthorised holidays and other unauthorised absences. It was reported that the codes currently used by Head teachers and which were set up in 2010 by Welsh Government are clearly defined. Further discussions centred around school attendance and the merit of continuing to further improve on school attendance, whether the improvements and efforts are worthwhile in terms of overall school performance levels against the resources that are used to tackle the issue. The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning referred Members to the subsequent report on the agenda outlining the Key Stage 4 examination results which demonstrates significant progress is being made by schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf despite the fact that the County Borough Council is the 21<sup>st</sup> most deprived Local Authority in Wales and consideration of other socio-economic factors such as free school meals. The improvements in the examination results are in direct correlation with improved attendance levels and it was stressed that current improvements in respect of school attendance need to be sustained and targets reached in line with the Wales average before any review of the current provisions are made.

Members discussed the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for non-school attendance within Rhondda Cynon Taf and of particular concern to them was the number of fines which appeared to remain outstanding for the period 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015 which is when the Local Authority commenced the issuing of the FPNs. The Attendance & Well Being Manager clarified the table within the report, stating that some of the FPN's may have since the publication of the report been paid within the maximum allowed timescale of 42 days. In response to a query as to how parents are served the FPN, the Attendance & Wellbeing Manager explained that they are issued by post to the parents but there is the potential for them not to reach the home. The Legal Officer further explained that the FPN is an invitation for the parents to settle a potential criminal matter outside of the court process and in that respect they are served by post in the same way the Council serves dog fouling or littering penalties.

A Member queried the pattern of unauthorised holidays and the Head of Engagement & Participation explained that although this is a difficult area to analyse Fridays and Mondays taken as part of long weekend caravan holidays are identifiable as well as days tagged onto the end of the summer holidays, the start of the new school year which is considered a pivotal time for all children.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the report

**74. KEY STAGE 4 EXAMINATION RESULTS, AND THE NEW PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL CATEGORISATION FOR 2014**

The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning presented the first part of the report in respect of Key Stage 4 Examination Results which outlined to Members the final results for the Local Authority over the five years to 2014 in respect of the key indicators upon which the school and the Local Authority are assessed by Estyn. It was reported that the local authority has improved faster than the all Wales average.

Members were presented with comparative performance for Rhondda Cynon Taf against other Local Authorities in relation to Level 1 and 2 threshold indicators, the level 2 threshold for English and /or Welsh and Maths and the core subject indicator which demonstrated the improvement the majority of schools across the County Borough have made. The Director for Education & Lifelong Learning commented that comparative data should not be considered in isolation and other socio economic factors that influence educational performance should also be taken into account.

When considering the table which set out pupils' performance in the four key subject areas of English, Welsh, Mathematics and Science over the past five years the improvements were evident for Members of the Committee to see and a table demonstrating the differences in gender variation showed that girls are still out performing the boys who have remained static for mathematics and languages. It was reported that since September 2012 and by way of improving the standards across all schools the heads of the core subjects meet with the

Council's Head of School Achievement to share and exchange best practice with future meetings to focus on the underperformance of the boys.

The Head of Achievement, Primary & Senior Challenge Advisor advised Members of the Committee that the Primary and Secondary School Categorisation which was introduced in May 2014 following the Robert Hill report on the Future Delivery of Education Services in Wales would replace the former Banding system. Members were guided through the three steps to the new categorisation model which is used to inform the colour categorisation of the school which in turn will trigger the relevant programme of support required. The four colour categories, as defined by Welsh Government were explained and details of the results of the School Categorisation specific to Rhondda Cynon Taf were presented by means of a table. The programmes of support which are available to those schools in Amber/Red categories and agreed between the Local Authority and the regional school improvement service were outlined to include packages such as specific leadership and/or teaching development; support from other schools in the region and support from the Literacy, Numeracy and Welsh teams based in the Consortium. All schools in the amber/red categories are required to meet with the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning on a half termly or termly basis with the support of the Challenge Advisors.

Members commented on the new school categorisation system following presentation of the report and expressed their concern at the decision that less emphasis will be put on school attendance and more onus on the performance of those eligible for free school meals. The Director of Education confirmed that key officials have recently agreed to review the data element of the Categorisation Model for free school meals.

Members of the Committee commented on the correlation between good school attendance and the clear improvement journey as evidenced by the Key Stage 4 results and they acknowledged the level of work undertaken by officers in Rhondda Cynon Taf. In response to a query regarding the forthcoming changes to the curriculum and the anticipated support which some schools may require the Director for Education & Lifelong Learning advised that the Qualified for Life team are supporting a number of schools through the changes in Literacy and Language as well as in Welsh, English and Science with schools supporting other schools and training being cascaded to the teaching staff.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to:-

- Note the information contained within the report
- Note the action taken to date and the action planned to be taken by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning to support those secondary schools in Categories Amber and Red

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm

(Mrs) C Leyshon  
Chairman

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next appropriate meeting of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee