

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes** of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (Education) held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2016 at 5.00 p.m.

**PRESENT**

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

**County Borough Councillors**

H.Boggis	M.Griffiths	G.Thomas
(Mrs.)J.Cass	P.Jarman	L.Walker
S.Evans-Fear	(Mrs)S.J.Jones	

**Co-opted Members**

Mr.J.Fish – Voting Elected Parent/Governor Representative  
Mr.S.Jones – Voting Elected Parent/Governor Representative  
Mr.D.Price – Representing GMB

**Officers in Attendance**

Mr A. Wilkins – Head of Legal -Corporate & Democratic Services  
Mrs E. Thomas –Temporary Director of Education & Lifelong Learning  
Ms G. Davies – Service Director for Access, Engagement & Inclusion  
Ms.S.Walker – Head of Achievement, Primary  
Ms.C.L.Jones – Head of Access & Inclusion  
Mrs.J.Hadley – School Organisation Manager  
Ms.N.Morgan – School Organisation and Governance Team Leader

**14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors J.Bunnage, S.Carter, B.Morgan, B.Stephens, R.K.Turner.  
Co-opted Member Mr.M.Cleverley.

**15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

## 16. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Mr S. Jones, to his first Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, in his role as Voting Elected Parent/Governor Representative.

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

### 17. A REVIEW OF RHONDDA CYNON TAF'S GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICE

The Senior Democratic Services Officer presented the report of the Director, Legal & Democratic Services in respect of the findings and recommendations which had been subsequently formulated by the Members of the Scrutiny Working Group which had been established to review the Governor Support Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

A member of the Scrutiny Working Group wished to place on record her thanks to the Officer involved in producing the report and also highlighted an amendment to the report in respect of the designation of the Welsh Government's Minister to read 'the Cabinet Secretary for Education' which was duly noted by Committee.

Other Members of the Working Group agreed that the review had been a larger piece of work than anticipated and although the report had concluded with strong and secure recommendations, which would be monitored closely, it was hoped committee could revisit this topic in the future.

A Member referred to the proposed, significant reforms from Welsh Government in respect of the governing bodies' structure and membership and in particular the '*requirement for an independent person to sit on all staff disciplinary and dismissal committees*' and asked how these changes could be managed.

In response, The School Organisation Manager reported that the forthcoming Welsh Government consultation exercise would provide more information and detail around the proposals and that the suggested reforms would require a change in legislation. It was agreed that any further information in respect of the proposals would be fed back to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting.

Another Member suggested that the report could be uploaded onto the Council website/Twitter account in order to capture the spirit of the work and to serve as a tool with which to attract new governors. The School Organisation and Governance Team Leader responded that currently there are a number of sources of information available to new governors outlining what they can expect in their new role.

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED** to commend the report and the ten recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group to the Executive

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

### **18. FOUNDATION PHASE, KEY STAGE 2 & 3 AND PROVISIONAL KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2015-2016**

The Head of Achievement, Primary provided Members with feedback on Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 outcomes for the academic year 2015 – 2016, and outlined the overall breakdown of standards groups for primary schools in the local authority. The Temporary Director continued with feedback on Key Stage 3 and provisional Key Stage 4 outcomes.

Members acknowledged that overall the report was a positive one and welcomed the improvement in the education performance for the third consecutive year across the four key stages especially when consideration is given to the large number of pupils eligible for free school meals within RCT. However, concerns were raised that at some stages progress had not been made in relation to those children eligible for free school meals and officers were challenged with regard to what measures for improvement were in place and the impact of projects such as Flying Start and schools maximising their Pupil Deprivation Grants.

The Head of Achievement, Primary reported that closing the gap in this area continues to be a priority for the Council across all key stages and a focus has been at foundation phase and key Stage 2, both of which have seen the gap closing between the two groups of learners.

One Member asked whether there were any transferrable strategies to improve performance in Key Stages 3 & 4 from Key Stage 2 which had seen the gap close between learners eligible for free school meals and those not eligible for free school meals

The Head of Achievement, Primary, stated that it is recognised that further progress needs to be made at Key Stage 3 where the gap has widened between the two sets of learners, however it is important to acknowledge the overall achievement made by schools in RCT which is an indication that the school to school work has impacted positively upon the performance levels. As such the Officer reported that there are three Alliance Schools working alongside the Challenge Advisors who have succeeded in narrowing the gap and are acting as a support mechanism for other schools and developing strategies, some of which may be transferrable into KS3 & KS4.

The Head of Achievement, Primary confirmed that data relating to the gap in performance between pupils eFSM and those not eFSM would be circulated to members of the Committee as requested.

Members were also concerned about the fall in the ranking from 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> position in the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in Welsh First Language at Key Stage 3 and queried the support needed to address this dip in performance. Furthermore, it was agreed that the recommendation set out at 2.2 of the report which asked members of the Committee to consider '*the implications of the data on the level of support needed for schools during the 2016-2017 academic year*' could not be considered and agreed at this stage until the summary of the strategies have been agreed and reported back to Committee. Members were informed that there is an LA performance meeting between the Central South Consortium and key officers due to take place next week where these strategies will be agreed.

Whilst discussing pupil performance at Key Stage 3, the Temporary Director for Education and Lifelong Learning highlighted the importance of working in partnership with organisations such as Flying Start, Families First and Communities First as often educational performance is linked to family circumstance. It was reported that in RCT many secondary schools run workshops and activities to involve parents in their child's learning but these workshops are more effective at the primary phase.

Members of the Committee acknowledged that consistency of performance is a complex issue and that each school should be treated on its own merit according to the needs of the school. The Temporary Director of Education assured committee that the Challenge Advisors and other LA officers are on hand to offer a good level of support to those schools where it is needed.

In conclusion Committee **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the information contained within the report;
- (2) That the level of support needed for schools during this academic year 2016-2017 is to be discussed at a future meeting (following agreement of a summary of strategies);
- (3) That the Committee is to receive more information on standards groups and strategies to improve performance;
- (4) That the detailed school by school information in relation to Key Stage 4 data will be presented to Committee on receipt of final, verified data from Welsh Government;
- (5) That arrangements are made for Committee to visit a school in action.

**19. ANNUAL SCHOOL EXCLUSION PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2015 - 2016**

The Head of Access & Inclusion presented her report with an analysis of school exclusion performance for the academic year 2015/16 and a comparison of performance over the last five years, and gave her observations under the following headings:

- Summary of Exclusions.
- National Benchmarking Data.
- An Analysis of Permanent Exclusions.
- An Analysis of Fixed Term Exclusion 5 Days or More.
- An Analysis of Fixed Term Exclusion 5 Days or Less.
- An Analysis of Primary Fixed Term Exclusions.
- An Analysis of Secondary School Fixed Term Exclusions.
- Exclusions Rates of Vulnerable Groups in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Case Study.

A number of tables were produced which demonstrated the permanent and fixed term exclusions for the academic year 2015/16 as well as those permanent exclusions within the individual schools across the County Borough. Committee was informed that the Local Authority has made reducing school exclusions a priority for schools and therefore the school exclusion rates are significantly better than in previous years.

To highlight this improvement, Committee was referred to a table which set out the number of exclusions within RCT in 2014/15-2015/16 which showed a significant decrease in the number of permanent and fixed term exclusions and the number of days lost within RCT schools. Also included within the report were a number of tables showing the national benchmarking data, for maintained schools in Wales by local authority and consortium which served to provide committee with RCT's ranking since 2011. Members acknowledged the usefulness of the comparison as this was a useful tool for reviewing the trend data for RCT and asked whether the comparison data for 2014/15 could be circulated. The Head of Access & Inclusion reported that although the timing was not ideal with the first release data being available recently, it was agreed that it would be disseminated for information.

Officers responded to a number of queries relating to the report including whether the Restorative Approaches in Schools (RAIS) project is now bearing fruit and whether it would be extended. The Service Director for Access, Engagement & Inclusion confirmed that the project may cease at the end of year three when the 'hub' schools would be in a position to train other schools but added that there is still a commitment to protect the budget.

Members raised concern in respect of the increase in exclusions within Primary Schools and also queried the reasons behind the overall improvement in the number of fixed term exclusions in RCT.

The Service Director of Access & Inclusion reported that overall improvements could be due to a number of factors such as improved behaviour management approaches adopted in schools and the effective implementation of training received to upskill staff. Initiatives such as the Wellbeing Education Project have also helped to improve schools' approaches to meeting children's needs. The local authority continues to have good provision for learners with significant needs. The Pupil Referral Unit provides an excellent behaviour support service. The Service Director also assured committee that the discrepancies between the fixed term exclusions in both primary and secondary are a priority, that concerns are being addressed and added that the Heads of Primary Schools in RCT would be meeting with the relevant officers shortly and these issues would be highlighted in this forum.

One member queried whether exclusion was the appropriate course of action for some children. The Temporary Director of Education responded that on occasion it was necessary to protect the child as well as other children and staff within the school but the decision to exclude a learner is taken seriously and its use is minimal.

Committee members discussed whether the term 'exclusion' should be 'referral', however, it was clarified that the term is derived from Welsh Government. Committee noted that the provision to track individual pupils from primary school to secondary schools is not currently undertaken but as confirmed by the Head of Access & Inclusion, this is something that can be considered and undertaken in the next academic year as the data sets are built up.

In conclusion Committee commended a very thorough report and **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the All Wales comparison data for the academic year 2014/15 is circulated to all Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee;
- (2) That the tracking of individual pupils from Primary to Secondary schools is undertaken in the next academic year as appropriate.

**(MRS) C.LEYSHON  
CHAIR**

**The meeting closed at 6.50 p.m.**

