

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 15 MARCH 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1
HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY, 15 MARCH 2021 AT 14:30**

Present

Councillor T Giffard – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
AJ Williams
TH Beedle

RJ Collins
KJ Watts
A Williams

J Gebbie
PA Davies
KL Rowlands

SK Dendy
RME Stirman

Apologies for Absence

M Jones, B Sedgebeer and SE Baldwin
L Morris, Registered Representative – Secondary School Sector.

Registered Representatives

Rev Canon Edward Evans Church in Wales

Officers:

Meryl Lawrence	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer
Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support

Invitees:

Councillor Charles Smith Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr JPD Blundell declared a personal interest in item 4 because he was a Community Governor at Cefn Glas Infants School.

Cllr TH Beedle declared a personal interest in item 4 because he was Chair of Bridgend Governors Association.

Rev. Canon E Evans, Registered Representative, Church in Wales, declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 because he was a Community Governor of Bryntirion Comprehensive School.

Cllr RJ Collins declared a personal interest in item 4 because he was a Community Governor of St Mary's and St Patrick's Roman Catholic School.

Cllr SK Dendy declared a personal interest in item 4 because she was Community Governor at Blaengarw Primary School.

Cllr AJ Williams declared a personal interest in item 4 because she had 2 children at Secondary Schools and 1 at Primary school within the County Borough who were all undertaking blended learning.

20. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 dated 7 December 2020 be approved as a true and accurate record.

21. **BLENDED LEARNING IN BRIDGEND SCHOOLS SINCE MARCH 2020**

The Principal Improvement Partner - Central South Consortium (CSC), Assistant Director for Curriculum – CSC, Group Manager School Improvement – Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) and Support and Digital Office Manager - BCBC gave a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the report on Blended Learning in Bridgend Schools since March 2020.

The Chairperson thanked Officers for the presentation. Members asked the following questions:

A Member thanked all frontline staff and provided feedback from parents and carers in his constituency, which in the majority of cases, teachers had been incredibly supportive, in addition to great feedback about the use of Hwb and Google Classroom. The number one theme from the feedback they had received was that there appeared to be a degree of inconsistency with what some schools providing live virtual teaching and others offering worksheets or pre-recorded videos, whereas the parents had a preference for live lessons. He felt this was especially true for those that were less able with some parents stating that in some cases this could be quite isolating and demoralising. He asked Officers for their comments and how the approach could be altered to take this into account. He also asked how the approach in Bridgend differed to other areas of Wales.

The Group Manager (School Support) stated she was pleased to hear that there had been positive feedback and explained that there had been mixed views about live streaming. Teachers had also been learning, sometimes with their own children at home whilst presenting lessons, which was a challenge. There was continual learning, and there had been changes during the past year as practice was refined, so she was certainly aware of the inconsistency, which was a target area for improvement. Many teachers had been rapidly upskilled to deliver lessons in this way and this was a whole new area for many of them.

The Principal Improvement Partner, CSC, said he had listened to multiple schools across the region talking about their approach to blended learning, and it was so contextualised. There wasn't necessarily a Bridgend comparison to other local authorities. What one school was doing was often very different to another because it was so localised and this had been the guidance put to schools, about meeting the needs of learners, which was the key thing.

The Assistant Director for Curriculum, CSC explained that there wasn't any data at present but WG had commissioned research, which she hoped would be available soon. The roadmap was based on making decisions at every level for schools and at a moment in time, which was what the continuity of learning document was about. It was important to make clear the expectations and priorities of WG and for schools to then make decisions based on their learner needs. If feedback from parents was this is preferred, then picking, how and why, could enable that to happen. Schools that had more consistent approaches, may have changed or developed over time because of things that had changed in the system. There was no data to say percentages of schools were moving in that way, because it was so changeable. Many schools had tried live learning or piloted live learning since January, and this had been well received in certain

areas although some schools had backtracked. It seemed to be a moment in time for an individual school, depending on the feedback they received.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration thanked the Member and said it was important to get views from parents and students. It was important to remember that certain parts of Wales had a head start in terms of blended learning, which were already in the e-learning business because of their rural location. Inconsistency had been anticipated, as one of the jobs was to interpret the advice and regulations from WG at the very start of the pandemic, which had focused on safeguarding issues to start with, the unforeseen consequence of which was a reluctance to live stream. The revision to that WG advice over the summer had been welcome. It was important not to make assumptions, in respect of live lessons, but to look at research and best practice, which CSC had done. Cabinet had been concerned about consistency and whether recorded lessons were better than live learning. CSC had stated they weren't experts in blended learning, but were experts in getting the research together and as Chair of CSC he was pleasantly surprised by the work already done. In terms of the comparisons across Wales, there was only anecdotal evidence, with some counties well ahead, some looking at blended learning with some trepidation making assumptions that it couldn't be used with younger pupils and this needed to be clarified and worked on with schools in a professional way. The way forward was that there was going to be a lot of pedagogical learning and CPD needed among teaching staff and teaching techniques needed to be shared among colleagues.

The Member thanked Officers for their comprehensive answers. From his feedback, he had been told that in some cases there was absolutely no contact or welfare checks, particularly for those with additional learning needs (ALN). He recognised this might be an isolated incident but asked for Officers comments. In addition, was there any plan to introduce any catch up sessions with pupils or summer schools?

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support explained that supporting learners with ALN was a key area but it was fair to say that at the beginning schools had still been finding their feet. Feedback from some parents had indicated that they felt that the learning offer needed to be more bespoke and this had been discussed with schools, where informed, to arrange changing the techniques, delivery mechanisms and changing pedagogy, and feedback from parents was that this had improved significantly over time. It was important to be put in contact with parents to make sure their children had the best possible deal.

The Assistant Director for Curriculum, CSC explained that that alongside learning guidance there was guidance produced by WG on vulnerable learners including ALN's. The expectation was clear from WG that whatever additional provision or learning need that an individual learner required, that those were recognised by schools and catered for, and this included children who through this process and system may now have additional needs. It was about ensuring that provision was equitable and provision was excellent for all learners and that every child's needs were taken into account and any difficulties with barriers to learning were overcome in the best way possible at this moment in time.

The Group Manager (Learner Support) explained that by identifying vulnerable learners, teams had worked really closely with schools to identify those who would benefit from coming in to the school environment and this had happened throughout the process. Where children and young people had been educated at home, teams had responded in different ways e.g., the sensory service had visited outside homes and assessments had been held remotely, etc. Inclusion service had responded flexibly with schools and parents in order to meet the individual needs and then support had been adapted accordingly. Where additional support was needed for any learners, this had gone in,

with funding being utilised in different ways, to do that. In addition, the Inclusion Service had purchased chrome books for the learning resource centres to make sure that no learner was digitally excluded. The important thing was partnership and keeping an eye on those individual learners and meeting their needs where appropriate. That had been really key in keeping a temperature gauge on how they were being supported and schools had worked very closely with the teams. It was an ongoing process, which had improved, and if parents had come forward, the local authority had responded accordingly.

A Member explained from her own personal experience how fantastic teaching staff had been and she was pleased with the standard of work and realised what a balancing act it was for each household. She asked if BCBC had a common approach to measuring engagement from online learning from school to school. Whether there was any data from each school to identify the take up on blended learning and was there a comparison of schools? Also, whether there were any patterns where learners were eligible for free school meals (eFSM), that there was less take-up or was it just across the board? Lastly whether all of this was being used to improve provision?

The Principal Improvement Partner, CSC explained that in terms of measuring engagement, improvement partners had been asked to find out how schools were delivering blended learning at a couple of points. Engagement had taken place with Headteachers in June, just after coming out of lockdown and then November time, where it was very much hybrid, with pupils back in school. The trend in Bridgend Primary schools was that the range of engagement was quite wide, although figures were not available but could be shared retrospectively. In terms of engaging with home learning in primary schools, the range was somewhere in the region of about 32% to 90% engagement. Numbers of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) were generally higher in the primary sector with engagement a little lower. It was interesting how schools changed approaches to delivering home learning to try and increase engagement with learning and the knock on effect, since November. In the secondary sector, the range was a bit smaller in the region of about 50% to 70% engagement, again following a roughly similar pattern. In terms of the Welsh-medium sector in particular, both in primary and secondary, there was much higher engagement in the first lockdown period in home learning irrespective of eFSM backgrounds. This work had been carried out in order to understand engagement and how schools would use that information to change their practice.

The Assistant Director for Partnerships and Improvement, CSC stated that across the region there was a vast array of different types of engagement. Initially engagement was ensuring learners were able to access devices, were able to make contact, etc., and then later a move to seeing what the quality of engagement looked like and if the engagement was meaningful and lead to learning. Conversations moved around looking to the evidence of a quality engagement as opposed to saying that youngsters had logged on to the computer and were sitting there whilst not engaging with any of the learning or any of the lessons. Regionally there was a massive difference in how schools were able to support learners to actively engage. In terms of engagement with schools, it was constantly being aware of the challenges facing schools. It was too easy, when not in those positions, to start making judgements that were not necessarily accurate so it was about making sure CSC had meaningful contact with Headteachers and schools, to find out where they were so the support provided was appropriate and it wasn't going to cause any additional anxiety within a setting, but would add value.

The Member asked if BCBC had a clear vision for blended online learning that had been communicated to schools and was there a minimum expectation of what that looked like?

The Headteacher of Brynteg School stated that he felt there was a very clear vision for blended learning/remote teaching in Bridgend and that the quality of the remote teaching was definitely more important than how it was delivered. From the start, schools were given the flexibility to operate like that and that was why so many schools were operating in so many different ways. What was interesting was that the whole process had exposed teachers because many people were beginning to have lots and lots of input into how teaching and learning opportunities are designed, and perhaps quite rightly so. Maybe that was something to be picked-up as schools as an indication of the future in terms of self-evaluation. Many parents/carers and pupils were saying how they wanted to be taught. Sometimes the school didn't quite agree noting that teacher's being online for 5 hours a day simply wouldn't work. The vision from Bridgend and working with CSC was that it was about the quality. It didn't matter if this was done virtually or in-situ, what mattered most was whether or not what was being done was building on prior learning. Staff in Brynteg were expected to be there live in every lesson but that didn't mean they were sitting there on camera, they could be there, or thereabouts, answering queries online through the chat box, etc., but being live and running a live lesson didn't necessarily make that a brilliant lesson.

The Headteacher of Brackla Primary School stated that she agreed with her colleague and it was all about quality, explaining that the school delivered all pre-recorded materials because that was what the teachers felt confident with. The offer had evolved over the months, the pre-recorded lessons were absolutely fantastic, and the quality was far superior to what it had been. The school had worked closely with CSC who had been really supportive. The Team Bridgend approach had been a strength for Bridgend with officers listening to what schools had to say and engagement had increased over the months because of the quality that was on offer. Schools were working much more collaboratively and sharing good practice and the upskilling of staff had been phenomenal. The vision had been communicated very clearly but was very much on the basis of quality and what suited the context of a particular school.

The Headteacher of Pîl Primary School explained that the ICT Strategy Group was looking at development around a blended learning/policy, but had found it difficult because it was recognised that everyone was coming from a different starting point. It was agreed that the principles of blended learning were here to stay and it was about trying to look forward rather than back and how there could be seamless learning between home and school in the future. The strategy group acknowledged that a one size fits all approach was very difficult and it was more about developing support, which CSC and the local authority had done in supporting schools to try and get where they wanted to be. The group would continue to look at making a common approach but it was difficult due to every school being on its own individual journey.

The Member asked whether there had been a rise in the number of staff accessing the Care First wellbeing service as a result of pressures (e.g. marking work outside of their normal working day).

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support stated that HR colleagues were not present but the point around staff wellbeing was extremely important not just in respect of school staff but local authority officers and also colleagues from CSC. One of the challenges over the last year was maintaining a correct work life balance when it was not as easily delineated as it had previously, so this was an important point. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support was minded to go back to HR to continue to provide expert up to date advice.

The Headteacher of Brackla Primary School explained that in terms of staff wellbeing there had been quite a lot of support in respect of Care First with weekly webinars on offer, on a variety of topics, which staff have tapped in to and had been a real positive.

There had also been termly wellbeing focus groups through Team Bridgend, so there was a lot of support on offer.

The Youth Mayor explained that she was a current Year 11 student who had returned to school today. As a student, she felt she hadn't seen much blended learning in her school and that it was either solely face-to-face, online or pre-recorded lessons. Many students she had talked to had seen schools doing blended learning, but she felt she was just being routed to one type of learning, so that had been difficult. In respect of the previous point, the Youth Council had discussed the point about inequalities of learning. Some students had a head start in their assessments, whereas others had not started them. She felt there were issues with communication and there had not been much information in relation to choosing A level subjects, which caused problems in respect of strict deadlines. She didn't feel there had been any inter-school communication about what different schools were doing, what had been tried and what had worked well. She appreciated that this had been a difficult year but asked what was being done to help stop the inequalities.

The Chairperson thanked the Youth Mayor for her contribution and said it was very helpful and a good insight to hear someone that was experiencing this every day.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration thanked the Youth Mayor for her contribution and stated that it was very important that teachers should see how things looked from the point of view of the customer. Historically there had been a tendency for teachers to self-evaluate in terms of how they performed, but feedback from students could indicate their perception was very different. He noted she had made 3 points in respect of blended learning, catch-ups/assessments and consistency. With regard to the first, the key was blended learning. There wasn't necessarily an answer that it was a particular method, but it should be a blended approach, so if that wasn't happening that was a concern and he was sure support staff and teaching staff there, would have a look at that. In terms of catch-up/assessments he wanted to reassure students that there was a sense in which they did not have to catch up and did not want students returning to school thinking they needed to cram in information. There needed to be a more enlightened approach and at the very top in Wales there was a very different philosophy with an expert panel of professionals looking at this in a more humane and more forward looking and realistic way. Hopefully this would be more reassuring when the deliberations of that panel were published. In respect of consistency, it was about encouraging teachers to become much more accomplished in the pedagogy or the teaching and learning approaches of blended learning.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support also thanked the Youth Mayor for her passion and real commitment to her own learning and those of Members of Bridgend Youth Council and also her peers. Learners had demonstrated remarkable resilience and patience over the last year and a fantastic job had been done by them, recognising it had been a very difficult time for them. One thing of pivotal importance throughout was to seek the view of the learner, so learner voice was pivotal to this. He recognised that some of the changes hadn't been communicated effectively to students and he took this on board. The key areas the Youth Mayor had picked up was with regard to inconsistency in adopting a similar style with regard to curriculum and assessments. He noted that all Directors in Wales had attended a meeting with Qualification Wales, prior to the meeting, and there would a publication out shortly indicating how assessments were going to run around substituting grades, and the practice around it, for the summer. He would be more than happy to share this not just with Headteachers, but also learners as well. The other thing that was important was making sure effective practice was shared. One of the key elements from WG funding was around additional money to support teachers to support their learners and hopefully it would be seen over the next couple of months how that had improved things. The

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Corporate Director – Education and Family Support acknowledged that there was two actions for him, to make sure that this was communicated more effectively to young people and with regards to the outcomes of today’s meeting with Qualification Wales.

A Member acknowledged the issue of internet connectivity, particular in the ward she represented, which didn’t have fibre optic broadband, and asked if there was any information on how many days or hours pupils had lost due to internet connectivity not being available. She asked in the long term, how would this affect individual and school absence rates if a child was not able to connect online or had a broken laptop, through no fault of their own.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support explained that it had been recognised right at the very beginning that internet connectivity was going to be a key issue especially with a proliferation of online resources and the need to make sure, regardless of geographical or economic background, that all learners had access to reliable broadband. Over 300 portable internet devices (MiFis) had been distributed to learners and if there was a need for this going forward an application would be made corporately for additional funding to support it. This was pivotal and wherever a learner had required it, one had been provided. If additional resources were required, there were additional MiFis and additional laptops available. The issue around the volatility of broadband was a key one and clearly, there was a need to make sure all learners got a consistent approach, although he was not aware of any issues around the Mifi availability. If there were individual connectivity issues in homes within the Members ward, he was happy to connect with economic partners within the Council and wider if need be. Whilst he acknowledged that the Member raised some relevant points in relation to wider connectivity to different communities, that fell outside the Education and Family Support Directorate, although he would be more than happy to look into that.

The Support and Digital Office Manager confirmed that 310 MiFis had been ordered at the start of the year and there were still a couple available if there was still a need with connection charges paid for until the end of July.

A Member asked how the local authority would make sure that children going back to in school learning were not digitally excluded, as they would still have to do homework. How would this be managed on a budget management level because it was important for both the local authority and schools as it would become a pressure in the future with more and more home school learning.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support explained, in relation to the first question, there has been significant investment by WG in all local authorities with regard to the Hwb Infrastructure Grant, funding over several years for a national platform that all schools were using to mitigate the risk of additional costs with regard to software and licensing. Investment had focused on sustainability as kit would become redundant and it was good practice to build on that. Part of all schools budgets included funding to look at the future and make sure that kit was available and that staff were upskilled through regional consortium colleagues, and elsewhere, so they had the skills for the future. The key word was sustainability, both on a funding point of view, from a training point of view and also from a hardware point of view. The next question was a really important one that looked at long-term sustainability. There had been a significant improvement in the way business was conducted online through blended learning formats and this would be developed and enhanced in order to future proof. So, there was the investment in the long-term vision, investment in long term training and adoption by staff and learners and also through various support mechanisms, available through WG, to support investment in hardware and software. This was an important question because again this was costly and there needed to be a plan to back this up so it didn’t fall over in the future.

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A Member stated that in the presentation it said WG funding for the Hwb programme was announced in 2019, which was pre Covid-19 so did this mean schools had offered out devices to pupils when they were initially intended for use in school. Was the local authority happy with the supplies in schools, as some would ultimately be written off?

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support explained that in relation to kit, he anticipated that some wouldn't be returned in a fit state for use in schools. There would also be an element of kit obsolete, the longer they were out of the system. In addition, some of them might be damaged and this was readily accepted. Part of the Hwb infrastructure programme, going back to 2019, was the planned refurbishment of school ICT, which featured as part of the grant. The understanding was that this was not just a one-hit capital investment, it would come over a number of years. Obviously, there was a range of terms and conditions needed to be met and the work done to align processes around the investment.

The Headteacher of Litchard Primary School confirmed that kit had been identified for schools through the Hwb project, funded by WG, but lots of schools, including his own, hadn't received their allocations at the start of the pandemic. The team approach was very strong here as schools were giving up the kit that they had and then redistributing it to schools that required that kit. The Hwb kit subsequently arrived, but parents who had received the laptops would be keeping them for sustainability going forward. Also in terms of sustainability, a lot had been done to educate parents about kit they already had including the use of PlayStations and Xboxes to access remote learning, which gave more equity.

The Member stated that CSC had said that most schools had been involved, so asked had there been buy-in by all schools for their support and using their services.

The Principal Improvement Partner, CSC confirmed that all schools had engaged with improvement partners and the full range of other services provided on the council's behalf. Most schools had then taken it forward a little bit further if they felt the need to and some schools have been in a position, through regular check-ins, that they were quite happy with the support they were getting and didn't feel they needed anymore. CSC had been there on demand for schools in every meeting in every possible way and in every forum.

The Headteacher of Brynteg School stated he felt that it was a statement about where schools were. Some schools would access lots of support from CSC, some schools felt that they didn't need to, at a particular point. It went back to his earlier point about trying to support the needs of individual pupils and the same input was not necessarily needed at the same time.

The Member asked, what was being done to look at wellbeing of pupils and to make sure they were being fully supported?

The Corporate Director - Education and Family Support explained that in respect of wellbeing, Headteachers and colleagues would be aware that Bridgend had three strategic objectives in Education, wellbeing, literacy and safety, and that safety related to health and safety and safeguarding. Wellbeing had been a key strategic priority since 2017, well before the pandemic, and it had put the Directorate in good stead because this had been a real focus of everything that was done, including around staff and learner wellbeing. He noted that Estyn colleagues were present in the meeting and they certainly recognised in the inspection report, the excellent work the Local Authority with partners in CSC, had done around protecting staff and learning wellbeing.

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The Headteacher of Litchard Primary School explained in terms of wellbeing, when children couldn't access work, as January progressed, learners were called in so they could catch-up with their work on school site. Kit that was made available was also distributed them to use. So two things were done, supporting them academically on site if they were not engaging, in addition to home visits as well, as lots of other schools did, and working with other agencies to help and support them with their wellbeing.

The Headteacher of Brynteg School stated in terms of wellbeing the concept of catch up could be quite scary for pupils and it would be difficult for pupils to catch up on all of their work in the next 3 or 4 weeks, and anyone who thought they could, was sadly misguided. It was about wellbeing and ensuring pupils re-learnt how to be part of the school community and enjoy being with each other and having that time with their friends was really important. It was about getting them to the point where they were happy and felt safe and then they would be able to access learning, so wellbeing was very much at the core of thinking at the moment. At school over the last few weeks, it had been recognised that everyone needed a break from computer screens, etc., and therefore wellbeing days had built in every week. These were days when no work was set on screen at all, and pupils were given a menu of activities, which took them away from the screen. It was not only the pupils that had responded well to that, but also parents and carers had said it had taken a lot of pressure off them at home, because they didn't have to worry about checking up on their son or daughter, doing the right thing at the right time. It was equally important about giving teachers and support staff time to think about their own wellbeing, as well and wellbeing would definitely be the key driver for all Headteachers in the next few months.

The Acting Headteacher of Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School explained in respect of wellbeing that pupils enjoyed World Book Day and the Eisteddfod and live assemblies but she was aware that lots of pupils had not been able to access those collective events and have been excluded, for whatever reason. The school had worked with pupils to develop a school ambassador group into online forums to look at what each year group felt would help bring them forward and was most appropriate. The school was fortunate to be part of the PERMA model pilot that worked really well with key stage 3 pupils. In addition key stage 4 and post-16 pupils had asked for wellbeing sessions to happen outside of the school day and were happy to access talks, webinars and question and answer sessions using technology and a blended learning approach. Traditionally extracurricular activities would have been on site at the end of the school day. Moving forward, it was about using the next two weeks to look at how wellbeing activities could be tailored for pupils in the summer term.

A Member asked if the figure was known for the extra funding which had been promised by WG to fill the gap and allow children to catch up. In addition she explained that she had signed-up to CSC's notifications so had been getting the regular WG updates about the changing role of governing bodies. She asked whether there was there a common approach to this and was there set guidance and whether Governing Bodies were getting the support and information they required.

The Corporate Director - Education and Family Support explained that in respect of the extra funding per local authority or per school, this was not known at present; however, the good news was that the level of funding that had been indicated by WG was significant and was likely to be over £100million across the local authorities in Wales. Obviously the breakdown needed to be seen because it was dependent not just on per capita, but also need e.g. ALN reform funding. As soon as this was known, it would be communicated.

In respect of the question around governors, this was a timely question as it was formerly part of the CSC business plan was to identify 5 key priorities for the local authority going forward, one of them being clarify around the role of governors, including

recruiting, retaining and professional development. More recently, this had come into sharp focus with regard to the role of the governing body and governors, with regard to risk assessments. Operational guidance by WG specified to a degree, that the role needed to be sharpened. One of the things the local authority was doing, as it was duty bound, was to look at Estyn guidance with regard to thematic reviews and also the directives from WG together with advice from CSC to make sure that this is passed on to schools.

The Assistant Director for Partnerships and Improvement, CSC explained that CSC had recruited 13 Regional Leaders for Governance because there was acknowledgement that there was a real development need within the governing bodies across the region. They were a really important tool in the improvement box because it was really key to have the right people to be able to deploy, so following a rigorous assessment process they were recruited and had been part of a training programme. They would sit as part of the School Improvement Team and would be subject to all the quality assurance processes that followed for all school improvement staff. Ultimately, they would be supported in the work they did with governing bodies in schools and the impact of their work would be looked at. In addition it was about enhancing and developing CSC's own support and training for school governors, through the self-evaluation tool for governing bodies. One of the first tools regional leads for governance would be working with schools on, was so governing bodies could effectively self-evaluate their own performance and from that point build a plan to be able to develop and improve their own functioning.

A Member asked if Headteachers felt there were any particular benefits of teaching online they had found, with any examples and thinking about teaching previously done was there anything they would have preferred to do or benefited from doing online.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration suggested that the Member have a look at the written report for the meeting, and in particular, at points 4.6 and 4.7 which listed both the disadvantages and advantages of online and blended learning, which he said was very interesting.

The Headteacher of Brynteg School explained there was lots to learn with good points as well. Teachers in a classroom delivering a difficult concept in a synchronised way would do so with the class around and it would be hoped pupils understood and would take that knowledge away. With recording videos, pupils could play at a time that suited them, they could play it time and time again, if they perhaps didn't understand a concept or stop it at a particular point, and that was a key learning point. In terms of the future, moving forward, it was the link with curriculum for Wales and how blended learning opportunities would allow creation of learning opportunities for pupils so that they could move at a point that suited them, instead of having, for example, to wait until the rest of the class needed to move on. There was some really exciting thinking around blended learning and vertical teaching e.g. bringing different year groups of pupils together to create exciting learning opportunities for them.

The Headteacher of Brackla Primary School explained that one of the benefits of teaching and learning from a blended learning point of view was the confidence of children that may not have had the confidence to be outspoken within the classroom, particularly foundation phase learners. They had a lot more support from adults in the household, so it had been noticed, in terms of benefits to confidence and certain progression in terms of social skills as well. They had also benefited from a Hub provision as well, if they've been in school, in small groups.

The Acting Headteacher of Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School echoed colleagues' comments, it was the confidence. It was really interesting to look at a class

of pupils, and pupils that wouldn't normally contribute very actively within the classroom that were quite happy to contribute online, whether that was in the chat or to communicate via their microphones. Similarly, with regards to the vertical idea, it had been really interesting with taster lessons, in terms of options, to give children the opportunity to just sit in on A-level or GCSE lessons, which they wouldn't normally have the opportunity to do so.

The Registered Representative - Church in Wales stated that there had been long discussions, lots of comments, some positive and some negative. He felt it was imperative that a huge vote of thanks to school staff, be placed on record as they had done an incredible amount of work and the overwhelming majority of them had gone way beyond what would be expected. It had been a very difficult time for everyone, for pupils yes, for parents, yes but for school staff as well, so a huge thank you to everyone.

The Chairperson stated that this was a very good way to end the questioning session today and he concurred completely with the registered representatives' comments. Feedback he had received from parents in his ward, was that the transition back into school had been seamless. He thanked all the school staff but also staff from CSC and staff in BCBC, particularly within the Education and Family Support Directorate and asked the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support to pass on the gratitude of the committee for the way in which staff, in various different settings had handled what had been an incredibly challenging period.

The Chairperson thanked all the invitees that had joined the meeting and noted that it had been a really good session with a range of different perspectives and thanked the Youth Mayor, on behalf of the Committee for her insightful comments.

The Invitees left the meeting.

Recommendations:

Having considered the report on Blended Learning in Bridgend Schools since March 2020, and Invitees' responses to Members' questions the Committee made the following comments and recommendations:

The Committee wanted to formally thank all school and teaching staff for their hard work throughout this difficult time.

The Committee requested that:

- Central South Consortium share data from the WG commissioned research upon Blended Learning when made available.
- Figures regarding the wide range of engagement be provided by Central South Consortium.
- The Corporate Director - Education and Family Support ensures that HR continues to provide up to date advice to school and teaching staff on wellbeing.
- The Corporate Director - Education and Family Support provide Members with more information regarding his mention of a strategy needed to deal with Digital Exclusion and also how it is funded moving forwards as an important priority for the Authority.

- The Authority engage with Welsh Government to lobby for improved internet connectivity (e.g. fibre optic broadband) and coverage across the County with a focus on rural and valley communities as this will be a key asset to the positive continuation of blended learning.
- The Corporate Director - Education and Family Support provides clarification that schools will have enough computer equipment, as they had pooled their equipment based on the 2019 WG announcement that ICT was being upgraded for schools.
- Consideration be given to amending absence recording to make allowances for those pupils who may not be able to take part in an online based school day due to internet connectivity or device issues.
- Arising from the Youth Mayor's comments:
 - That inequalities and differences between same school and year groups in terms of advancement or difference in work completion are assessed and lessons learnt approach adopted.
 - That information surrounding how learning will change, the new procedures and forthcoming changes to education are properly shared with pupils as well as staff and other bodies.

22. **URGENT ITEMS**

None