

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

10 JANUARY 2018

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OPERATIONAL AND PARTNERSHIP SERVICES

MEMBER AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present the Committee with the findings and recommendations from a Member and School Engagement Panel (MSEP) meeting with Maesteg School.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report relates to the following Corporate Priorities:

- Supporting a successful economy
- Helping people to become more self-reliant
- Smarter use of resources

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council's scrutiny function has an important role to play in enhancing the transparency and accountability of public services. The purpose of engaging Head Teachers together with Chairs of Governors with Members of Scrutiny is to explore school performance with a view to improving levels of understanding in support of the Committee's accountability function.
- 3.2 Maesteg School had been highlighted as a school for the Panel to consider with the rationale that the local authority issued the school with a cause for concern letter in October 2016. Information from the Directorate explained that concern was raised about the quality of leadership at the school because in 2016, based on school reported data, there was a decline in nearly all key performance indicators at key stage 4. The decline was significant in mathematics at level 2 and the level two threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics.
- 3.3 Unverified data for key stage 4 pupils in 2017 indicates that performance is still low, especially in the combined English and mathematics threshold indicator. However, it was highlighted by the Directorate that performance in 2017 cannot be compared to performance in 2016 as GCSE reforms mean that qualifications cannot be compared like for like.
- 3.4 Also there are a number of changes that all schools have had to address over the recent academic year, which may have impacted on this year's performance and therefore the performance at Maesteg. These include; 'A' level changes taking place simultaneously; full implementation of the Welsh Baccalaureate at level 1 and

level 2 in key stage 4; late publication of available information from WJEC; no grade descriptors and in-cohort changes.

3.5 In relation to Maesteg School, a joint local authority and Central South Consortium enquiry, conducted alongside the school, was undertaken in May 2017. The enquiry recommended that in order to strengthen the impact of the headteacher and senior leadership team on school improvement, the group should relentlessly pursue a more focussed agenda for accelerating progress and raising standards; continuing the current impetus at the school and maintaining the drive that is beginning to set higher expectations. This is to be achieved through:

- Empowering middle leaders to take greater responsibility for reducing in-school variation, thus ensuring greater consistency in the areas for which they are responsible, providing support and challenge to improve the performance of individuals and the team;
- Continuing on the quest for consistency by focusing attention on a small but powerful set of standardised procedures to drive out in-school variation;
- Further improving the process of self-evaluation; and
- Further developing the school's approach to identifying and sharing effective learning and teaching strategies.

3.6 The progress review in July 2017 indicated that the school has made a positive start to addressing these recommendations.

3.7 The MSEP met with the Headteacher, Mrs Helen Jones and the Chair of Governors, Cllr Keith Edwards, along with the Officers from the Education and Family Support Directorate on 22 November 2017.

3.8 The Panel received detailed information to assist them in their deliberations and development of questions including recent school data, the School Improvement plan, the Central South Consortium School Enquiry Report and the Summer Term 2 Progress Report.

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 Following their discussions with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, the Panel highlighted a series of key points and recommendations:

Key points from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors

- Two particular areas have hit schools hard recently – BTEC Science and English Literature – being withdrawn from quantitative measure.
- Struggle to recruit new staff, particularly in Maths and Science; firstly as there are so many opportunities in this field both within teaching and outside of teaching – many in the latter with much less pressure; and secondly high calibre teachers are much easier to attract to a 'Green' Category school.
- The Categorisation System for schools creates additional issues as parents are also attracted to 'Green' schools which can have a detrimental effect on individual school budgets through significant numbers of surplus places. This is further compounded by the fact that it is mainly Green schools that are

considered to become 'Hub schools' allowing them to broker services and create additional income;

- Pupil population boom in England will exacerbate recruitment situation in Wales, as England have bigger budgets to attract good teachers.
- Girls underperforming boys is becoming an increasing issue for some schools with possible indication of a demographic/cultural issue. This underperformance appears to be starting at Key Stage 3. Several reasons attributable to this:
 - 1) A lack of confidence at the core and girls not believing they can achieve and having low aspirations;
 - 2) The quality of relationships girls have with their teachers;
 - 3) An increasing gender stereotypical view of girls and boys;
 - 4) New curriculum being exam based not coursework based which tends to favour boys ways of learning and achieving.

The Panel highlighted the following as key methods the school has identified for improvement and possible areas for sharing best practice with others:

- A combination of strong pupil tracking systems and higher aspirations for pupils is vital to improve pupil performance.
- Challenging pupil data from primary schools in order to better categorise pupils and set them correctly – starting off the learning journey from year 7 instead of later.
- Teaching and Learning Reviews being held at beginning of school year with new performance targets – instead of waiting until it's too late to do anything about it.

School Governors

- Have Governors and a budget allocated to aspects of school motto/focus: 'STRIVE'
 - S – Skills – Literacy and Numeracy
 - T – Teaching
 - R – Raising aspirations
 - I – Inclusion
 - V – Visionary
 - E – English/Maths
- Link Governors for English and Maths together to ensure focus is maintained equally on both.

4.2 Recommendations

1. The Panel expressed concern over evidence reported that although schools may be issued with a cause for concern letter at the beginning of the school year in the Autumn term, support mechanisms are not put in place until after the school categorisation has been ratified in the following January. This sometimes means that a school may not get the support until a few weeks before the next exams and therefore have not had the opportunity or support to make changes and have an impact on those pupils for that year.

Given the fact that, as reported by the Corporate Director- Education and Family Support, it is extremely unlikely that the school categorisation system will contradict the cause for concern letter, it is recommended that support from the Local Authority and the Consortium is put in place for schools immediately after a cause for concern letter is issued.

2. Discussions were held in relation to the tragic accident that had occurred at the school in 2014. From evidence received the Panel recommend that support mechanisms are put in place for schools relating to any tragic incident. This should include a clear support package from the Local Authority, covering pupils, families, staff and the Headteacher. The Panel further recommend:
 - a) that this package utilise that already in place for dealing with suicides as the impact can be similar;
 - b) that this support package include dealing with press and items such as Freedom of Information Requests.

3. The Panel also recommend that lessons be learnt from Maesteg School with:
 - a) Schools and the Local Authority investing in better training for Headteachers and school staff in Health and Safety processes;
 - b) School Leaders being better prepared for dealing with the accountability and culpability in such tragic situations;
 - c) Other schools learning from improved processes now in place in Maesteg School for vehicles and pupils entering and leaving the school with the hope of preventing further tragedy.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 The work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees relates to the review and development of plans, policy or strategy that form part of the Council's Policy Framework and consideration of plans, policy or strategy relating to the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental wellbeing in the County Borough of Bridgend.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality implications directly attached to this report.

7. Financial Implications.

There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 The Committee is asked to
 - a) Accept the comments and recommendations of the Member and School Engagement Panel in relation to Maesteg School;
 - b) Determine whether it wishes to send the comments and recommendations to Cabinet, the Directorate and the Consortium for a response.

Andrew Jolley
Corporate Director, Operational and Partnership Services

Contact Officer: Rachel Keepins
Scrutiny Officer

Telephone: (01656) 643613

E-mail: Rachel.keepins@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal Address Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

Background documents

None