

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

29 APRIL 2019

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND REGULATORY SERVICES

MEMBER AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – PLASNEWYDD PRIMARY

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 Plasnewydd Primary School.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report relates to the following Corporate Priorities:

- Supporting a successful economy – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
- Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
- Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

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 Plasnewydd Primary School had been highlighted as a school for the Panel to consider with the rationale that the school currently has a Red status under the National Schools Categorisation System.
- 3.3 The MSEP met with the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors and Officers from the Education and Family Support Directorate on 11 March 2019.

3.4 The Panel received detailed information to assist them in their deliberations and development of questions including recent school data, Estyn reports, the School Post Inspection Action Plan and the Authority's Statement of Action.

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

- a) The Headteacher reported that the priority for the school was always on wellbeing particularly given the number of vulnerable pupils attending the school.
- b) Regarding questioning around timescales and the pace of progress, the Headteacher informed the Panel that whilst they would like to progress change faster, unfortunately policies and process were holding things up.
- c) The Panel were advised that they were looking at restructuring the leadership team.
- d) Recent staff training has focused on how to make classrooms more differentiation friendly. There is more focus on monitoring and tracking pupils, raising expectations of both pupils and staff. There is ongoing work with St Marys and St Patricks schools on upskilling teachers on the Foundation Phase and the school were also looking at Maes Y Haul for good practice. It was further reported that there have been improvements in sharing best practice across the school.
- e) The Headteacher reported that they have experienced difficulties in engaging with parents and as a result have difficulties in recruiting Parent Governors from the local community with persistent vacancies.
- f) Work was being undertaken to try and engage parents more, such as Family Learning Sessions, workshops and parent evenings. There was particular focus on Year 3 parents due to the transition at this stage but there was a suggestion that this engagement needed to be a lot earlier, possibly even from birth for potentially vulnerable families.
- g) The Headteacher advised that more multi-agency support was needed. The Panel were advised that the Health Authority have now appointed a dedicated Learning Officer who will attend education meetings. The Senior Challenge Adviser stated that an example of good practice was used by Gwent Police when they contact schools immediately on a Monday morning if there has been an incident over the weekend, however schools in other localities do not receive this information.
- h) In relation to the school's preparations for the introduction of the new curriculum, the Panel were advised that planning was being undertaken around new areas of learning and experiences, with a tracking literacy and numeracy focus. Leadership planning and reporting for this was a particular focus to ensure the

messages were being cascaded down throughout the school as well as fed back to monitor and review.

- i) Following a comment from the Headteacher regarding an increasing intake of pupils from local Welsh Medium schools, the Group Manager Inclusion and School Improvement reported that the Authority is undertaking a piece of work into such movements of pupils across the County Borough.
- j) On the subject of School Governors, the Panel were advised that Governors were now heavily involved in the school, with pupils and staff able to recognise them. Staff were now directly feeding back to Governors. There was recognition that there was a need to continuously renew training. The school has received bespoke training through a Consultant Governor and has developed a Governor Pack. The school still had ongoing vacancies for both Parent Governors and Local Authority vacancies.
- k) The Headteacher reported that there were difficulties regarding the environment for Foundation Phase in that it was not necessarily fit for purpose with no designated green space for the pupils. However, the school has looked at different ways of providing these experiences such as mud kitchens and visits outside of the school to green spaces.

4.2 Recommendations made by the Panel

Recommendations to the Authority

- a) In order to support the school further the Panel recommend that the Authority look at putting in 'Team Around the School' support (group of practitioners working with a particular child or young person and their family) for Plasnewydd Primary as soon as possible.
- b) The Panel recommend that a direct and urgent connection be made with a school when social services have been involved, such as over a weekend, with a particular pupil of that school. Members stressed the need for a prompt reaction from social services to ensure that a school is made aware so that they are ready and able to provide immediate support to that child in an appropriate way.

Recommendations to School/Consortium

- c) The Panel recommend that the Governor Pack that Plasnewydd Primary has recently developed with their Challenge Advisor be considered for sharing across other schools in the County Borough with a view to assisting other School Governing Bodies.
- d) The Panel recommend that School Governors from Plasnewydd Primary School consider visiting and attending School Governor meetings in other schools in order to view best practice and possibly obtain ideas which could be adapted and used within their own school. Furthermore, the Panel recommend that the Consortium and the Authority promote this method for all School Governing Bodies so that they can optimise on the best practice that is available throughout the County Borough and ultimately improve school performance across schools.

- e) Following confirmation of the two Local Authority School Governor Vacancies, the Panel recommend that a job description be provided for advertising these vacancies so that individuals understand what the position entails and furthermore that different ways of advertising be considered.

Further points for Scrutiny

- f) Based on evidence received, the Panel requested that a scoping exercise be carried out by Scrutiny Officers to determine whether there is an item suitable for Scrutiny in relation to the movement of pupils from Welsh Schools to English schools within the County Borough.
- g) The Panel expressed concerns over Governor training and whether it was sufficient enough to enable School Governors to carry out their role effectively. The Panel requested that this be investigated by Scrutiny with a view to a recommendation that Governor training be reviewed and improved to make it more effective and fit for purpose. Members proposed that a job description, for example, be provided when schools advertise for Parent Governors to ensure that the right people apply for the position and understand what is expected of them.
- h) The Panel agreed to monitor the performance of the school, reviewing it again early next year when results are published to determine whether they wish to carry out any further investigation into the school.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 The work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees undertakes 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

- 6.1 There are no equality implications directly attached to this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment

- 7.1 The Act provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with 5 ways of working to guide how public services should work to deliver for people. The following is a summary to show how the 5 ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been used to formulate the recommendations within this report:

- Long-term - The work of the Member and School Engagement Panel supports the improvement of standards and outcomes in schools.
- Prevention - Monitoring school performance allows the Authority to identify trends over time and to identify areas of good practice to be shared to help raise standards and to identify areas for school development. In making

recommendations for change and further exploration by Scrutiny, the aim is to prevent standards from slipping across the County Borough.

- Integration - Providing effective Member and School Engagement Panel support, has a positive impact on well-being objectives through engagement with schools. This ultimately means that learners can learn and achieve and can play active roles in their communities, contributing positively to society as a whole.
- Collaboration - The Member and School Engagement Panel and Scrutiny Committees work specifically with Local Authority Officers, schools and with the Central South Consortium (CSC) to help towards the delivery of the well-being objectives related to school improvement. Receiving information from those listed assists in the production of recommendations that are made to a combination of all those involved to support the delivery of school improvement.
- Involvement – The work of the Member and School Engagement Panel and the Scrutiny Committee involves Officers from within the Authority, CSC, schools including Headteachers and Chairs of Governors to identify areas for improvement, further support and future monitoring.

8. Financial Implications.

8.1 There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

9. Recommendation.

9.1 The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Accept the comments and recommendations of the Member and School Engagement Panel in relation to Plasnewydd Primary School;
- b) Determine whether it wishes to send the comments and recommendations to Cabinet, the Directorate and the Consortium for a response.

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Background documents

None