

Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 6th January, 2016

School Modernisation – School Standards and Reorganisation Action 2013 – Ysgol Maes Edwin

The comments and concerns raised by Members of the Committee focused on the following areas:-

- **Federation**

A number of comments were made around the possibility of a federation, with questions being asked on whether enough time had been given to the school to explore the possibility of a federation, the savings which could be achieved through federation and whether the departure of the Headteacher had impacted the ability to progress with a federation.

The Chief Officer for Education & Youth and Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision explained that it had been confirmed that no neighbouring school was willing to form a federation with Ysgol Maes Edwin. The departure of the Headteacher therefore had no impact on the ability of local schools to progress with a federation.

When asked, the officers confirmed that delaying a decision by two months to implement a proposal would significantly prolong uncertainty for families and the wider school community, as implementation would no longer be possible for the commencement of the 2016-17 academic year.

- **Alternative School Capacity and the impact of Housing Developments**

A number of comments were made around capacity at neighbouring Schools, with question being asked on whether certain year groups within Ysgol Owen Jones were full, the capacity at neighbouring Schools to ensure sibling/friend groups remained together in the event of a school closure and whether childcare provision was similar at neighbouring Schools.

Concerns were also raised around the impact the Croes Atti Housing Development would have on pupil numbers in Flint and whether closing a school in Flint would have negative impact on school places in the future.

The Chief Officer and Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision confirmed that there was sufficient capacity in the local schools network to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Maes Edwin in the event of closure. The Committee was also informed that capacity was being closely monitored.

Some year groups at Ysgol Owen Jones were full but the Committee was informed of options available to headteachers to alter class structures at the beginning of each academic year.

- **Transition Arrangements**

Further information on future transition arrangements, in the event of school closure, was requested, especially for those vulnerable groups of learners with Additional Learning Needs.

The Chief Officer outlined the importance of supporting all children through the transition of school organisational change before, during and after the process and referred to the provision of individual plans for pupils, especially for those vulnerable groups of learners with Additional Learning Needs, in the event of school closure and transfer to other schools.

- **Consultation process/documentation**

Concerns were raised around the consultation process, with comments made that all conclusions within the consultation document justified school closure and that the consultation documents did not measure the effect of school closure on the community and the lives of individuals.

Concern was also raised around the general process which was believed to be the first step in the Authority re-organising the whole excellent primary school network across Flintshire.

The Chief Officer and Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision reported on the Authority's statutory responsibility to manage the supply of school places. Information on the consultation process, which was a legal requirement, was also provided to the Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Education responded to the comments and outlined the level of austerity faced by the Authority and the current and future cuts to the level of funding received which had resulted in maximum savings being achieved in other service areas.

Comments were also made around the improved school pupil numbers since 2008 and the benefits to pupils of attending a small school. Concern was also raised around the Council's Policy on parental choice which it was felt was being used against Ysgol Maes Edwin as part of the School Modernisation Strategy criteria. It was felt that there was a danger that pupils who attended Ysgol Maes Edwin would have to move back to a school they had previously left because of a number of personal reasons.

The Committee also asked questions on the projected savings from school closure and how these would be re-invested.

The Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision outlined the projected savings and commented that funding for pupils would 'follow' the pupil in the event of school closure.

A number of Members, raised concerns on the Welsh Government National Categorisation Model, with a request that the Authority proceed with caution, that in the event of school closure, pupils would receive a similar standard of education at a neighbouring school. Concerns were also raised over the Authority's responsibility around the standard of education and school building at Ysgol Maes Edwin.

The Chief Officer and Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision explained that it was the opinion of Estyn that the proposals would at least maintain the quality of learning for the pupils in the event of school closure.

The Committee also suggested that consideration be given, in the event of school closure, to financially assisting parents with the cost of new school uniforms.

The Chief Officer agreed to give consideration to this suggestion as part of the planned transition arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the Committee recommend to Cabinet that the process be suspended for two months to allow the opportunity for federation to be reviewed; and
- (b) That the comments of the Committee be collated and presented to Cabinet at its meeting on the 19th January, 2016.