

**EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**2 FEBRUARY 2017**

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire at 2pm on Thursday, 2 February 2017

**PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)**

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, David Healey, Colin Legg, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Vicky Perfect, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and David Williams

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS:** David Hýtch and Rebecca Stark

**APOLOGY:** Bernard Stuart

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Education; Senior Manager, School Improvement; and Senior Manager, Inclusion & Progression

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

**52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

Mrs. Rebecca Stark declared a personal interest on agenda item 3 'Learner Outcomes' as she had children in secondary school education.

**53. LEARNER OUTCOMES**

The Senior Manager (School Improvement Systems) presented the report on pupil attainment in statutory assessments, attendance and exclusions across the primary and secondary school phases for the school year 2015-16.

The detailed breakdown of data showed a general improvement in learner outcomes for the period, with marginal progress in Foundation Phase. The need for further improvement was recognised and schools continued to receive support to provide a platform for future development. The projected ranking of Key Stage 2 outcomes in Flintshire as the 6<sup>th</sup> best in Wales (based on free school meal data) would be the first time of exceeding the benchmarking level and reflected strong performance in primary schools. Whilst Key Stage 3 performance also remained strong, concerns on outcomes at Key Stage 4 were mirrored in national support category levels.

In welcoming the results of earlier key stages, Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer praised the effectiveness of the school network and felt that greater concentration should be directed towards improving outcomes in the secondary sector.

Councillor Colin Legg referred to the range of support and assessments available to help teachers' development, in addition to those who sought self-

improvement by other means. In view of this, he questioned the purpose of GwE as a remedial service and asked for anonymised examples where GwE had added value to outcomes. The Chairman agreed that this would be useful.

The Senior Manager advised that the support programme published annually by GwE set out levels of support given to schools and that there was clear evidence of a positive impact on school journeys, particularly those with improved support categories. There was increasing recognition amongst schools on the impact of GwE, since its inception, with examples of invaluable support and the sharing of best practice which benefited the whole of the region.

Councillor Chris Bithell gave assurances that performance at secondary school level was recognised as an issue and that resources and support were being diverted accordingly. He pointed out that issues were not generally identified until external examinations were taken at Key Stage 4. Whilst referring to negative comments made by Estyn on the quality of teaching across Wales, he said that a range of courses were publicised by GwE to offer development opportunities to teachers and that ongoing learning was a necessity in dealing with changes in education.

Mr. David Hýtch spoke about positive feedback from some primary sector colleagues at the School Standards Monitoring Group. He suggested that a greater level of secondary expertise may be required in GwE and welcomed the narrowing of gaps in performance of various pupil groups. In response to queries, the Senior Manager provided clarification on the 'value added' table and agreed to check whether Flintshire's outcomes on Language, Literacy & Communication (Welsh first language) in Foundation Phase were above the GwE average, as stated in the report. Mr. David Hýtch also welcomed the attendance figures for Flintshire and commented on the effect on teaching when pupils were taken out of school for term time holidays.

In response to comments on Key Stage 5 outcomes, the Senior Manager (Inclusion & Progression) referred to the establishment of a post-16 group to focus on priorities. The group would also respond on behalf of the Authority to consultation on consistent measures for post-16 learning.

Councillor Nancy Matthews referred to two schools which had benefited from GwE support. She felt that secondary school performance should be regarded as 'not up to the level we want' and that there was a responsibility on pupils as well as teachers.

Having examined learner outcomes between 2012/13 and 2015/16, Councillor Dave Mackie explained that he had calculated the average improvement rate per county for each of the regional school improvement consortia in Wales. He reported that counties in the GwE region showed an average improvement of 4%, whereas those in the three other Welsh regions were much higher. Whilst acknowledging that the same base did not apply to all, he made the point that performance in the GwE region was not as good as the other regions in Wales, as those which had previously performed worse than GwE were now ahead. He asked that this be raised as part of the scheduled GwE update, adding that Estyn had commented on the need for more thorough scrutiny of regional services.

The Senior Manager said that GwE had recognised the need to shift the balance on distribution of support to focus more on Key Stage 4 and that a major review was underway to identify more secondary curriculum specialists. She highlighted middle leadership level as an area of inconsistency and referred to the leadership development programme across the region.

Councillor Bithell spoke about individual responsibilities of the three-way partnership between GwE, local authorities and schools in identifying areas for improvement. He also commented on the potential impact which arose from changes in teachers and leadership.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark welcomed the levelling of performance between male and female pupils at Key Stages 2 and 3, and felt it would be useful to monitor that cohort to establish any widening of the gap. She gave a reminder of Flintshire's previous good performance on learner outcomes which was above the national average for some years and cited curriculum changes and pressures on teachers as significant factors affecting progress. On the sharing of best practice, the Senior Manager regarded this as a significant benefit of GwE in broadening opportunities to access examples of quality work across the region, with many schools participating in school to school support networks.

In response to concerns about the impact of pupil absences, the Senior Manager (Inclusion & Progression) acknowledged that this was a concern given the pressures facing young people. However, there was no waiting list for young people in Flintshire to access Mental Health Services and a multi-agency Emotional, Health & Wellbeing group had been set up to look at key issues presented in schools to establish appropriate support. In addition, there was a range of bespoke support packages to help engage young people in education.

In referring to the differences in performance between primary and secondary sectors, Councillor David Healey pointed out a similar disparity between school balances. He highlighted the importance of continuity of teaching and said that increased pressures on teachers from curriculum changes could impact on pupils. He went on to ask if there was a balance of teacher sickness absence levels between primary and secondary schools.

The Senior Manager (School Improvement Systems) spoke about the uplift in school budgets and the monitoring of spend. She pointed out that there were a number of significant challenging factors affecting schools and that a range of support was given to enable schools to make appropriate decisions in order to effectively deliver the curriculum.

**RESOLVED:**

That the attainment of Flintshire children and young people for the year 2015-16 be noted.

**54. SKILLED EDUCATION WORKFORCE SHORTAGE**

The Senior Manager (School Improvement Systems) presented a report on the availability of suitably skilled personnel to positions in schools and the

challenges in recruiting to vacant posts. She provided an overview of the findings of the report which showed local and national trends such as increasing pupil numbers, class sizes and challenges in recruiting to Head Teacher posts. Informal feedback shared by a small number of schools across Flintshire highlighted difficulties in the recruitment of specialist teachers in core subjects such as science in secondary schools and also support staff in primary schools.

Councillor Dave Mackie felt that short lead-in times to accommodate curriculum changes were a particular issue for teachers and asked if Challenge Advisors were providing adequate support to alleviate stress on teaching staff. He added that curriculum changes in Wales were a factor in many newly qualified teachers opting to work in England and that teacher pay scales should be appropriate.

Mr. David Hýtch spoke about the implications of the Donaldson review and stressed the importance of a measured approach to introducing curriculum changes. In highlighting a number of areas in the data reported for Flintshire schools, he raised concerns about the significant proportion of costs claimed by agencies in engaging temporary teaching staff. In noting the sickness absence levels for full-time teachers, he pointed out the negative effect of increased workload upon work/life balance.

Mrs. Rebecca Stark said that many issues were beyond the authority's control and that more action was needed by Welsh Government to sustain those in the teaching profession. Whilst noting the issues on the recruitment of Welsh teachers in response to the new GCSE requirements, she felt that a greater balance was needed in considering other much-needed languages.

The Chairman referred to the challenges in teacher retention, particularly in Wales, and said that more investment was needed in standards to encourage greater use of the Welsh language. He also raised concerns about the lack of male teachers applying for posts in the primary sector, particular in junior schools which he felt should be addressed at national level. He highlighted the importance of education for this particular age group where there were no limitations on class sizes and said that the lack of middle management in junior schools also had a bearing on workload.

The Senior Manager agreed that the lack of male applicants in the primary sector was disappointing and could be due to a number of reasons.

The Chairman proposed that a letter to the Minister be prepared on behalf of the Committee to request additional resources into schools in Wales in order to achieve the significant aims being set. He asked that the issues raised be reflected in the letter and that it be circulated for additional comments prior to sending.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked that the letter include concerns about the approach to dealing with class sizes in excess of the regulations for Foundation Phase.

In response to a suggestion by Mrs. Stark, the Senior Manager agreed to email those schools which had responded to the request for feedback to thank them on behalf of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Facilitator prepare a letter from the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, to request additional resources into schools in Wales in order to achieve the significant aims being set and to reflect the issues raised by the Committee.

**55. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The following actions were agreed:

- A senior representative of GwE to be invited to the next meeting on 16 March 2017 to provide an update on the service. As requested, anonymised examples of support given to schools would also be shared. It was also agreed that the date of the meeting would be subject to change depending on the availability of the representative.
- To accommodate the above, the item on Curriculum Reform and Pioneer Schools to be scheduled for a future meeting in the 2017/18 municipal year and an update report on Incidents of arson, vandalism and burglaries in Flintshire schools to be circulated.
- The Quarter 4/Year End Improvement Plan Monitoring Report scheduled for June 2017 to be withdrawn, to enable the first meeting of the new term to consider the Committee's Terms of Reference. An informal session would also take place with senior officers on the areas within the portfolio.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be updated; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

**56. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.45 pm)

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**Chairman**