

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON FRIDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2021**

PRESENT: County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)
County Councillors B Davies, S C Davies, L Roberts, R G Thomas, K M Roberts-
Jones,
Co-Opted Members: A Davies, S. Davies, M Evitts and G Robson

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors P Davies (Portfolio
Holder for Education and Property) and A W Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance and
Transport)

Officers: EurigTowns (Senior Challenge Advisor), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager
and Head of Democratic Services), Anwen Orrells (Senior Manager – Education
Services) and Hayley Smith (Interim Senior Manager; Additional Learning Needs and
Inclusion)

1.	APOLOGIES
-----------	------------------

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor M Weale, E
Roderick and from Lynette Lovell (Chief Education Officer)

2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
-----------	---------------------------------

There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for
consideration on the agenda.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP
-----------	-----------------------------------

The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a
Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section
78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4.	ESTYN REVIV OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES WORK IN SUPPORTING THEIR LEARNING COMMUNITIES 2020
-----------	--

Documents Considered:

- Estyn Review of Local Authorities Work in Supporting their Learning
Communities 2020.

Issues Discussed:

- Positive report from Estyn. This was a national report looking at how local
authorities were supporting learners from March to October 2020. Estyn
also produced a local report for authorities. The report reflects the strong
joint working across services, with partners, schools and with local
communities.
- Estyn were positive about the quick and safe way that the Council had
established the childcare hubs. The report also highlights communication
as a strength and the positive use of digital technology. In addition, the
report recognised how the service provided guidance, shared good
practice and supported digital connectivity, and shows how well the local

- authority established groups involving headteachers who were kept informed and involved in decision making during the period.
- The report recognised the establishment of the Team around the Hub and Team around the Cluster and how this has supported the wellbeing of learners.

- Questions:

<p>Staff need to be commended for the work done during pandemic. Much has been learned about the delivery of education during the pandemic. What will developments such as blended learning look like going forwards. In relation to children getting access to equipment, where are we with the provision of equipment for pupils.</p>	<p>In relation to blended learning, the Council is developing its approaches to new curriculum. Much of that is based around pupil independence, learning and self orientation. Each school has developed its own approach, as there is no set way of delivering blended learning. Activities have had to be adapted and pupils are very adaptable and resilient and this has been shown in the work being returned to schools. Teachers are being creative and adapting the way that they teach. That will develop further as the new curriculum is developed.</p> <p>In relation to access to digital equipment, over 800 families have been supported with equipment. In addition, over 1300 items of equipment have been loaned out but there are still families sharing devices, and schools are not equipped to give out devices to everyone. The Service is working with the Welsh Government and the Education Technology Programme to increase the number of devices in schools. There has been investment in equipment in schools and for teachers and funding has been received for next year to continue this. It is hoped in each school to have 1 device between 2 pupils. There has been support provided by businesses and others as well to assist pupils. However, the aim of the Service is to increase digital equipment in schools next year as well.</p>
<p>Has the pandemic made it easier for teachers to look at how they approach the new curriculum as it has been disruptive to traditional</p>	<p>There has been a greater ability to undertake more professional development during the pandemic so that teachers are able to adapt.</p>

<p>methods.</p>	<p>Hopefully teachers will be in a position to be able to take on change more readily after this period.</p>
<p>Has digital learning had an impact on e-sgol development, and take up post 16.</p>	<p>The Council was lucky to be in a strong position prior to covid as e-sgol had been started in September 2019 and especially in the secondary sector e-sgol teachers were supporting other teachers initially. Since then, primary and secondary school teachers have undertaken professional learning and developed strong practices on either Google Teach or Microsoft Teams. e-sgol is being rolled out nationally across secondary schools in September 2021. e-sgol started with 11 subjects and by September schools will be delivering 3 subjects not only for Powys pupils but also nationally across Wales. More use of e-sgol will be made for post 16 in future to broaden the offer of courses to Powys students.</p>
<p>How will this broaden the numbers of courses available through the Welsh Medium</p>	<p>As from September it is hoped to offer A Level Welsh Language over e-sgol, Religious Studies, History and a BTEC in childcare through the medium of Welsh. This will mean accessing the course through e-sgol and being able to undertake practical experience through the local Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin. Other courses are available from other authorities and more will become available from September.</p>
<p>Are other authorities moving onto e-sgol with potential for further collaboration between authorities</p>	<p>Yes, some schools are working with other authorities now. Some are bringing courses into Powys and some Powys schools are offering their courses to others. Collaboration is the way forward as all schools are struggling with numbers for some courses, especially through the medium of Welsh.</p>
<p>This is a positive report. Very positive communications channels established with schools by the Service. In relation to infrastructure there is</p>	<p>Challenge advisers' visits to schools are being undertaken and focussing on literacy and numeracy. Advisers are asking schools where they are now, are pupils progressing or</p>

<p>much information going out to parents. There is a challenge about ensuring that all parents get this information.</p> <p>Governor training and briefings online have been excellent and hopefully these will continue post covid.</p> <p>In relation to mental health issues there seems to be an increase in the numbers of referrals. The press is currently painting a negative picture e.g. children losing a year of school. What more can the Council do to stop parents putting pressure on themselves and on their children.</p>	<p>regressing. There has been a very different approach to learning during this period as it has been about remote learning. There has been pressure on staff during this period to ensure beneficial learning is happening as during the first lockdown period the focus was on pupil wellbeing, this time its on wellbeing and learning.</p> <p>Schools are keen to track and check on pupils' progress. Whilst the rate of progress of some pupils is not as expected, nevertheless they are still making progress. There will be evidence which can be shared.</p> <p>The Service's focus is mainly on learners and their well-being, then ensuring teachers well supported and trained, and making sure schools are mentally healthy schools.</p> <p>Using this approach the next step is how to get this guidance and support out to parents to assist them.</p>
<p>Having observed digital lessons over the past months which are excellent, they help pupils to learn and develop.</p> <p>The Service issued a parent consultation on the learning experience of pupils. When will the results of that consultation be coming to scrutiny.</p>	<p>The results can be shared with the Committee. It has been shared with headteachers and chairs of governors.</p> <p>The results of the parent / pupil survey and staff survey will be shared in a governor briefing this week. An individual analysis for schools is also ready to be issued, in addition to a whole authority analysis.</p>
<p>Congratulations to the Service on delivering distance learning. The mental health of staff and pupils is of concern. It is always interesting to look at what are we not doing so well so that we can challenge ourselves and improve.</p> <p>In relation to Welsh Language and immersion learning and now digital learning, will pupils need additional support when they return to school.</p> <p>For difficult to reach pupils, there are some parents who are not engaging with schools, or pupils</p>	<p>Welsh Language has been a difficult area for some schools. There are other schools that have coped well with this. Schools are using digital technology to support pupils, with regular contact as well as supporting parents. Some schools are using their Accelerated Learning Grant to assist support with the Welsh language. Having pupils back in schools can help pupils re-immersion in the Welsh Language.</p> <p>With regard to recruiting of staff, getting Welsh medium support staff</p>

<p>who do not have or not accessing equipment, and may not be learning.</p> <p>It is difficult to recruit staff who can teach through the medium of the Welsh Language. What is being done to increase the number of staff who can speak Welsh.</p> <p>Regarding Headteacher workload and additional tests which are being implemented, what can governors do to help and support headteachers.</p>	<p>and teachers can be difficult. The Council is doing all it can to attract staff.</p> <p>In relation to Headteacher workload the Service has acknowledged this with headteachers and is telling heads to take time off during holiday breaks and is not sending out information to them to give them that break. The Service is also supporting headteachers' wellbeing with guidance and assisting with governor support questions to assist as much as possible.</p> <p>With hard to reach pupils, there are clear protocols in place, central lists of pupils are kept and pupils visited by the educational welfare service or the youth service, and others. Joint visits are undertaken to keep communications open and also the Service is looking at an engagement support plan with schools, parents and pupils on how pupils will come back into school and be supported.</p>
<p>Have seen lessons from three primary schools over the year and the experiences are very different e.g. where there have been two classes in a year, but pupils are the same age, the content and time they had with teachers was greater than where there were four years in one class. This means the teacher not only has to cope with different abilities in a class where there are small streams but also teaching online. Has this issue been fed back to the Service.</p>	<p>Small schools have had to respond in different and more creative ways than the larger schools. In some cases age groups have been split between time slots for teaching purposes. There has also been an effective use of support staff during lessons taking on smaller groups of pupils. Schools have worked creatively to give the best provision possible to pupils but this has been hard.</p> <p>In the survey results, over 90% of parents thought that the provision for pupils was fine, but there will be instances where some parents are unhappy with the provision.</p>
<p>High schools have provided superb lessons online, even though the social aspect of lessons is missing. With regard to PE teachers, lessons have been free periods and pupils have been encouraged to go out and do some exercise. Have schools used these PE teachers to do other things such as support others in schools, as they do not</p>	<p>The information received by the Service is that some PE teachers have been running live lessons. They may also have been looking after the welfare of vulnerable pupils. They will also still have to prepare for exams. However, this will be reviewed by the Service.</p>

<p>have to prepare lessons, and therefore share the load with other teachers.</p>	
<p>As we're in a transition period we will be going back into a new normal, what will this look like. What will not be done the old way</p>	<p>The new curriculum, and developing pupils' independent learning, developing blended learning, the use of digital, all these are skills which teachers have adapted to over the covid period. It is expected that there can be more pupil independence when they return to school as this has developed over the period and progress being made with pupils.</p> <p>There are many positives from this period which can be taken forward in the curriculum.</p> <p>From the perspective of leadership, it is likely that online meetings will continue for headteacher and governor meetings which will mean less time and cost spent on travelling.</p>

Outcomes:

- **Noted.**

5.	WORK PROGRAMME
-----------	-----------------------

The Committee noted the provisional forward work programme as set out on the agenda. However, it was noted that the timetable could be subject to change and was dependent on when transformation reports would be available for consideration.

County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)