

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

Portfolio holder for Education - Cllr Phyl Davies

Date: 7th May 2020

REPORT TITLE: Emergency childcare hubs and continuity of learning

REPORT FOR: Information – Cabinet.

Emergency Childcare hubs

On Friday 20th March 2020, all schools across Wales were closed and the Easter holiday was brought forward for learners due to the Covid outbreak. Schools were repurposed to become childcare hubs for key workers' children and vulnerable learners. Over the period of a week Powys had set up 15 childcare hubs for school age pupils across the authority, two of which were for special schools and PRU. Emergency Childcare hubs were set up and commenced in Powys on 27th March 2020.

Hubs in Powys operate from 8am – 6pm seven days a week including bank holiday weekends. Staff, including headteachers, teachers, support staff, catering staff, cleaning staff, sports development officers and officers from the local authority schools service, work in the childcare hubs on a rota basis throughout school holidays and weekends. This work has been commendable and our thanks goes to all the staff involved who have had to adapt and change working patterns very rapidly.

Numbers in the early year hubs are up to 154 children attending and in the school age hubs up to 245 across the LA. Nearly 400 children are supported in the childcare hubs across Powys at this time. Numbers in the hubs have been increasing of late as a result of the intentional joint work between schools and children's services to ensure that more vulnerable learners are accessing the hubs.

Three meals are available throughout the day which include breakfast, lunch and tea. Pupils attending the hubs who are eligible for free school meals have meals provided in the hubs. Social distancing is adhered to throughout the day including at meal times. A cleaner is on site throughout the day to ensure surfaces, door handles etc are wiped and disinfected throughout the day. Handwashing routines are regular and managed well.

Parents book their children into the hubs through an online booking system which is working effectively. Transport is provided for those children who are eligible.

PPE is available in all the childcare hubs. In the 13 mainstream hubs, PPE is available for dealing with pupils who are displaying symptoms and need to be isolated with a member of staff until they are collected by their parents. In the special childcare hub and early years' hubs, PPE is available for feeding and/or intimate care as well. Long distance thermometers

have also been purchased for use in the hubs. Tests are available for all staff who may be displaying symptoms.

Each emergency has a hub leader who is usually the headteacher of the school in which the hub is based. Other headteachers support and lead on different days of the week. Safeguarding is a priority with a designated lead for safeguarding on site each day. Hubs follow the Welsh government guidance for Emergency childcare hubs published in the beginning of April.

The set-up of the emergency childcare hubs has been very successful across Powys and is an excellent example of joint working across schools, across different service areas in the local authority and with the Trade Unions.

1. Continuity of learning plan

The Local Authority is working closely with WG, Estyn, ERW and other local authorities to develop the plan. The main priority should be to ensure that as many people as possible remain fit, healthy and have a positive attitude towards life and will be ready for work or learning when this traumatic period is over. At the same time, we need to ensure that the learning pupils undertake during this period enables them to engage in their learning effectively and make progress.

The introduction of distance learning is a very different way of educating our pupils. For nearly all pupils in our county, they are learning at home with the support and help of their parents. This is new territory for us all, including the teaching profession, many of whom also have their own children at home at this time.

Distance learning should not be about replicating the normal classroom experience in the home. Circumstances make this virtually impossible. During this period, it is not reasonable to expect distance learning experiences to mirror learning which learners get at school.

Schools need to prepare for this new method of teaching and learning. Schools will need to consider the training needs of their staff in order that they can deliver distance learning experiences.

In Powys in week one and two of the continuity of learning plan, the school service has been pro-active in providing schools with guidance, facilitating the sharing of good practice and establishing connectivity issues.

We established that there were a substantial number of families that did not have a suitable device for learning and also some that had no wi-fi access. As a result of this, clusters of schools were asked to identify spare school devices that could be repurposed for home usage for those learners who did not have devices. The collaboration between and across clusters has been excellent and has resulted in all learners throughout Powys now having a suitable device for learning. Working closely with Welsh Government we have also been able to ensure learners have access to Wi-fi through the purchase of 4G dongles which are due to arrive on Monday 11th May 2020.

Teachers have access to a wealth of resources through the Welsh Government learning platform HWB. All learners in our schools have a HWB username and password which enables them to access safe, reliable content for learning. The regional consortium ERW also facilitates shared resources which informs the development of the Powys continuity of learning plan which is updated on a weekly basis and sent to all schools for support and guidance.

Clusters of schools are meeting at least weekly, with the cluster leader of learning meeting fortnightly with the Interim Chief education officer and senior challenge advisor as well in order to discuss progress, issues and to share their practice. To date, clusters are at different stages of developing the joint working with some clusters sharing joint projects for example on the NHS and other clusters working on the new curriculum areas of learning and pooling resources under these headings. The purpose of the joint meeting is to share these resources across the county to ensure more consistency moving forward.

To date, all of our clusters are working on continuity of learning plans. A Powys Distance Learning Plan has been written which is an operational plan to put the continuity of learning plan into practice across our schools. There are key themes which include Wellbeing, Connectivity, Learning and learners, Remote teaching and Provision. This also includes a fortnightly publication of actions to support schools to implement the plan.

There are many examples of good practice which include joint projects, transition work and providing parents with guidance. All clusters have a challenge advisor supporting the work. Examples of good practice are being shared in clusters and across clusters through the use of teams. In addition, work has already begun on transition, from early years' settings to primary schools, from primary to secondary schools and to support our young people at 16 and 18 with their next, very important life changes.

Schools are also being supported through the production of examples of remote and digital learning shared with schools on a weekly basis. The focus is on approaches to digital learning, resources and networks. Many of these examples are from Powys schools that have adopted these methods successfully.

Many of our schools are embracing the change with confidence and at pace. Although not in their school buildings, the headteacher and governing body of each school still have the responsibility for teaching and learning for their own pupils. If parents have issues regarding the work the school is providing, then the process remains the same as it was before the school buildings were closed. They should contact the headteacher of their child's school to discuss their concerns.

Nearly all of our schools are supporting our vulnerable learners effectively. This has included all schools, in conjunction with children's services, health colleagues, youth workers, sports development officers working together which includes weekly and often daily phone calls and emails. This has been a key priority for Welsh Government, Estyn and for all of us in Powys in our Continuity of Learning Plan.

This is a challenging time for all involved in our Education system in Wales. The commitment and professionalism shown by school staff, school service staff and across other service areas in the council over the past six weeks has been admirable.

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