



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday,
27 April 2023 at 5.00 pm.

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

**County Borough Councillors – The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee
Councillors were present online:-**

Councillor S Evans (Chair)
Councillor K Webb Councillor M Ashford
Councillor R Bevan Councillor J Brencher
Councillor J Cook Councillor J Elliott
Councillor S Hickman Councillor C Lises
Councillor M Maohoub Councillor C Preedy
Councillor J Smith Councillor J Turner
Councillor D Wood

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr P Booth, Voting Diocesan Authorities Representative
Mr M Veale, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms S Corcoran, Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT
Mr M Silezin, 14-19 Strategy Officer
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Mrs T Watson, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for absence

Mr M Cleverley Mr M Thomas

37 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Agenda item 4 – School Based Counselling

- County Borough Councillor C Preedy - Personal - 'I was a student at Bryncelynnog and received Eye to Eye Counselling during a period mentioned in the report'

Agenda Item 5 – Overview of the Post-16 Curriculum offer across RCT Secondary Schools

- County Borough Councillor J Smith – Personal – 'In my day job, as a Trade Union official, I represent members within the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and I also sit on the Programme

Board for the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER)’

- County Borough Councillor S Evans – Personal – ‘I am linked with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) through my work at the University and there is a link with the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), as well’
- County Borough Councillor S Evans – Personal – ‘The school that my son attends is named in the report’
- County Borough Councillor J Brencher – Personal – ‘A school mentioned in the report, was a school that I taught at’
- County Borough Councillor C Preedy - Personal – ‘Last year I was in my final year as a student at Bryncelynnog’
- County Borough Councillor S Evans – Personal – ‘Dame Julie Lydon, is known to me’
- County Borough Councillor C Lises – Personal – ‘I declare an interest in relation to Hawthorn and Pontypridd High in that I am the Chair of Our Children First Action Group’

Agenda Item 6 – Annual School Exclusion Performance Report for the Academic Year 2021/22

- County Borough Councillor S Evans – Personal – ‘The school that my son attends is named in the report’

38 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 2nd March 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting subject to amendment to the minutes subject to the following amendment:-

Page 12, paragraph 2, line 16, reads ‘referred to FPNs as a last result.....’ but should read ‘referred to FPNs as a last resort’.....’.

The Chair added that in that meeting on the 2nd March 2023, Members had discussed establishing a Task and Finish Group in relation to the report on School Modernisation and queried with the Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer, around the progress, timing, and scheduling of that. The Chair requested that the Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer come back to the Committee with a progress report, on that Task & Finish Group, before the next meeting.

39 CONSULTATION LINKS

Members were advised that the consultation links, were available through the ‘RCT Scrutiny’ website. Members were reminded that information was provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration by the Committee and were circulated monthly and updated on a fortnightly basis.

The Head of Inclusion Services explained to Members that this was a twofold report, with the first section concentrating on the counselling services, and the second on the broader wellbeing initiatives within RCT. She then took Members through the background, at section 3, before advising that section 4 contained 2 main subsections, before summarising the main highlights of the activity and impact of the counselling services provided to children and young people, during the activity year 2021 and 2022, but advised Members it was important to note that due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to make direct data comparisons, between the last 3 academic years, so in many cases, she would make comparisons with data, over a 5 year period. The Head of Inclusion Services then took Members through the main highlights, before concluding that the report provided clear evidence of the effectiveness of the counselling service in RCT, in improving the wellbeing of children and young people as well as being central to the strategic planning of the education directorate and due to the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, upon the wellbeing of pupils, families and staff, would remain a core element of the ongoing work and strategies.

A Member referred to paragraph 4.20, in respect of waiting times for children in years 3-5 and the Step 4 provision, in terms of the wellbeing and behaviour of students, highlighted on pages 30 to 31, and asked, moving forward, if Officers could monitor those 2 aspects.

The Head of Inclusion Services explained in relation to the waiting times, it was noted by Eye to Eye that this was due to capacity issues in relation to those delays, noting that with children in years 3-5, it was not a statutory requirement to provide counselling, and therefore the criteria were very strict. In terms of the Step 4 provision, there was lots of evidence of the impact of this, and progress would continue to be monitored and an evaluation report was taken to Cabinet and was available on the website. Staff wellbeing was a high priority, noting the new staff wellbeing service which was well utilised and was awaiting an evaluation report. She noted that the whole school approaches grant, was evaluated, on an annual basis and reported back to Welsh Government (WG).

The Director of Education Inclusion Services then picked up on the Members points around staff wellbeing, acknowledging this was a significant priority and that services supported schools with a whole raft of research informed strategies.

The Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT reassured the Member, highlighting the conference held last term, in terms of teaching and learning and behaviour strategies that could be implemented to support wellbeing. She also highlighted the work around restorative approaches as well as explaining about the Team Around the School (TAS) initiatives. In terms of wellbeing, there was a huge amount of work around the CARI platform so that the right areas were being targeted for staff, whilst continuing to monitor.

A Member sought clarification around the scale, in relation to 4.23, graph 8, and 4.24, graph 9.

The Head of Inclusion Services acknowledged that she would get back to the Member, in terms of the core assessment outcomes and range.

The Member referred to 4.72, in relation to the Virtual School for Children Looked After (CLA) and asked how this was organised whilst recognising that this was a new initiative.

The Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT explained that there were 2 reports online. One was the new ALN legislation, and its impact and relevance to CLA, which referenced the virtual school and there had also been an evaluation report on Year 1, to date, of the pilot for the virtual school model and progress against year 1 implementation, but was happy to provide a further report at some future point if this was required

The Member referred to 4.82 and asked for clarification around the number of sessions mentioned and take up of CARI and highlighted that the area of staff wellbeing was so crucial and including that information in any report coming forward should describe the support that had been given since Covid-19, how many staff used the platform and how staff were being looked after and supported

The Head of Achievement and Wellbeing explained about the partnership with occupational health and schools to develop the CARI pilot, and to obtain termly feedback from those pilots, so this was an ongoing training opportunity for school. In terms of the actual figures relating to engagement she would need get back to the Member.

A Member acknowledged that that counselling was presented as a one off and asked if there was any understanding of how many students were accessing further support.

The Head of Inclusion Services said she did not have that data but would enquire with Eye to Eye.

The Member referred to the formal Strategic Plan for Wellbeing 2022-2025, and noted there were a number of approaches listed, and sought clarification if this was a holistic approach for adoption, across the county borough.

The Head of Inclusion Services explained there were a number of theoretical models, but PERMA was the overarching one. The Trauma Informed Schools approach was very much promoted, which took a whole school approach, but the other approaches were seen as a complimentary range of approaches that sat within that overarching PERMA approach.

The Member then referred to Page 67 and asked for clarification in terms of the Boxall Profile.

The Head of Inclusion Services advised that this was a diagnostic assessment so it could be carried out so that schools could identify where there was more of an identified need, in terms of wellbeing, social and emotional behavioural development, etc., and the child needed something very bespoke to their needs and then you could baseline the child, putting in intervention and then do a post intervention assessment to measure impact, whereas PERMA was used as a more universal approach.

The Member then referred more generally around the strategic priorities, and about having some more KPI's, so what were the hard stats, on performance, whilst recognising some of these were hard to measure e.g., through Estyn

inspection reports, a subjective thing, or attribute some evidence towards it.

The Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT, explained that in conjunction with the CSC, the annual action plan for the wellbeing strategy, was currently being written, and would provide this when finalised.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services added that performance measures for the delivery plans, had been picked up in the Estyn inspection report. Historically, the service had been data rich prior to the suspension of performance measures. In light of these national changes, moving forward, its Estyn's view that new ways of measuring performance is now needed, and this is something that is going to be a priority for further development.

The Member then referred to Page 70, the last bullet point, under Strategic Priority 2, and asked how much confidence was there that those schools had the ability to be able to deliver the approaches, through the medium of Welsh, as well.

The Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT acknowledged that the service worked very closely with CSC in terms of the new curriculum and the Health and Wellbeing AoLE, referred to, with everything through the medium of Welsh, whilst expecting the commissioned school improvement service to be delivering the training and professional learning in exactly the same way. In terms of all the other aspects of teaching and learning, and wellbeing, everything was available through the medium of Welsh at this point in time. The Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT confirmed that she would ensure CSC asked for some feedback on the delivery, through the medium of Welsh, which would be put in the WESP.

The Member sought clarification around the number of schools using the PERMA Wellbeing tool, whether 95 or 99.

The Head of Inclusion Services to confirm.

The Member asked, in relation to Family Engagement Officers (FEO's), that with the pressures on funding now coming down the line to schools, was it a priority to ensure that provision remained.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that to make the resources reach more schools, match funding arrangements, had been looked at. About £950k had been invested since the beginning of the pandemic in FEO's. The impression from WG was that this was a priority for them as well. The driver initially, was very much about improving attendance rates, but the role had become much broader than that. She hoped that schools would still see attendance as a priority for them given the ongoing challenges facing schools. It is a question of schools balancing priorities, with some difficult decisions for schools to make.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to note that Members had scrutinised and commented on the information contained within the report, having made several requests for further information, whilst considering the two reports, on virtual schools, which had already gone to the CPB, and for Members to consider whether this should feature as an item on the future FWP.

OVERVIEW OF THE POST-16 CURRICULUM OFFER ACROSS RCT SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The 14-19 Strategy Officer presented Members with the report, advising that the report was in 2 distinct halves, the first half, provided Members with an overview of the Post-16 curriculum offer across RCT secondary and through schools which, he noted was very much shaped by the geography and 2009 Learning and Skills Measure, before continuing through the background of the report. The second half of the report noted the Hazelkorn review and recommendation that WG create an arms-length body to regulate and have authority over the whole PCET sector. This body would be the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) and would replace the current Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The 14-19 Strategy Officer continued that CTER, was in the process of being created and since writing the report, both the Chair and Vice-Chair had been appointed, with 2 further appointments advertised, and appointed to. The Commission would be responsible for further and higher education, apprenticeships, work-based learning and sixth forms. It would also be responsible for WG funded research and innovation and would have responsibility for funding, monitoring quality, enhancing provision, and improving relationships with employers. He acknowledged that this brought into question the role Estyn would have in the future, which may have implications for local authorities, in terms of six forms.

A Member sought clarification around the ability to study, for example French or Geography, at Hawthorn and Pontypridd High, which had no provision.

The 14-19 Strategy Officer advised, that RCT uniquely still offered transport to the nearest provider of the young person's choice, of level 3 qualifications.

The Member asked, in terms of outcomes, whether closer analysis could be done, in terms of individual schools, noting the nine local area curricula operational in RCT.

The 14-19 Strategy Officer explained that the outputs were very important, and could be distinguished, between the schools, down to pupil level or value added based on their GCSE results, as a baseline. That information was available, subject to GDPR.

A Member raised concern around the learner numbers and the threshold numbers, noting that CTER, may consider, where numbers were low, to rationalise things further.

The 14-19 Strategy Officer acknowledged that the number of 250 was not enshrined in any law, and so it was possible to run a smaller sixth form with fewer than 250, especially when working in collaboration with others. The key going forward, was strong voices on CTER, who had a good knowledge of the sixth form environment, the funding, as well as the performance.

The Chair thanked the 14-19 Strategy Officer but felt that there were a few things missing from the report, which she detailed, but recognised this was a snapshot in time.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that this was a new report, which could be tweaked, and the information adjusted for future reports, to include the requested data and information.

The Chair concluded that she would be happy to receive a more detailed report, in the next municipal year. She felt that the committee needed to keep a watching brief on CTER, but also in relation to the approach to six form education and level 3 and the post compulsory education piece, which was important.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge, that Members had scrutinised the contents of the report and wished to receive a more detailed report in the next municipal year.

42 ANNUAL SCHOOL EXCLUSION PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2021/22

The Head of Inclusion Services explained to Members that she would pull out the main points of the report, continuing, that Section 3 provided contextual information regarding the processes and procedures, in relation to exclusions, in line with WG guidance, and also provided a brief overview of some of the alternatives, to exclusions, that could be considered by schools whilst recognising the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon the rates of exclusions, from March 2020 onwards, so there was an emphasis in the report, of comparisons over the last 3 years, but also with pre-Covid data sets. Section 4, then provided a summary of key indicators relating to both permanent and fixed term exclusions in 2021 and 2022, compared to 2020 and 2021 before moving on to national benchmarking data, in section 5. Sections 6 to 12, then provided Members with an analysis of local exclusion data, in relation to 2020, 2021 and 2022, and the Head of Inclusion Services, noted the key highlights. Section 13 then provided Members with an overview of how the local authority would address the rising exclusions in RCT, including the strategies. The Head of Inclusion Services concluded that the local authority, acknowledged there had been a concerning trend of increasing exclusions, during several years, prior to the first academic year, affected by the pandemic, and that there had been a sharp increase in both permanent and fixed term exclusions, again, over the past academic year and the local authority was implementing a range of strategies designed to work collaboratively with schools, and other agencies, to reduce exclusions.

A Member asked for an anonymised example of a school where there had been concerns, and where intervention had taken place, to bring things around, e.g., what were the issues, how were they addressed and what was the outcome.

The Head of Inclusion Services confirmed that there were certainly examples of that support and challenge in the summer term, at one school, and it was simply a matter of sitting down and initiating that discussion with the school about how they reframed, in terms of behaviour management and thresholds, for exclusions, and alternative to exclusions, within the school, with a fresh pair of eyes. There was another school, where that support and challenge took place, within the summer, who had drastically reduced their exclusions, over this academic year. There were also examples where Team Around the School (TAS) meetings had taken place, in the last term and it was hoped to see the impact of that, during this term. The Head of Inclusion Services advised that she might be able to provide a flavour of some of the actions, from the Team Around the School (TAS), meetings.

A Member asked, in relation to approaches to exclusions, how did the service achieve that consistency, noting that one school might be very lenient in its approach and adopt a different type of sanction to another school, acknowledging that this was more in respect of temporary exclusions.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that the key thing to consider was that behaviour occurred in context, and one size, didn't necessarily fit all. Schools need to be able to demonstrate robust self-evaluation and improvement planning to inform strategic approaches. Discussion had taken place around pressures on staff wellbeing, on families and on learners, so it was important to support schools to improve practice, particularly in this challenging period, and that included ensuring that professional learning was strong, and that approaches were not too punitive, because in her experience, exclusions didn't really change behaviour in the longer term. Sometimes these issues, in terms of self-regulation, happened because children hadn't learned those appropriate social, emotional, and behavioural skills to manage and regulate their own behaviour. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services noted there were some real success stories in schools, but the practice around sharing that good practice, needed to be strengthened.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge, that Members had scrutinised and commented on the contents of the report and considered whether they wished to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

43 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair advised Members this was the last meeting of this municipal year, and she felt that the year appeared to have gone by in a flash. She thanked Members for being part of the committee and for their contributions and hoped they had a sense of satisfaction, in being able to digest and scrutinise the reports, in detail, acknowledging there had been some excellent questions asked. She advised Members she had thoroughly enjoyed being Chair, and thanked Members for their patience. The Chair concluded by thanking officers.

44 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 6.40 pm

**Cllr S Evans
Chair**