



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday,
20 June 2023 at 5.00 pm.

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

County Borough Councillors – The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor S Evans (Chair)
Councillor M Maohoub Councillor C Preedy
Councillor J Smith

The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present online:-

Councillor K Webb Councillor J Brencher
Councillor J Elliott Councillor S Emanuel
Councillor C Lises Councillor D Wood

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr P Booth, Voting Diocesan Authorities Representative
Mr M Cleverley, Representing NASUWT and Teachers' Panel

Officers in attendance:-

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms C Edwards, Head of Service Transformation And Data Systems
Ms A Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Mr T Britton, Head of Achievement RCT – primary sector
Ms S Corcoran, Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT
Mr D Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service

Others in attendance:-

Mr C Philips, Assistant Director, Estyn

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors Ashford, Cook and Hickman and Co-opted Members, Mr Patterson, Mr Thomas, and Mr Veale.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations were made pertaining to the agenda:

Agenda Item 2 – Estyn’s Report on Education Services RCTCBC

- County Borough Councillor S Evans – Personal – ‘My children attend two schools in RCT, which would have been assessed as part of this report, and I am also a vice-chair of governors of one of the schools in RCT, which also would have been included as part of this inspection’
- County Borough Councillor C Lises – Personal – ‘I am chair of governors at a school in RCT and also chair of the Our Children First, action group’
- County Borough Councillor D Wood – Personal – ‘I am one of the governors for a local primary school’
- County Borough Councillor J Smith – Personal – ‘I am a governor at schools included in the report, but also in my full-time employment, I am a senior trade union official, that negotiates for Estyn’
- County Borough Councillor M Maohoub – Personal – ‘I am a governor of one of the schools mentioned in the report and, I am also a Member of the Governance and Audit Committee’
- County Borough Councillor C Preedy – Personal – ‘I am a governor at a primary school, and I was recently a student of one of the secondary schools inspected, so know students that still attend’
- County Borough Councillor S Emanuel – Personal – ‘Both of my children attend a school, mentioned in the report, and I’m a governor on two schools, also’
- County Borough Councillor J Brencher – Personal – ‘I am a governor of school that was mentioned in the report, that was associated with the special measures comment’
- County Borough Councillor J Elliott – Personal – ‘I am a governor Cwmbach Primary School’

3 ESTYN'S REPORT ON EDUCATION SERVICES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the inspection process and the outcomes of the Estyn inspection of the Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC), which took place in January 2023. The detailed report could be found in Appendix A and in the main, the report provided a positive picture of Estyn’s view of Education Services in RCT. Section 4 provided some background information, with the Inspection process detailed in Section 5, noting the LGES Inspection Framework was underpinned by three inspection areas, which were detailed. Members were advised that Inspectors did not inspect or evaluate all education services during a core inspection. The

Inspection Report was clearly detailed, so the Director of Education and Inclusion Services would not go through that in full, but highlighted the high-level summary of Estyn's findings, which were detailed in Section 6.2, and the lengthy report in Appendix A. Estyn identified 3 key recommendations, which were detailed in Section 8, and clearly these recommendations would be the focus of improvement in 2023, and beyond and, and was already reflected in the delivery plans and improvement actions, for the forthcoming financial year. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services concluded that the report would be considered by the Council's Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet, in future meetings. The overall inspection of Education Services in RCT was very positive and the feedback provided by stakeholders was also very positive as well with Estyn finding many areas of strength in the Directorate as well as some key areas for improvement. These areas for improvement had already been taken on board and were the focus of improvement planning and delivery.

The Chair thanked the Director of Education and Inclusion and acknowledged that the Committee felt it was a very robust report, and offered the Committees congratulations, noting there were several areas of good practice identified and the Directorate needed to be commended, for that and also the fact that Estyn had requested the 2 case studies, which was something to be proud of. The Chair felt that the recommendations Estyn had posed, were fair and very much actionable.

A Member referred to page 2, paragraph 4 of the Inspection report, in respect of 'Overall, the quality of support and the information provided by the CSC is too variable' and asked for clarification. The Member also asked if the same data was available to the Committee, as was presented to Estyn. The Member also referred to page 15, paragraph 3 of the inspection report, in relation to 'the impact of poverty' and asked if Estyn could have strengthened that statement.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that in terms of the variability, the interpretation of that feedback, was in relation to some of the reporting. Estyn had taken a cross section of SIPL reports which detailed the work of Improvement Partners and Strategic Teams and felt there was a degree of inconsistency. The service was working closely with CSC around expectations, to ensure that the information that was recorded, was very much based on first hand evidence, with an evaluative nature to the observations/findings. This was considered to be essential in order to enable the local authority to make informed judgements about schools and to respond in a timely manner in respect of schools causing concern. Members were advised that the service had also tightened its own internal processes for identifying emerging concerns in schools, with heads of service and CSC colleagues meeting regularly to share that intelligence. Members were advised that CSC had been working on their quality assurance processes, as there should be no surprises when Estyn inspected a school. It was important that information and intelligence provided by CSC was accurate, and there had been improvement in this regard, with ongoing work and a partnership approach adopted.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services continued that in terms of data, what was nationally available could be shared but there had been significant changes in the system during the pandemic with a suspension in national performance measures. As a consequence, this had restricted what could be shared from a data perspective. Where internal data was available, that was

shared with the Committee. The Service is entitled to use some school datasets for its own self-evaluation purposes, with just some restrictions on publishing certain datasets.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained, with regard to the impact of poverty, that at the start of the inspection, Estyn had received a presentation to provide an understanding of the context and they were empathetic of those challenges, whilst also scrutinising the data in a very robust way.

A Member referred to page 1 of the Inspection report, in relation to the delegated school budget per pupil in 2022-23, noting it was the slightly lower than the Wales average, and asked for assurance going forward that the shortfall was no longer there. The Member also referred to page 6, paragraph 2, of the Inspection report, in relation to 'the rate of permanent exclusions was broadly in line with the national average' and asked if there should be more data to ensure scrutiny, in the future of how the service had improved, in line with the R3 recommendation.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged she was happy to provide further detail on the shift in the Education budget information, because colleagues in finance had provided updates, noting in the School Budget Forum, that school budgets had been protected, possibly to the detriment of some central services. Sometimes direct comparisons were not made when looking at key statistical releases, because these datasets did not always capture other resources given to schools. For example, additional resources have been provided for family engagement officers, STEP 4 provisions, etc. It was recognised that it had been a particularly challenging period for schools, with difficult decisions having to be made.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services continued that with regard to permanent exclusions, she felt that Estyn were referring to the 2017-19, national data sets. Detailed attendance and exclusion reports had been presented to the Committee and was included in the work programme for next year, so this would give Members an additional opportunity to review the data. It was a strong focus for the service and a fair recommendation.

A Member referred to page 4 of the Inspection report, in relation to R1, and asked what steps would be taken to firmly embed a more self-reflective, listening, and co-ordinated work ethos across the Directorate. The Member also referred to page 11, paragraph 2 of the Inspection report, in relation to the ALN referrals process, and asked what steps would be taken to improve the process and improve the portal system.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained in relation to the self-evaluation, that there wasn't an issue with the quality, per se, and really in-depth self-evaluation was done, but part of the issue was around the need to streamline the documentation, with plans already in place to make it more succinct and ensure it was very evaluative. Estyn felt there was a clear thread from the Corporate to the Directorate 3-year strategic document, down to the annual Directorate delivery plan but they wanted to see greater alignment from the Directorate Plan down to Service Plans. This has been tackled, to ensure a consistent format of service plans was adopted. Estyn were also keen that the service incorporated new performance measures or perhaps greater clarity

around success criteria, which had now been assigned to all the actions in the current Directorate Delivery Plan for 2023-24. In terms of stakeholder feedback, it could be evidenced that the service had consulted with wide ranging partners. However, with learner voice, this area had already been identified as an area that required strengthening, so there was an engagement plan in the process of being developed.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained in terms of the Portal, this was in the Delivery Plan, and the service was well aware of the issue and acknowledged that some schools were frustrated with the clunkiness of the system so the uploading of digital information needed to be streamlined. This work had already been progressed, and new processes would be shared with schools in September. A lot of training was provided, and focus groups had taken place with schools and, feedback was being taken onboard.

A Member referred to page 16, paragraph 4 of the Inspection report in respect of the comment around the comparative financial data with other local authorities and asked if this was easily addressed through the action plan. The Member also referred to page 11, paragraph 4 of the Inspection report in respect of ALN complex needs class comment and asked the Director for her view on that. The Member also referred to page 2, paragraph 2 in respect of immersion opportunities and asked how much work was done with other local authorities. The Member concluded by asking why there was no mention of Step 4 in the Inspection report.

The Head of Service Transformation & Education explained that in terms of finance, vigorous benchmarking was completed, against other authorities, through the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) finance group but stressed that there were some variances in terms of what was delegated to schools, and what was retained centrally but could provide some more information on what was included in the delegated sums.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing then provided Members with an update on what was being done around bullying in terms of the pupil voice work and explained a redesigned framework with a bullying focus, was being used to undertake a senior leadership team (SLT) survey, which would be coupled with children led focus groups. It was hoped to complete this work by the summer term, with a report formalised over the summer break, with this being phase 1 of pupil voice, around bullying. An action plan would be developed in the autumn term to look at next steps.

The Service Director for 21st Century Schools explained that some great strides had been made on Welsh language immersion, with the right staff now appointed and in place. Lots of networking had been done with external agencies as well as other local authorities and the first 3 learners started access to Welsh language immersion provision on the 12th June 2023. It was hoped that the numbers requesting Welsh language immersion would continue to grow. It was noted that although this was a key recommendation, it has been seen in a positive light and work is now well underway to progress developments.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provided Members with an update on Welsh Language immersion in respect of Heol-Y-Celyn Primary. In terms of developments around the ALN provision, and language immersion, some of that would be covered off in the Annual WESP report, which would come to the Committee and the Language Immersion Teacher could come along

and give her own update as well.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services then explained, in respect of the comment around the ALN complex needs class in the report, that there was very clear criteria for all provisions, but the difficulty was sometimes children had multiple needs, and it was a question of deciding which was the primary need and about the best placement for the learner. It was recognised that it wasn't a precise science and all placements required informed and careful decision making. In terms of Step 4, this was picked up as part of the meetings with Estyn and discussions around that agenda. This was also the case around the poverty agenda and what was done to support young people facing challenges. Estyn were satisfied with what was done, and the service was able to demonstrate that quite robustly.

The Chair summarised by saying that it had been a really good discussion, and reiterated that overall, the Committee felt it was a really positive report, and congratulated the Director of Education and Inclusion Services and her team, as well as schools themselves.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge, that Members had undertaken pre scrutiny of the reports (Attached at Appendix A & B) and had identified further items for inclusion in the Committees future work programme in respect of the work around bullying, the YEPS element and a report in 6 months' time of the how the Estyn recommendations had led to improvements and developments, across the county borough.

4 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair thanked Officers in attendance for their contributions and also to Members for their contributions and questions that had been posed. The Chair reminded Members about Scrutiny Training on Monday 26th June 2023, at 4.30pm, which was a good opportunity to have some training and some of the elements that Members of the Committee, needed to be aware of. In addition, prior to the next meeting of the Committee on the 19th July 2023, at 5pm, there would be a Joint Committee with the Community Services Scrutiny Committee at 4pm, to examine the notice of motion in respect of Child Poverty. An alternative date would be sought, in respect of the 19th July, pre-meeting.

5 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 6.09 pm

**Cllr S Evans
Chair**