

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 DECEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors Boes, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne and Hopkins

Co-opted Members: Carol Cobert (Church in Wales Representative),
Bridgid Corr (Parent Governor Representative) and Celeste Lewis
(Parent Governor Representative)

29 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Church Representative), Councillors Joyce, Melbourne and Simmons.

30 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

31 : COVID-19 RECOVERY IN SCHOOLS

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education), Melanie Godfrey (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning), and Mike Tate (Assistant Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to the meeting). He also welcomed Patrick Brunnock (Headteacher, Corpus Christi RC High School), Claire Skidmore (Headteacher, Radyr Primary School) and Michelle Jones (Headteacher, Lansdowne Primary School).

The Chairperson invited Cllr Merry to make a statement, during which she referenced the long term impact of Covid-19 particular on disadvantaged pupils how have missed a range of experiences.

The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning referred to the changes in the handling and scrutinisation of data, the data now sits with schools and felt that the Committee would benefit from what the three Headteachers speak about their own schools.

The Committee were provided with a [presentation](#) by the Assistant Director, a copy which had been circulated with the agenda.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

Members asked why, when disadvantaged pupils returned to school, their play was very physical and whether there is any information as to why this has happened. Members were advised that the information is mainly anecdotal however there has been an increase in the referrals for speech and language and communication, particularly in Years 3 and 4 which is related to the physical nature of play.

Members discussed covid anxiety leading to a lot of absences and sought clarification as to how widespread and persistent it still is. Members were advised that there are no specific figures however, when looking at persistent attendance below 50% our EOTAS team works specifically with them. The anxiety issues are surfacing when we look at the increase numbers of those young people who have elected to be educated at home; they are withdrawn by parents because of anxiety levels. Work is ongoing with those families to ensure those pupils are not forgotten.

With reference to EOTAS pupils Members sought clarification of the steps taken to encourage those pupils to go back to school. Officers explained that for some pupils, education other than at school is an appropriate education, and there would therefore be a range available outside of school but linked to schools provision. They will remain on the roll. There will be links to provision, maybe through ACT, CAVAC or various different sorts or provision. We are looking to build provision.

Members referred to attainment levels and queried with the difference in marking over the years and the assessment methods, are the figures comparable. Officers advised that it is not possible to use data for comparable reasons which is why individual schools data is not shared. It is used by schools to inform their self-evaluation.

In response to questions from Members, officers provided information about the level of support from Welsh Government (WG) during the pandemic; Headteachers came together extremely quickly to develop a consistent approach, WG quickly worked with Directors of Education to utilise some of the approaches in Cardiff. A consistent voice was provided for the Headteachers. Officers commended WG in terms of the grant funding provided – it was appropriate and it has added value to schools.

Members asked about attendance as most school attendance has decreased. Officers advised that intermittent attendance, a day a week or a week at a time and non attendance has significantly impacted the school attendance figures and moved the attendance figures down. Those that have attended well in the past have probably continued to attend. The importance of good attendance is a formal conversation that is had with parents, although at the present attendance is affected by the outbreaks of Strep and Scarlet Fever as parents are taking their children out of school and they do not want the impact of that before Christmas. Headteachers are trying to get parents to bring their children to school; in some classes there are only 11 and 12 pupils because of the current sickness levels. Families with more than one child are being told to isolate because one child is ill. Parents whose health conditions make them more vulnerable are also keeping children home as they do not want them bringing illness into the home.

Members queried whether there was any financial support going forward with attendance issues, bearing in mind Council budgets are tight. Members were advised that schools are working on cluster attendance policies that helps when breaking down the reasons for the non-attendance. The Association of Directors of Education across Wales are involved in a working group looking specifically at education and are sharing best practice so that there is a consistent approach across Wales.

Members discussed the impact of more viruses on children's education and asked whether there were any means of managing the anxiety of both the children and the

parents. One of the headteachers outlined to Members that it is not just a problem in Cardiff, it is all across Wales. As a group of headteachers they have arranged to share good practice but it is felt that it is going to be a big issue for the future.

Members noted the increase in referrals to speech and language therapists but wondered whether there was any whole school or whole cohort interventions that we are using. Members were provided with information about an assessment called WELCOM in nursery. It assess where the pupil is at with speech and language; 9 of 26 are at age appropriate. Training is being put in place for the teaching assistants, teachers and through the foundation phase. A lot of children coming to the school have communication difficulties.

Members queried the structure of the school day and whether the pandemic had changed this. One of the headteachers provided information about their introduction of 'well being time' throughout the school day – it was done during the pandemic. There was also more down time. This has continued, it is not structured, the children decide what they want to do, for example reading in the library, walking or running outside (Victoria Park or Thompson Park). There are more frequent movement breaks and more flexible timetabling.

Members asked about resourcing, whether WG recognise that there are ongoing resourcing challenges which are over and above schools operating normally, and whether is there any optimism that there may be some additional resourcing found, during what is still a difficult period. The Cabinet Member stressed the importance of investing in the education and wellbeing of our young children in this city. It is more important than ever whilst coming out of Covid. It is understood WG will prioritise spending for the Council as a Local Authority and hopefully invest in young people. The Director advised that there were ongoing and frequent conversations taking place between officers, WG officials, Councillor Merry and her fellow politicians; the settlement is still awaited. The point was made that it is not always about the money, but the terms and conditions in which it is received. It is also about how, as a City, the Council draws on all the resources in the City to put that help and support around schools.

Members noted that it is clear that the core purpose of assessment is rightly for schools to have the tools to intervene and support children and recognise their progress and so forth, but queried how WG is going to assess how the Welsh system is performing, particularly in light of all the disruption over the last few years. Officers advised that the direction of travel over the last 4 years has been a move away from high stakes data. Schools still have data available and they will use that to self-evaluate as well. There is also the new accountability framework and the responsibilities of different stakeholders within that framework. It is important to move away from the bar use of data and actually understanding what the data is telling us. There are wider conversations to be had and reported back to the Committee.

Members queried why if a child is late and misses registration why they are then marked as absent. Officers advised that there was an Attendance Policy which goes out to schools; it deals mainly with persistent absenteeism, an element of flexibility and discretion would be expected however, the headteacher would have knowledge of the families background. Officers did not believe it was a consistent practice. In

this particular instance Officers confirmed it would depend on the length of the absence, and the knowledge of the family's background.

Members made reference to teams still working in the Recovery Board, and asked how much longer it was like to continue and what other roles it has. The Director advised that across the authority there is wider integration which is important and needs to happen because of the impact of the pandemic. The Recovery Board will continue until it is no longer needed but its work is ever growing; it is not a finite board and will probably continue into the medium to longer term future to enable that wider and necessary integration of services.

Members referred to the increase in home learning since the pandemic and asked about what is done to ensure that the level of learning is consistent, or to get them back into school, and also an increase in counselling. Members were advised that those in elective home education (EHE) are tracked, work is undertaken with the families directly to encourage a return to education, again, there are a number of reasons for this, in particular the anxiety element. The Council does have a responsibility in terms of safeguarding to maintain contact and encourage reengagement. In terms of counselling, it was explained to Members that the increase in counselling was a national issue, hence the use of online services so that pupils can use those services rather than face to face counselling. It is also about ensuring that trained counsellors are available and like Children's Service with Social Workers, consideration is being given as to how different forms of practitioners within the Council can be used.

The [presentation](#) also provided Case Studies referred to by the Headteachers; Michelle Jones (Lansdowne Primary at page 23); Claire Skidmore (Radyr Primary at page 32); and Patrick Brunnock (Corpus Christi RC High School at page 38).

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

The Headteachers were asked about the well-being of staff, and Members were told that the huge anxiety level with pupils and parents and the safeguarding concerns were really the issue. It was an unprecedented time and staff were working 24 hours a day 7 days a week. They were effectively permanently "on call". They would be emailing and ringing families regularly, dropping off food parcels and knocking on doors so that they got sight of the children. It was a very difficult time. Members discussed the importance of supporting staff going forward.

Members commended the presentations by the Headteachers.

Members asked about the first hand contact with families and face to face contact and whether that contact from the relevant partners is happening as it should, and also noted that there was still a delay in the response to referrals. Members were advised by the Headteachers that care and support meetings and child protection conferences are still online and currently it is only if a family is persistent that they are happening face to face. Improvements still need to take place. An example of the delays in relation to referrals was provided, the neurodevelopmental pathways currently as a 30 month waiting list, as schools it is therefore important for us to look at what can be put in place to support those children during that period, but schools

do not have that level of specialism particularly if there is then a diagnosis of autism or ADHD, it does make it more difficult to support those children.

Members enquired whether there were areas that the headteachers felt that the Council had not done well and what areas did they think we should learn from to protect children's education should there be a similar situation in the future. Headteachers advised that it was a team effort, everyone was in it together. No one was personally making cuts or changes. No one could pre-empt what happened. Things were being dealt with on a daily basis. It was very fast paced. The communication was very strong.

In relation to the learning, Members were advised that there will be learning from the process, which will be evaluated, there is a lot to learn, there are positives, there are areas of development. I was unprecedented. Schools are constantly evolving and updating practices on the basis of what they have learned.

Members sought clarification surrounding staff exits, members were advised that some staff found returning to school difficult; they have seen the impact of Covid on their families. There are teachers who also cannot access support for their own children so have to consider their priorities.

Members asked about occupational therapy services in schools, and were advised there can be referrals and reports and support for individual cases but there is not focussed involvement in schools.

Members noted the importance of not stigmatising children and queried whether it had been raised as a concern and how was it best addressed. Members were advised by the Headteacher, Corpus Christi that the cohort of pupils he had were amazing, they took it on the chin, they did as they were told and the teachers were trusted with the assessed grades. Stigmatisation he could not really comment on, as his results were almost a straight line through the pandemic.

Members queried the challenges of online learning and were advised that those who taught the practical subjects more difficult, they are more hands on, but the other departments were brilliant. They were prepared and well resourced and made it fun. Primary schools are finding, as an example, that the use of online learning and digital learning means that they can provide more modern language education for their children.

Members referred to the lack of toilet facilities which had been referred to by the Headteacher, Corpus Christi which results in queues for the toilet as only 2 pupils were allowed in at any one time. Members were advised that funding has been and still is an issue particularly bearing in mind the funding that has been needed to support the pupils pastorally, for example well-being and inclusion, care, support and guidance. There were in excess of 100 safeguarding incidents in a term, that has not been taken into account in the schools budget.

Members referred to the mask mandate in schools and asked whether it impeded learning in any way. Members were advised that the masks were hated, it was difficulty to support children, particularly those language difficulties. Staff did not want to wear them, children were frightened of them. It was a huge challenge.

Members asked further about remote learning, it was noted that pupils missed teaching assistants, as they really make progress in the classroom, but overall, the online learning was a real success. Teachers and pupils were trained before they left school.

The Youth Council representative sought clarification about mixed ability classes and were advised that initially it was for years 7 and 8 and now year 9 has been added. It is going well, but they still set in Maths but across the rest of the school it is calm, there is good teaching.

As a result of a question, members were advised last year there was not a reduction in grades in Year 11. They all engaged with the online learning, there had been training and resources made available to all which helped.

The Chair thanked all for their attendance but particularly the Headteachers for their presentations which have been emotional and inspirational.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

32 : SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLANNING TASK & FINISH GROUP REPORT

The Chair outlined his meeting with Councillor Hopkins and the SOP Team on 7 December to discuss the proposals relating to Moorland Early Years Unit and Replacement Flying Start: Procurement of Contractor for Construction ahead of its consideration at Cabinet on the 15 December.

He advised that their views and observations are set out in the report. He also referred to one query that was outstanding; whether any of the buildings earmarked for demolition in the proposal were listed. An update has now been received, none of them are earmarked for demolition or are listed.

RESOLVED: To note the comments and observations made by the Task & Finish Group, and that the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee.

33 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS REPORT

Members were provided with a summary of the Committee's business and updated on the Correspondence received.

RESOLVED to:

- note the progress in relation to the Task & Finish Group and the EOTAS Inquiry Task & Finish Group;
- note the progress of those items distributed informally and the verbal updates
- approve the latest CYPSC Forward Work Programme for January to April 2023.

34 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None

35 : WAY FORWARD

Members discussed the information received and identified a number of issues which the Chairman agreed would be included in the letters that would be sent, on behalf of the Committee, to the relevant Cabinet Members and Officers.

36 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee is to be confirmed, although at the present time is due to be 21 February.

The meeting terminated at 7.50 pm