

Date: 21 March 2024

My Ref: CYP/SOP_ALN_Admissions March 2024



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Councillor Sarah Merry
Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education
County Hall
Atlantic Wharf
CARDIFF
CF10 4UW

Dear Sarah,

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 MARCH 2024 -
SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLANNING: ALN POST CONSULTATION &
ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS 2025/26**

Please accept my thanks on behalf of the Committee for attending the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to provide us with the opportunity to consider the draft reports on ALN post-consultation; and Admissions Arrangements 2025/26 prior to their consideration at Cabinet on the 21 March 2024. Please also pass on our thanks to Richard Portas; Michele Duddridge-Friedl; Brett Andrewartha; and Jennie Hughes.

The following comments and observations were made by Members at the SOP Task & Finish Group meeting with you on the 12th March 2024; as well as during the Way Forward at the formal meeting:

**PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL
LEARNING NEEDS (ALN)**

Issues arising from the Task & Finish Group meeting – 12 March 2024

1. The Group acknowledged that they were struck by the scale and extent of the proposals – and welcomed the fact that schools, parents and pupils were largely supportive of the proposals. At formal committee, further assurances were sought on whether there was capacity to manage this.

2. The Group stated that it recognised that this report sets out a stage in the SOP process in relation to ALN, and much of the detail is not yet available. What will be key going forward, and that this scrutiny committee is required to do is to monitor the following:
- How will this proposal improve the quality of learning and provision for the children & young people themselves?
 - Does demand meet supply – how will this be monitored and adjusted accordingly?
 - Has/will there be an evaluation of the impact of the proposals and when? Will this be undertaken in partnership with schools?
 - A need for evidence on outcomes

Emotional Health and Wellbeing and Complex Learning Needs

3. Group Members discussed the following issues that could form part of the *next* Cabinet report:
- The need to explain further the context of having these places – to give better provision to those already known as having ALN? Potential new cases? The new system being more flexible and responsive.
 - The movement/transition from well-being classes to SRBs
 - The capacity and demand for these placements, including those children and young people remaining longer in these places and the impact of this.
 - The impact on the wider school community, given the financial constraints and challenges facing schools
 - The benefits to the school in having an SRB, including on the wider school community, as well as practice, expertise and training.
 - The opportunity to remove any “barriers” to the having a SRB at the school – not a “them and us” set up, but an amalgamation of the whole school working together - a development of the school provision.
 - Support for governors in planning and operating the provision
 - Impact on the Welsh Language and communicating the message that there will be parity of provision in the Welsh medium
4. Group Members raised the **Estyn responses** received which highlighted that the proposals are likely to retain standards, but also highlighted other issues that required further detail. Where possible, answers to the questions had

been responded to in the Cabinet Report (**Appendix A** in the scrutiny papers):

- Support in establishing the provisions
- How out of county provision relate to the proposals
- Whether the places are sufficient to meet demand
- The need for more information on the benefits to the learners (curriculum and wider support provision)
- Eligibility for free transport and the need for clarity in this area
- Ensuring correct placements are made
- Need for more information on:
 - Transition arrangements (including from mainstream into the provision)
 - Costs
 - Amendments to some of the buildings
 - Identification of space within the buildings
 - Proposed staffing of SRBs
 - Welsh Provision (the Welsh Impact Assessment had been provided to Estyn)
 - Community Impact Assessment – the need for clarity on this.
- Impact of learners and their parents
- Response re the recent ALN Inspection document
- Suitability of accommodation and space available for other professionals
- Support for governors in planning and operating the provision

5. In relation to specific schools, Group Members discussed the responses received from schools, as set out in **Appendices A, 3 and 8 in the scrutiny papers**, namely:

- Coed Glas
- Lakeside Primary School
- Greenway Primary School
- Pwll Coch
- Plasmawr
- Herbert Thompson Primary School
- Fairwater Primary School

6. Suggested Way Forward by The Task & Finish Group

The Group agreed that the Cabinet Member and Officers provide assurances to formal committee on the following:

- Rationale for the proposal
- Why is this being done?

- What the implementation arrangements are
- How the funding elements are being addressed
- How the impact will be evaluated in consultation with the schools themselves
- Emphasis on partnership working with individual schools – including addressing pressures and issues raised by individual schools during the consultation

Issues arising from the formal CYPSC meeting – 20 March 2024

7. During the formal meeting, Members asked questions on the following, and were satisfied with responses:

- Costs of transport in relation to ALN, which had previously been raised at the February budget meeting
- Whether Welsh Government funding for transport was sufficient
- Clarity sought on the ability to deliver these proposals in the current climate, particularly around school deficit budgets
- Whether you were confident capital and revenue costs could be met
- “Future proofing” of proposals to ensure that demand meets capacity
- Assurances requested on any recruitment and retention challenges for SEN Teachers teaching via the Welsh language
- Sought information was available to schools in relation to capacity building
- Clarity on mitigating risk around to pupils who don’t quite meet the threshold for an IDP and how the council are working to ensure that these young people do not fall through the net.
- The health and wellbeing of staff required to add this new requirement to an already extremely busy workload.
- Clarity on whether the proposals were fully inclusive for all genders
- Sufficient capacity and levels of work from Coed Glas, Severn and Greenway Primaries – given their responses to the consultation.

8. Members also wanted to log the following as areas of follow-up in the future:

- The response from RhAG (*Appendix 8 to the papers*) which referred to parity of provision; capacity building; communication with parents; costs; the need to spur demand in Welsh; WESP; potential need to travel further than the WM School; risk of moving children to a English medium setting; and lack of training in Welsh in the ALN field.
- The requirement of Welsh medium places to be more geographically spread across the city.

9. Members also agreed that the way forward suggested by the Task & Finish Group in para 6 above be formally adopted by the Committee and responses be sought on this.
10. Members also agreed that the next Cabinet report should contain responses to many of the issues raised by this scrutiny committee and the response from Estyn, which we agreed were too critical in places.

SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2025/2026

Issues arising from the Task & Finish Group meeting – 12 March 2024

11. Cllr Hopkins revisited an issue he raised during the consultation period relating to revised arrangements for keeping yourself on the waiting list and for it to be noted that the answer had been responded to in the response in the report (Appendix 2).
12. The Group sought clarification on the out of chronological age of applications (*paragraph 1.6 page 5 of 27 of the Admissions Policy document*) and talked around a particular case where (at school appeal) the parents of a child had requested their child be placed a year below and were advised by the LEA that the individual school would be responsible for this - but this was not clear in the Policy. It was reiterated that the Policy stated that the Local Authority would look at each request, NOT the school. It was agreed that clarification of this issue would be considered and brought back to the scrutiny committee on the 20th March.
13. The Group raised an issue in relation to *Point 7.3 on page 18 of the Policy document* where it states “looked after children” was used as a term. As Cardiff generally used the term “children looked after” it was asked why this wasn’t used in the Policy. It was explained that legislation at the time of consultation still stated the term “looked after children” so this term was used in line with legislation, but this could be looked at and amended.
14. The Group discussed *Paragraph 7.5 on page 18 of the Policy document* relating to “compelling medical or social grounds” which stated that a “medical consultant or social worker” could make a recommendation. The Group sought clarity on whether this would include a GP. Recent training

undertaken by a Member of the Group stated that a barrister (leading the training) had stated that a GP's letter could be used if detailed and specific enough. The response stated that a GP's letter is not currently used. The Group requested that, in light of the advice by the barrister, and GP's letters being brought to appeals as evidence that this be considered further, clarified and reported back on in due course.

15. The Group raised the issue of a consultee complaining that they had to complete two forms in the voluntary aided sector, which requested very similar information. It was responded that, in consultation with this sector, there was a varied response on retaining two forms. It is hoped that progress in this area in primary schools could pave the way for further refinements in the future.
16. Members raised an issue on *Page 9, para 57 of the Cabinet Report (Appendix A in scrutiny papers)* which refers to Cathays High School increasing its admission numbers to cope with the excess demand from Cardiff High School and sought further clarity on this. Responses stated that there will always be schools with more demand than supply (with Cardiff HS being one of them) but some of the demand is out of catchment.

Issues arising from the formal CYPSC meeting – 20 March 2024

17. At the formal meeting, Members followed up on some questions they had asked at the Task & Finish Group around:
 - Further clarity around any requests for out of chronological age requests from parents
 - The criteria for “compelling medical grounds”, especially the use of a GP's letter
18. Members also asked questions relating to:
 - Whether any suggested amendments made during consultation not included in the redraft
 - Whether declining birthrates positively impacted school admissions
 - Sought further clarity on the impact of under subscribed classes/schools
 - Clarity on catchment boundary changes (Ysgol Groes Wen as the example)

19. Whilst Members unanimously agreed for the need for a robust and clear Admissions Policy and this be adhered to, during the way forward, there were detailed discussions about the following and we would **request** a response on the issues raised:

- A breakdown of numbers of those pupils affected by oversubscription and not getting the choices they want.
- How the Policy is communicated to families – Members felt there is a disconnect between families and pupils, schools and the LEA. Members stated there appears to be a need to “prepare the ground” at a much earlier stage, that messages are communicated and managed in a more clear and timely manner.
- There was particularly a need to manage expectations. Members suggested that families need to be told directly that if they are going to apply to particular schools, (where appropriate) they are informed at THIS stage that “*X School is usually oversubscribed. Therefore, there is a risk that your child may not be accepted*”. Members strongly agreed that straightforward, clear communication and information is made VERY clear and directly to families.
- In addition, I asked questions around school choices and children going through a transition process, which could give a strong impression that this school is the one the pupil will be attending at Year 7. Whilst we accepted the response given, we again felt that this needs to be clearly communicated to schools, pupils and families to not raise expectations, but as a way for pupils to get a feel for a secondary school setting. This transition does NOT indicate a place at that school.

20. Whilst, at this stage we will not log out concerns re para 19 above as a formal recommendation to revisit the policy at this stage, we would **request** that the suggestions made in para 19 be adopted. We will follow this up accordingly later in the year.

To recap, we are requesting:

ALN Provision

1. Assurances that further Cabinet reports contain the following information:

- As per paragraph 3 above:
 - The need to explain further the context of having these places – to give better provision to those already known as having ALN? Potential new cases? The new system being more flexible and responsive.
 - The movement/transition from well-being classes to SRBs
 - The capacity and demand for these placements, including those children and young people remaining longer in these places and the impact of this.
 - The impact on the wider school community, given the financial constraints and challenges facing schools
 - The benefits to the school in having an SRB, including on the wider school community, as well as practice, expertise and training.
 - The opportunity to remove any “barriers” to the having a SRB at the school – not a “them and us” set up, but an amalgamation of the whole school working together - a development of the school provision.
 - Support for governors in planning and operating the provision
 - Impact on the Welsh Language and communicating the message that there will be parity of provision in the Welsh medium

- As per paragraphs 6 and 9 above:
 - Rationale for the proposal
 - Why is this being done?
 - What the implementation arrangements are
 - How the funding elements are being addressed
 - How the impact will be evaluated in consultation with the schools themselves
 - Emphasis on partnership working with individual schools – including addressing pressures and issues raised by individual schools during the consultation

- As per paragraph 10, Members also agreed that the next Cabinet report should address many of the issues raised by this scrutiny committee and the responses from Estyn and RHaG.

School Admissions

2. To provide a breakdown of numbers of those pupils affected by oversubscription and not getting the choices they want.
3. That communication relating to the school admissions policy be reviewed with the following pointers, and updated accordingly:
 - How the Policy is communicated to families – there appears to be a need to “prepare the ground” at a much earlier stage, that messages are communicated and managed in a more clear and timely manner.
 - There was particularly a need to manage expectations. Members suggested that families need to be told directly that if they are going to apply to particular schools, they are informed at THIS stage that “*X School is usually oversubscribed. Therefore, there is a risk that your child may not be accepted*”. Members strongly agreed that straightforward, clear communication and information is made VERY clear and directly to families.
 - In addition, relating to school choices and children going through a transition process (which could give a strong impression that this school is the one the pupil will be attending at Year 7). This needs to be clearly communicated to schools, pupils and families to not raise expectations, but as a way for pupils to get a feel for a secondary school setting. This transition does NOT indicate a place at that school.

There are no formal recommendations arising from this letter.

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. BRIDGEMAN', written over a light grey rectangular background.

COUNCILLOR LEE BRIDGEMAN

Chairperson – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

CC: CYPSC Members

Melanie Godfrey - Director of Education and Lifelong Learning

Richard Portas - Programme Director for the School Organisation Programme

Brett Andrewartha - School Organisation Programme Planning Manager

Michele Duddridge-Friedl - Operational Manager, School Organisation Programme Strategy

Jennie Hughes, Lead Officer, Inclusion

Adam Foster, Head of Cabinet Support

Claire Deguara – Cabinet Support Office

Helen Eager - PA to the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning

Paula Williams – PA to the SOP Director

Tim Gordon and Jeremy Rhys – Media and Comms

Gavin McArthur – Chair, Governance & Audit Committee

Cllr John Lancaster – Group Leader

Cllr Rodney Berman – Group Leader

Cllr Andrea Gibson – Group Leader