
SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16.04.15

Present: Cllr. Peter Read (Chair)
Cllr. Beth Lawton (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Alan Jones Evans, Gweno Glyn, E. Selwyn Griffiths, Alwyn Gruffydd, Linda Ann Wyn Jones, Dewi Owen, W. Tudor Owen, Ann Williams, Eirwyn Williams and Hefin Williams.

**Co-opted Members
with a vote on**

education issues only: Mrs Rita Price (Catholic Church)

Teachers' Unions David Healey

Officers: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager Corporate Commissioning Service), Gareth James (Members' Manager – Support and Scrutiny) and Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Also in attendance: Cllr. Gareth Thomas - Cabinet Member for Education
Arwyn Thomas – Head of Education
Fflur Jones - Wales Audit Office

Apologies: Councillors Elin Walker Jones, Siôn Wyn Jones, Liz Saville Roberts, Eryl Jones-Williams, Reverend Canon Robert Townsend (Church in Wales), Neil Foden (Teachers' Union).

1. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (a) Fflur Jones from the Wales Audit Office was welcomed to the meeting.
- (b) The meeting would be webcast.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

3. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of a meeting of this Committee that took place on 12 February, 2015, as a true record subject to the following amendment:

Item 4 (b) (i) – Enablement Service – Delete the reference to a period of '6 weeks' in paragraph (i) of the minute and amend to 12 weeks.

4. ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOLS' PERFORMANCE

- (a) The annual report on the performance of the authority's schools was presented by the Cabinet Member for Education for the committee to scrutinise the results at the end of the key stages in the 2013/2014 educational year.
- (b) The Head of Education reminded the Committee of his vision that all the County's children should achieve the highest standards in order to sustain the language, culture and the local economy. It was noted that ESTYN measured the performance of the 22 education authorities in Wales in accordance with the indicator that represented the percentage of children who receive free school meals. In this context, it was noted that Gwynedd was in 4th position, namely the most privileged. It was further noted that standards in schools were dependent on leadership and the quality of teaching. The wish was for schools to perform in the upper half of Quartiles 1 and 2. The importance for governors and elected members to challenge schools about these standards over three years was stressed and schools should progress and compare favourably with other schools within the same family.
- (c) Reference was made to the main messages within the report namely the data on all County schools, how they compare with the rest of Wales, and their position within the different sections bearing in mind that the authority was aiming to be around 4th position.
- Foundation Phase – looking over three years that an increase to 85.2% compared well with the rest of Wales and placed Gwynedd in 10th position.
 - Key Stage 2 – performance was consistent over the last three years and Wales had progressed quicker with Gwynedd placed 14th. It was noted that in a County such as Gwynedd approximately 20% of the pupils had additional educational needs and there was work to be undertaken regarding the consistency of assessments compared with the other 22 authorities.
 - Regarding the quartiles, the picture in Gwynedd was fairly equal with 33% of primary schools in Quartile 1 and 33% in the lower quartile.
 - It was noted that performance in Welsh, English, Mathematics and Science was fairly consistent as individual subjects.
 - Key Stage 3 in schools had performed well over the last three years with a figure of 89% which was a very positive, however, there was concern if the teachers' assessments during this stage were too generous. They should be proud of the performance and there was no school in the red category for 14 year old pupils, two schools in the amber category and three schools in the yellow category. The need to ensure that this performance transferred to the results of the external examinations was emphasised.
 - Key Stage 4 (threshold level 2+ - 5 GCSEs A*-C including Mathematics and Science) - Gwynedd had progressed quicker than other authorities in Wales across the indicators, apart from Welsh as the majority of pupils sat Welsh First Language as a subject. However, this was seen as a strength with pupils leaving the education system with a qualification in both main languages.
 - The importance of maintaining the performance of the indicator that refers to pupils leaving the County with a qualification was noted as it was these individuals who remained in the local area.
 - In terms of attendance, there was still room for improvement and it was always a priority.
 - In the context of the benchmarks for KS4, it was pleasing that Gwynedd was performing well and the challenge was to ensure that every school in the yellow or green categories perform in the upper half in comparison to similar schools and to

especially give attention to Mathematics and English. Whilst accepting the challenge to attract mathematicians into the profession, and although the collective figure was positive and the authority was in 4th position, there was room for improvement for individual schools and as a result the performance percentage would increase further.

(ch) To conclude, the Head of Education noted that the performance at Foundation Phase and Key Stage 1 were good; Key Stage 3 was excellent, however the opinion for Key Stage 4 was adequate. Although two were good and one was excellent the pressure was on KS4 – namely those pupils who leave the education system at 16 years old and the two main factors were too many schools in the highest quartile and the second quartile over a period of time. If ESTYN inspected the performance the likelihood was that their opinion would be adequate rather than good and the fact that too many schools were in follow-up categories by ESTYN.

(d) During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

(i) KS2 – that Table 3 demonstrated an improvement in each of the subjects except Science – did this highlight a problem in performance or with the system in setting the expected levels?

In response, the Head of Education stated that priority had been given recently to literacy and numeracy and Science had not received as much priority locally and nationally with the attention given to Welsh, English and Mathematics. It was further noted that there was work to be achieved generally not only locally, but regionally to try and raise the status of Science.

(ii) Table 4/5 demonstrated that comparative performance had got worse in the last two years with more pupils in quartile 4.

In response, the Head of Education confirmed that there were too many schools in the red category and that it was necessary to look at the individual standards of those schools and this was based on percentages dealing with the free school meals indicator, as well as teachers' assessments. Due to the number of small schools in the county, the performance of one pupil may change a school's category from green to red quickly, following changes in a comparatively small number of pupils.

(iii) It appeared that many children did not declare that they were eligible to receive free school meals due to pride and a system should be implemented that did not discriminate against them with other children in the schools.

In response to the above comment, the Cabinet Member for Education noted that a number of schools did their best to implement a system where it was not possible to identify pupils who receive free school meals. It should be borne in mind that it was an indicator set by the Welsh Government and was not a perfect in terms of several areas in Gwynedd. The Head of Education elaborated that discussions had taken place several times with the Government regarding the indicator's appropriateness and they would look further at systems for schools to implement, such as electronic cards.

(iv) Concern regarding the failure to appoint Head teachers to Gwynedd schools as well as teachers in specialist subjects. It was felt necessary to respond to the fact that there were approximately 10 schools in Gwynedd without a Head teacher and in some areas it

was difficult to appoint governors due to the increasing pressure and responsibility placed on them.

It was recognised that the above comment was a genuine concern and it was necessary to conduct further discussions regarding the leadership of primary schools based on work conditions/patterns and to consider a system of federalisation in order that Heads lead more than one school. In the same manner, within the secondary sector, it would be necessary to discuss an effective format to share the expertise of subject teachers. The Cabinet Member for Education stated further that he was aware that individuals were under pressure especially in the primary sector and worked extremely hard and it would be necessary to discuss releasing time for them to be able to lead effectively. It was further noted that many more prospective Head teachers had been accepted on the NPQH course in Gwynedd than in the past.

It was proposed and seconded that the above matter be included as part of the work programme of this Scrutiny Committee's Annual Workshop to take place on 21 April 2015.

- (v) Concern that there was 10% difference between the performance of boys and girls.

In response, the Head of Education noted that he was aware that schools had done a great deal of work on the above and boys were less mature in the early years than girls. The findings were that the contents of the curriculum up to Key Stage 3 were a factor to be considered as the literacy curriculum was not attractive to boys and they were more willing to undertake practical skills. It was not envisaged that the gap could not be closed quicker in Welsh and English unless there was a change in the curriculum.

- (vi) Table 5 noted that some schools had been in the lower quartile for 3 years and others for 2 years. It was asked if the authority was working with schools to make progress and it appeared that there was no consideration of the efforts of schools to attain the indicators in terms of the Welsh language and would it not be fairer to state the linguistic background in the table?

The Head of Education accepted the above comment and added that the indicator in Key Stage 2 referred to one language or the other in Science, Mathematics and English. The assessment had to be consistent and it was added that the performance of one child could have an impact on a school's performance to be in the green or red category.

- (vii) The Head of Education was requested to provide information regarding the number of teachers in both sectors in Gwynedd that were absent due to stress and to note the areas.
- (viii) It was asked what the authority could achieve locally to ensure accuracy and reconcile teachers' assessments and the need for pupils to get a level that they will attain.

The Head of Education explained that a task group was considering the above and schools were trying to maximise the performance of every child and push the boundaries to what was reasonable and within the ability of the pupils. It was further noted that there was a key point to be considered namely were the tracking systems sophisticated enough and perhaps further investment would have to be made in addition to what was currently undertaken.

- (ix) Whilst they were aware that there were problems to attract specialist teachers in Mathematics and Science, would it be possible to consider a scheme to target prospective specialist teachers and collaborate with colleges in the future?

The Head of Education explained that he had discussed the requirements of the secondary sector specifically in the specialist fields of Mathematics and English, but certainly a discussion could take place with the Universities in order that the authority could have first pick of the best students to attract them into the education system. It would also be possible to consider the appointment of additional staff in order to try and give more resilience to schools when teachers are absent due to illness and to encourage schools to work together.

- (x) The importance of a continuation in the tracking system from primary to secondary.

It was agreed that tracking a child's educational history was key especially bearing in mind the huge leap from primary to secondary and some children took more time to settle down. One of the strengths of lifelong learning schools from 3 -16 years old would be that the establishment would have the information already, but where this did not exist it would be essential to have a uniform system with consistent elements.

- (xi) It was noted that the system had created a great deal of pressure for Head teachers and teachers to improve their schools as well as pressure on Governing Bodies. It had to be recognised that Head teachers and teachers were anxious to improve school performance but key factors had an impact on the performance of schools at grassroots which added to the frustrations, namely a lack of recognition regarding the number of incomers in some areas. Although these pupils achieved very well in schools it had to be borne in mind that when they went home they did not speak Welsh or English and this certainly had an impact on their performance and made a difference to the general anticipated scores. The situation at grassroots level had to be recognised when considering and pushing these performances forward.

The Head of Education accepted the above as a fair comment but unfortunately they had to conform to the Welsh Government's performance model in order to have local management of education.

- (xii) Reference was made to the work of the Scrutiny Investigation into the Quality of Education and the evidence found regarding inconsistencies with moderation between KS3 and KS4 as a result of teachers' assessments. The Head of Education's views regarding the authority's language policy, especially in the secondary sector, were requested.

The Head of Education explained that it was essential to always compare and measure performance to see what worked well and assessment was a national discussion that needed to be resolved to give more credibility to the information available.

In terms of the Language policy, the Head of Education was of the view that the policy was still as strong and robust in Gwynedd, however, current data had to be gathered and it should be ensured that the policy was implemented in every school and ascertained if it should be amended or adapted.

- (xiii) It was disappointing to see in Table 21 that schools had remained in the red category having received support and it was asked what the reason was for this.

In response, the Head of Education explained that discussions with the schools and officers were proceeding and if the support had no impact on the quality of teaching then capability processes would have to be followed.

(xiv) In response to a query regarding this Scrutiny Committee's support to the Head of Education regarding any concerns he anticipated, he explained that the biggest challenge was to tackle school leadership, how to support primary Head teachers, trying to make leadership posts attractive as well as strengthening the service's central human resources.

(xv) The importance of maintaining a tracking system in terms of qualifications of occupational courses and adhering to the current target (namely 0) bearing in mind that these pupils were the most vulnerable within the education system and were likely to remain locally. It was added that it should be ensured that these courses were not removed as currently happened in schools as a result of cuts or a large core of children would leave the education system without any qualification.

In response, the Head of Education explained that it was possible to track these pupils locally and a bid had been submitted between the six north Wales authorities for European funding in order to offer the above menu to the schools.

(xvi) As an explanation regarding the difference in Table 25 where two schools are designated in the green category and within group 1 whilst another school was in the yellow category and in group 1, it was noted that the colours indicated how much support was given to schools and in this context perhaps the change in school personnel had contributed to placing the school in the specific categories.

(xvii) In response to a query regarding how much of a problem it was in Gwynedd when parents take their children out of school to go on holiday, the Head of Education was not aware of the size of the problem in Gwynedd, however, analysis could be undertaken to see if there was any problem in the primary and secondary sectors.

(xviii) Stemming from the above, a Member further asked if it was possible to reduce teachers' holidays as occurred in other countries. In response, the Head of Education noted that he was aware that discussions had taken place regarding this nationally, but there was no will to move the discussion forward at the time.

(xix) In terms of improving schools to the green category, it was explained that the cohort of pupils in eight schools in Gwynedd were small and the performance in Mathematics and English could change the school's category from one colour to the next. The need to share expertise in these subjects was emphasised and also to consider giving more support to the schools.

Resolved: (a) To welcome the work in the pipeline by the Education Service on targets and moderating assessments.

(b) To ensure that the following matters are included on this Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for 2015/16 to be discussed at the Scrutiny Committee's Annual Workshop on 21 April 2015.

- (i) To receive a report by the Education Service on proposals for alternative models for school leadership.**
- (ii) To receive a progress report from the Education Quality Promotion Project**

- (c) To request that the Head of Education acts on the following matters:
- (i) Consider the possibility of introducing an electronic system where it is not possible to identify pupils who receive free school meals
 - (ii) Ensure that the current target is maintained for pupils who follow occupational courses at school and continuation of local tracking
 - (iii) Investigate and report back to the preparatory meeting on the percentage of teachers who are absent from their work due to stress
 - (iv) Investigate and report back to the preparatory meeting on the percentage of children who are taken out of school to go on holiday and note in which areas these are
 - (v) Assess the results of the Welsh Medium Education Scrutiny Investigation on the authority's language policy and act as required.

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 12:35pm.

CHAIRMAN