

## LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2023.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor R.R. Thomas (Chair); Councillor H.M. Payne (Vice-Chair); Councillors A. Asbrey, W. Gilligan, R. Godfrey, E.J. Goodjohn, W.A. Hennessy, N.P. Hodges, J. Lynch-Wilson, N. Marshallsea and E. Penn.

Co-Opted Members: L. Barrowclough (Parent Governor – Primary Sector), R. Morteo (Church in Wales), M. Price (Roman Catholic Church), G. Scott (Welsh Medium Education), G. van der Burgt (Parent Governor – Secondary Sector), R. Goodjohn (Vale Youth Forum), J. Clemett and T. Williams (Vale Youth Council).

Also present: Councillors R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), C.P. Franks, S.M. Hanks, Dr. I.J. Johnson, N.C. Thomas and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

### 501 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

### 502 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor J.M. Norman.

### 503 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

### 504 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor E.J. Goodjohn declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Elective Home Education (EHE) Update. The interest was a prejudicial interest as they were an Elective Home Educator and entitled to access Elective Home Education grants to support their children’s education.

R. Goodjohn declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Elective Home Education (EHE) Update as they were home educated.

#### 505 SUMMARY OF ESTYN INSPECTION OUTCOMES FOR SUMMER TERM 2023 AND UPDATE ON SCHOOLS IN STATUTORY FOLLOW UP (DLS) –

Estyn inspected quality and standards in education across Wales. During the summer term 2023, three primary schools (Y Bont Faen Primary, St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary and Albert Primary) were inspected. None of the three schools were in statutory follow-up (Significant Improvement and Special Measures) or Estyn Review. One case of interesting or innovative practice was identified at Y Bont Faen Primary.

Two schools from the Vale of Glamorgan, Ysgol Pen y Garth and Pencoedtre High School, remained in Estyn statutory follow-up category. Both schools were in Special Measures following their inspections during the autumn term 2022. The Post-Inspection Action Plan and statement of action for both schools had been approved by Estyn. The progress of both schools was being monitored by Estyn on a termly basis. Llanfair Primary was in Estyn Review following their inspection in spring 2023. Progress the school had made towards addressing their recommendations would be reviewed about 12-18 months after the publication of the inspection report.

The report was presented by the Central South Consortium's Principal Improvement Partner. Following their presentation, in response to questions and comments from the Committee, the Officer provided the following additional advice.

- A number of schools had recognised a decline in standards of handwriting skills among pupils, particularly as impacted by the pandemic limiting access to Early Years provision and development of pupils' fine motor skills. Programmes to improve this were being undertaken including development of skills through play.
- Post Inspection Action at Pencoedtre High School included appointment of a new Headteacher. The recruitment sought to bring extensive experience to the school including experience of managing significant change in a school environment. A job advert was accessible on e-teach.
- The officer would make enquiries around whether the Post Inspection Action Plan for Pencoedtre High School could be shared with Committee.
- Estyn had recommended that Y Bont Faen Primary School improved its arrangements for healthy eating, and the school needed time to address this. However, the school had put in place significant changes to promote healthy eating including growing plants and vegetables.
- Cadoxton Primary School had implemented a Big Bocs Bwyd project and similar hubs were being rolled out across Wales and replicated in various ways.
- Open days at Cadoxton Primary School showcased the work of the Big Bocs Bwyd project.
- Attendance at Pencoedtre High School was currently at approximately 73%.

- It was difficult to deduce whether the current attendance situation at Pencoedtre High School was an improvement on the levels during the school's Estyn inspection at this point.
- Several year groups at Pencoedtre High School were at full capacity.

The Lead Officer for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing subsequently advised that it was difficult to make comparisons around attendance at Pencoedtre High School currently as there were only two months' worth of attendance data available. However, there had been a slight improvement on the cumulative year to date figure at Pencoedtre High. They added that there was significant work still to be done on the school's attendance levels, that the Council aspired for higher rates, and was working closely with the school to achieve this.

With no further comments or queries, Committee subsequently

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the inspection outcomes of the three schools inspected during the summer term be noted, and that Committee write to congratulate the schools where there was no Estyn follow-up activity.
- (2) T H A T the progress of the two schools in Special Measures be noted.

#### Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting, and to recognise the achievements of the schools where there was no Estyn follow-up activity.

#### 506 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION (EHE) UPDATE (DLS) –

The report was presented by the Inclusion Manager who advised that the Vale of Glamorgan (VoG) like all Local Authorities (LAs) had longstanding obligations to ensure that all children of school age received a suitable and full-time education at school or otherwise.

The VoG, along with nearly all LAs in Wales, had seen significant increases in the number of parents choosing to home educate in recent years. Comparative data was limited and restricted in its use. The LAs' Elective Home Education (EHE) data below shows an ongoing increase over time which had subsequently continued to rise since schools fully re-opened post Covid closures in April 2021 and over the last year.

January 2018	January 2019	January 2020	January 2021	January 2022	January 2023
46 EHE known to the LA	76 EHE known to the LA	87 EHE known to the LA	104 EHE known to the LA	134 EHE known to the LA	166 EHE known to the LA

Since the date of the last report to Cabinet regarding EHE in September 2022, Welsh Government had published the new guidance document no: 292/2023 which replaced 289/2023 as of October 2023.

This document provided statutory guidance for LAs on arrangements for identifying children of compulsory school age who were resident in their area, who were not on any maintained school roll, not in education other than at school (EOTAS), not on any independent school roll, being educated at home by parents and those not known to the LA as receiving a suitable education.

The regulations had increased obligations upon all Welsh LAs to maintain a reasonably accurate database of all learners living in the VoG who were of school age and “so far as it is possible to do so” the LA should do all that was reasonable, practicable and appropriate to identify children.

Welsh Government had published a Home Educators EHE guidance document in June 2023.

Following presentation of the report Councillor Goodjohn advised Committee around their experiences as a home educator, particularly raising the following points:

- Home educating parents worried about satisfying the requirements of the LA regarding their child’s education, and support to alleviate such fears would be welcomed;
- Although the Vale of Glamorgan Council seemed to have a particularly supportive approach towards home-educating families, further support around exams would be appreciated;
- The difficulties experienced by families on low incomes who home educated.

In response officers advised the following:

- Along with colleagues in Cardiff Council, officers identified exam centres that were affordable;
- The Council wanted an open dialogue with Elective Home educator parents and to help put their minds at ease;
- There had been a doubling in Elective Home Educating learners in four years but not in the resources and finances for this, although families did require support.

Officers subsequently advised the following in response to questions from the Committee:

- Significant work was being carried out by officers to build and maintain positive relationships with EHE families;
- Schools provided the Council with information around pupils who may de-register, around their difficulties, expectations and support, and some may decide to rebuild their relationship with schools;
- Information on the Council’s website was being renewed, and guidance was being provided on what suitable education looked like;

- Children missing education (CME) fell into two distinct groups – those electively home educating but not engaging with the LA, and those displaced in education;
- While an increase in elective home educating grants provided may reflect increased financial pressures on households, this also came as a result of building relationships with families, a larger home educating community, and increased profile and media attention around the issue;
- Feedback from Members of the Committee with experience of EHE and the support offered by the Council was valued and appreciated;
- Persistent absenteeism was a core focus for the service and was separate to work with home educators;
- The Council wanted children to remain engaged in schooling, but recognised the right to EHE;
- Many home educating families engaged with group social activities to enhance personal and social skills.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language subsequently advised that a significant portion of funding for EHE came from Welsh Government and would not otherwise be available.

The Inclusion Manager advised that emphasis on CME could be incorporated into a report on attendance during the Summer term of 2024.

With no further comments or queries, Committee subsequently

#### RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the progress made in the area of Elective Home Education (EHE) during the last 12 months be noted.

(2) T H A T a further progress update report in relation to the ongoing delivery, and further measures to raise awareness of the use and impact of EHE grants for the support of EHE learners be received in 12 months' time.

(3) T H A T in receiving the report referred to in Recommendation (2) above, the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee be updated on the further progress as to the likely impact of any implementation of the proposed amended statutory guidance on Home Education and the proposed draft regulations which incorporate the requirement for Local Authorities to maintain a Children Missing Education (CME) database.

#### Reasons for recommendations

(1) Having regard to the content of the report and discussions at the meeting.

(2) To further update Scrutiny Committee as to the progress made in relation to the ongoing delivery and further awareness raising of the use and impact of the EHE grants for the support of EHE learners.

(3) To ensure that Members of the Scrutiny Committee continue to have oversight and awareness of ongoing changes to the expectations and obligations placed on the Local Authority with regards to EHE learners and learners who may be categorised as CME, with a specific focus on those missing their entitlement to an education.