



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

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Service Area	Education
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To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Community Focused Schools

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report outlines the work the local authority has undertaken so far in relation to the national agenda of developing Community Focused Schools.
- 1.2 It considers the continuum of provision and how this can be embedded into our schools.
- 1.3 It also considers the pilot approach being undertaken in the cluster area for Pen-y-Dre High School.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members feedback outcomes of their Workshop and how ongoing work in this area can be further developed across the County Borough.
- 2.2 Members consider if further information is needed for them to continue to drive this agenda forward.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

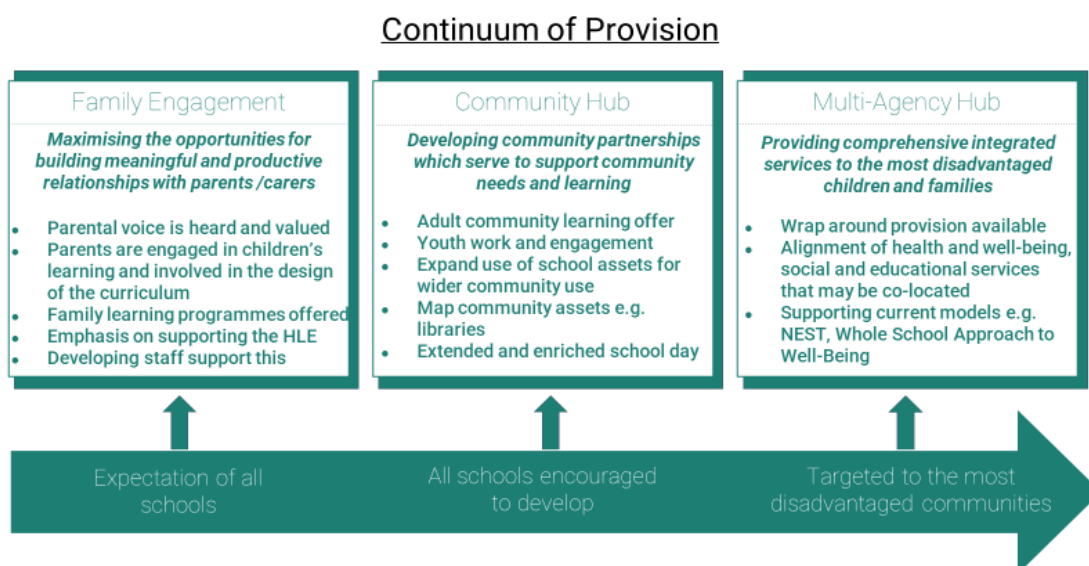
- 3.1 Community Focused Schools is a key driver led by Welsh Government as it is recognised as a critical aspect in tackling disadvantage in all its forms and in particular the disadvantage of poverty on educational achievement and future career aspirations.
- 3.2 Within his announcement of recent funding for taking forward this policy area Jeremy Miles, the Minister for Education said:
'Tackling the impact of poverty on attainment is essential if we are to achieve high standards and aspirations for all.'

We know that the life chances of children and young people are hugely influenced by their home and community and that teachers need more support in addressing the issues some children and young people face. By investing in Community Focused schools, we are ensuring that learners have the support they need to reach their full potential.

Community Focused schools develop partnerships with a range of organisations and make services accessible locally to families and the wider community. They use their facilities and resources to benefit the communities they serve, improve the lives of the children, strengthen families and build stronger communities.

Above all else, our national mission is to tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment and to set high standards for all. I want all young people to have high aspirations for their education and future careers and that means using every lever we have to support them'

- 3.3 Community Focused Schools is not a new concept and has been around in a number of iterations over the past thirty years, firstly recognised through the impact of a Community Focused Schools approach in tackling disadvantage in the Harlem Childrens Zone project in New York and since replicated numerous times.
- 3.4 In 2020 Estyn published its report 'Community Schools: families and communities at the heart of school life' July 2020 (see Background Paper A). This report has led to the increased focus on the Community Schools agenda as outlined in 3.1 & 3.2.
- 3.5 The below diagram outlines the expectations of Welsh Government for Community Focused Schools.



- 3.6 Whilst this concept is named Community Focused Schools it is recognised and accepted that a range of key partners are fundamental to ensuring the success of the overall approach. More importantly these partners are fundamental in ensuring children's outcomes and future career aspirations are realised. This entails ensuring a coherent/joined up approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage across communities, through the range of services meeting the needs of children, young people and their families with schools as the focal point upon which future success is built.

3.7 The recently launched Young Person's Guarantee further cements this approach and looks at a holistic system. This work is a key driver for the Education Minister who has in recent speeches outlined his vision for - High Standards and Aspirations for All, underpinned by his strategy for tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment. It works to the extensive evidenced-based model that high-quality education experiences are the best tool for reducing the impact of deprivation and poverty within communities.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 Schools across Merthyr Tydfil have daily and direct access into families across the County Borough and are uniquely placed to be able to identify and be a link to most families experiencing disadvantage and poverty. The challenge of the educational agenda is about changing the way families view education/schools and related support services. The winning of hearts and minds is critical to the future success of challenging poverty and the impact this has on achieving future successful outcomes for learners and families. Historically the impact of poverty and disadvantage has resulted in education outcomes and key indicators remaining stubbornly difficult to change or improve. In March 2022 a report was presented to the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee which identified the following key points.

- The gap between non-FSM and eFSM has narrowed but has fluctuated. EFSM boys across many schools are achieving less well than girls. Free school meals (eFSM) pupils are outperformed by those not eligible (nFSM) at each key stage, based on the last published data in 2019.
- The Gender Gap has fluctuated and widened this year but the three-year trend across most schools is narrowing. Boys (middle to low ability) are performing less well than girls.
- The gap between the local authority and Wales in English Language has narrowed from 12.3 percentage points to 10.4 percentage points and in English Literacy from 21.6 percentage points to 18.7, however, both are still below the Welsh averages.
- Despite improvements, the local authority performance in most key indicators is still below the 2019 Wales averages.

4.2 The recent report on 'Inequalities in GCSE results across England and Wales', identifies that for pupils across Wales experiencing disadvantage the gap in educational progress equates to 22-23 months and for those experiencing persistent disadvantage the gap increases to 29 months of educational progress. This is important to note as within the compilation of these statistics Merthyr Tydfil is stated as the second highest area for pupils experiencing disadvantage and the highest for pupils experiencing persistent disadvantage, thereby impacting on the progress pupils make.

4.3 A key contributor to improving the above outcomes is the families understanding just how important their children's future success is entwined with school attendance. Prior to the pandemic an analysis of attendance demonstrated the impact on achievement for each key stage.

In line with the national picture, the percentage of pupils achieving key indicators decreases as their attendance decreases.

	Over 90% Attendance	Below 90% Attendance
Foundation Phase Achieved	81.1%	62.4%
Key Stage 2	90.4%	78.1%
Key Stage 3	89.0%	83.0%
Key Stage 4 Cap 9	336.8.	240.7

4.4 In January 2022 a report presented to the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee identified the following in relation to attendance:

- At the end of academic year 2019/20 (due to the start of lockdown data is only to end of February 2020) we saw an increase in secondary attendance when compared to 2018/19 data, both whole year and part year. Primary attendance saw a reduction both whole year and part year.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Secondary	91.76%	91.82% (92.55% - Feb 19)	93.32% - Feb 20
Primary	94.03%	93.92% (94.51% Feb 19)	94.33% - Feb 20

- At the end of 2018/19 Merthyr Tydfil was ranked joint 21st with Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) for secondary attendance, 0.1% below Blaenau Gwent. The Wales average is 93.8%.
- For primary attendance, Merthyr Tydfil was ranked joint 20th with Neath/Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire, 0.4% below RCT.
- The gap between Merthyr Tydfil and the Welsh average has continued to close since 2016/17 and our rate of improvement is the third best in Wales. However, improvement remains a fluctuating picture and the profile of improvement does not support a consistent sustained improvement.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Merthyr Tydfil	7.0%	7.6%	7.2%
Wales Average	5.9%	6.2%	6.2%
Difference	1.1%	1.4%	1.0

No national comparator data has been published throughout the pandemic.

4.5 The impact of the pandemic will result in a significant challenge not only in relation to all the above academic indicators but also to community-based provision. Already being noted is the impact of the pandemic on younger children's developmental delays, especially speech and language and how this is impacting in schools. In older children it is reported that anxiety and stress levels have increased throughout the pandemic resulting in increased non-attendance, behaviour issues, and general concerns about pupil wellbeing.

It has also been noted that during the pandemic children and young people's social, emotional development and interpersonal skills have been severely impacted, all of which are critical to functioning appropriately within group environments including learning environments. All of the challenges above are recognised and embedded within the recently implemented Raising Aspirations and Raising Standards (RARS) Strategy across Education which seeks to address these challenges but cannot do so alone, *"It really takes a community to raise children, no matter how much money one has, nobody can do it well alone."* (M.D.Edelman)

- 4.6 The Pupil Deprivation Grant is currently utilised across schools to support a range of approaches. This funding is currently being reviewed by Welsh Government. The purpose of the review being to improve the impact of the grant schools receive in relation to children on Free School Meals, as the same challenges in performance identified locally are reflected at a national level.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 Merthyr Tydfil has been part of a Welsh Government research project looking at current practice around Community Focused Schools. This has focused upon three specific geographical areas of Merthyr Tydfil, Wrexham and Swansea; however, the full report is yet to be published. The Merthyr Tydfil specific research (see Background Paper B) has identified the following key areas.

Pillar of Good Practice	Activity	Research Findings
Enriched Learning Time & Opportunities	A wide range of provision identified across the cluster – after school holidays etc.	Evidence of after school provision and enrichment activities – further work needed to link in more closely with the curriculum and benefit academic learning
Collaborative Leadership & Practices	Culture of professional learning, and shared responsibility through site based leadership	Limited evidence of collaborative leadership but plenty of enthusiasm for this approach
Integrated Student Support	Dedicated staff member to address barriers to access out of school learning	Number of services working with schools, improvements need to be made in multi-agency interprofessional collaborative working, develop shared provision at school sites
Active family & Community Engagement	Schools function as neighbourhood hubs – some opportunities in place e.g. family learning Family liaison officers and team around family practices in place	Potential for developing a mix of provision both on and off school sites to maximise community and family engagement particularly the upskilling of adults, and to increase access to services for the community. Schools acutely aware more to be done to engage families who do not currently engage and recognise need to involve partners to broker engagement.

- 5.2 The changing face of Education, through the new Curriculum for Wales, will provide a unique opportunity to link both academic and experiential learning opportunities, through providing 'real life' learning opportunities. However, to achieve this schools, community based organisations and industry are going to need to develop stronger links that open up these opportunities.
- 5.3 Poverty and disadvantage faced by communities across Merthyr Tydfil and the impact this has on educational as well as social mobility outcomes is well recognised. However, the pandemic, the energy crisis and the health challenges highlighted by Covid mean that there is a greater recognition that schools cannot face these challenges alone. This cannot be a quick fix and needs to be recognised as a long-term commitment to addressing poverty and disadvantage within communities. Critical social aspects to a child/family's life and the escalating needs of families can only successfully be addressed in partnership, if longer-term outcomes for the individual child, family, and the community are to be realised. Therefore, greater integration of the services that wrap around these families at as early a stage as possible is essential to enabling children and families to engage with the curriculum and maximise the impact of learning opportunities and existing support structures. This will include learning from the success of the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) approach through utilising early identification processes across all year groups to intervene earlier.
- 5.4 Work has already been undertaken with some school Governors, Headteachers, senior Officers and the previous administration to consider how this work will be rolled out across the County Borough – the summary of this work can be found in the Background Paper C.
- 5.5 Welsh Government has provided some funding for this agenda and as part of this funding the following has been identified.
- Community Focused School Manager appointed to the Pen-y-Dre cluster area – part-funded by schools
 - 2 x Family Engagement Officer(FEO) appointed to the Pen-y-Dre Cluster area – part-funded by Attendance Grant
 - 1 x FEO appointed to Ynysowen and Coed y Dderwen Primary Schools (identified through %eFSM & WIMD data)
 - All schools offered opportunity to bid for capital funding for expansion of community use – 10 bids received, further work ongoing with Headteachers and Governors to enable these works to be completed.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 Schools and community services acting interdependently for the benefit of all families.
- 6.2 Use of school assets managed through Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with Governing Bodies.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 Set up a strategic working group to lead the Community Focused Schools agenda.
- 7.2 Prepare a report for Members to consider the findings from the pilot work in Pen-y-Dre cluster area and FEO work in other schools.
- 7.3 Consider how all services work effectively together to drive this agenda.
- 7.4 Develop MOU for Governing Bodies.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO RAISING ASPIRATIONS RAISING STANDARDS STRATEGY

- 8.1 The contents of this report relate to the following RARS Themes and Goals.
 - Partnership & Collaboration
 - Pandemic Recovery

 - Supporting Learners' Health and Wellbeing
 - Developing the environment for learning

9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

- 9.1 The contents of this report relate to the following Wellbeing Objectives:
 - Best Start to Life
 - Living Well

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PORTFOLIO LEAD FOR EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		