



FULL COUNCIL REPORT

Date Written	18 th September 2022*
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Service Area	Education
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	5 th October 2022

To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Future Development of Community Focused Schools within a Cluster Model across Merthyr Tydfil

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report outlines the current national strategic drive from the Education Minister to implement Community Focused Schools and of the expectation levels for schools as set out by Welsh Government. This includes the role schools play in challenging the impact of poverty and disadvantage within the community, particularly for vulnerable learners and families, to influence future success in learning as a long-term approach to deliver community benefits.
- 1.2 The local context and the strategic drivers for change are identified within section 4.0 of this report. These are well known within the authority as it has continually sought to improve the outcomes of children and young people accessing education services.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S) that

- 2.1 The three cluster approach, subject to funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund, as set out in Section 5.0 be approved.
- 2.2 The bringing back of a progress report to Council in 12 months be approved.
- 2.3 Identified named leads for service areas working within the cluster model to further develop integrated working practices around each cluster be approved.

- 2.4 The holding of cluster development and visioning meetings involving partners across the north cluster with key partners identified for the future establishment of a steering group to support the development of the approach be approved.
- 2.5 The replication of 2.4 across other clusters be approved.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

National Context

- 3.1 The establishment of 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, which is linked to his policy direction of High Standards and Aspirations, 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.”

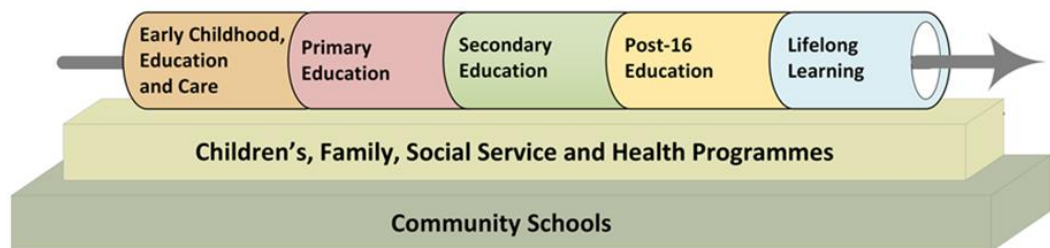
- 3.3 Community Focused Schools is not a new concept and has been around in several iterations over the past thirty years, firstly recognised through the impact of a Community Focused Schools approach in tackling disadvantage in the Harlem Childrens Zone project in New York and since replicated numerous times.
- 3.4 The below diagram outlines the expectations of Welsh Government for Community Focused Schools. Within this model a significant number of schools across the County Borough would fall into the Multi-Agency Hub expectation and if Members approve this proposal, all clusters would work to develop this model of provision.

Continuum of Provision



3.5 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.

3.6 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.



Tackling the Impact of Poverty on Educational Attainment in Wales - A Whole System Approach

4.0 COMMUNITY FOCUSED SCHOOLS LOCAL CONTEXT AND DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

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) are outperformed by those not eligible (nFSM) at each key stage.
- The Gender Gap has fluctuated and widened this year across schools 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 '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 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 Development Grant (PDG) 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.

4.7 From 2022/23 schools are expected to draw up a plan for expenditure against PDG under eight headings.

- High Quality Teaching & Learning
- Community Schools
- Early Childhood Education & Care

- The Health & Wellbeing of Children & Young People
- Developing High Aspirations through strong relationships
- The Curriculum for Wales & Qualifications
- Leadership
- Post-16 progression

4.8 Non-maintained settings are also directed to specific priorities for their PDG plans and a similar expectation is placed on expenditure for PDG-LAC. Appendix 1 shows the allocations for PDG for Merthyr Tydfil.

4.9 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 has identified the following key areas within the framework diagram provided in Appendix 2.

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.

4.10 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 will need to develop stronger links that open up these opportunities.

4.11 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 NEETs approach through utilising early identification processes across all year groups to intervene earlier.

5.0 THE CLUSTER MODEL AND COMMUNITY FOCUSED SCHOOLS VISION

5.1 It is planned that the Community Focused Schools model will consist of a three cluster approach and this will establish a North, Mid and South Cluster model as set out below. This approach will see schools and partners working collaboratively primarily within these geographical communities.

North	Mid	South
Pen y Dre High School	Cyfarthfa High School	Afon Taf High School
Blessed Carlo Acutis		
Pantyscallog Primary	Coed y Dderwen	Ynysowen Primary
Dowlais Primary	Heolgerrig Primary	Troedyrhiw primary
Goetre Primary	Caedraw Primary	Trelewis primary
Gwaunfarren Primary	Twynrodyn Primary	Bedlinog Primary
Gellifaelog Primary	Cyfarthfa Park Primary	Edwardsville Primary
Ysgol y Graig Primary	Ysgol Santes Tudful	Abercanaid School
		Ysgol Rhyd y Grug
Geographically this would mean the following wards aligned under this approach		
Vaynor Gurnos Pant & Dowlais Penydarren	Cyfarthfa Park Town	Plymouth Merthyr Vale Treharris Bedlinog & Trelewis

5.2 The development of the model will have the following key purposes (reflecting the best practice pillars in Appendix 2) to achieving a successful community focused schools' approach. However, the long-term benefits are not the schools alone. If achieved this would benefit all partners involved across each cluster and would impact on longer term needs of families and communities and subsequently on current service providers. The longer-term benefits of the model are embedded in reducing the disadvantage across communities and thereby reducing the demand for services particularly the need for more intensive and expensive interventions. Bringing about community change as a foundation towards future prosperity of residents.

- **Improved access to services**, working with partners to bring services closer to the community and reducing barriers to engagement.
- **Increasing use of school facilities** by the community outside of the school day / alternatively where extensive community services exist increasing the use of those facilities to maximise community involvement.
- **Early identification & prevention** of pupils at risk of disengagement, or families needing support, ensuring an integrated approach across services with the school at the heart, ensuring joint messaging and engagement around key challenges.
- **Enrichment of learning experiences** within the new Curriculum through programmes that can be either delivered in schools or where schools can access opportunities in the community.
- **Increased Community Involvement in services**, through greater integration across the cluster partners will develop greater connections and understanding between organisations and be more able to support families to engage with services including those as part of accessing ongoing peer support in the community.

- 5.3 The impacts of this work will take time, this is not a quick fix to the challenges faced but is a structured approach to challenging some persistent and deep-rooted challenges for the local authority, including but not limited to:.
- attendance
 - pupil and family wellbeing
 - service demand – high cost interventions
 - healthy lifestyles - obesity
 - achievement
 - future employment and prosperity ‘life chances’
- 5.4 As recently identified by the Cwm Taf Public Service Board: “giving the community access to local services and opportunities develops greater social connections and fosters a sense of belonging across communities.” Our evidence finds that social connection is underpinned by having meaningful things to do in communities (e.g., sports, culture, arts, services) and inclusive places to do them. Community connection is underpinned by these meaningful things to do and inclusive places to do them and is further supported by shared goals across sectors and organisations, and digital and physical infrastructures to support coordination. For both social and community connection (and therefore for community action) shared purpose and inclusive infrastructures are key”. (What can PSBs do to Improve Wellbeing from a community perspective?)
- 5.5 Through the funding received from Welsh Government, and the previous research conducted by Cardiff Metropolitan University, it has been agreed that the North Cluster be the first cluster to be piloted. Pantyscallog Primary School will act as the lead or host school whilst the overall approach will be managed by a Steering Group of Headteachers across the North Cluster along with support from the local authority.
- 5.6 The implementation and piloting of the cluster model will require Borough-wide prevention services and Education services operating in these areas to manage their workload differently going forward. An analysis will need to be undertaken in line with population levels and current demands within the above geographical model. This will enable services to allocate current staffing resources against each cluster.

Providing named individuals against each cluster will enable enhanced relationships, building a more integrated approach between services, schools, and families.

This virtual team approach, alongside strengthening the role of schools within the Team Around the Family plan, interventions, including monitoring the impacts of these interventions within each cluster.

- 5.7 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 Appendix 3.
- 5.8 A Scrutiny workshop held recently gave members the opportunity to consider the same questions as Headteachers had in Summer 2022. The SWOT analysis by members can be found at Appendix 4.
- 5.9 The definition drawn up by Members for Community Focused Schools emphasises the value this approach can make in delivering on key priorities for both education and the economy moving forward.

Community focused schools are at the heart of the community, geographically accessible, and engage successfully with the local populace; all stakeholders are inclusive and strive to work towards improved outcomes for all their community.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A recent grant from Welsh Government awarded to the local authority of £108,000 revenue funding for designated functions (£30k for a Community Focused Schools Manager & £78k for Family Engagement Officers (FEOs)).
- 6.2 Schools in the North Cluster have contributed £5k to the Community Focused Schools Manager post.
- 6.3 The local authority has utilised additional Attendance Grant funding to support the FEO roles – there are two in the North Cluster and using eFSM figures and Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) information funding has been given to Ynysowen Primary School & Coed y Dderwen Primary School to develop FEOs across the school communities.
- 6.4 In addition to this the local authority has applied through shared prosperity funding to roll out this approach more widely across the Mid and South Clusters with further work being undertaken by Cardiff Metropolitan University in these areas.
- 6.5 Capital funding of £380,000 has been made available to schools by Welsh Government to develop community access to facilities and this is currently being worked through with schools through an application process (10 bids received). This is being aligned as part of cluster plans and the impact of this will be monitored over five years. Schools may also be required to make a financial contribution towards these capital programmes.

7.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Neutral/Not Applicable	
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	4 of 4	0 of 4	0 of 4	
2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term • Prevention • Integration • Collaboration • Involvement 	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5	
3. Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	10 of 10	0 of 10	0 of 10	
4. Socio-economic Disadvantage	6 of 6	0 of 6	0 of 6	
5. Consultation and Engagement	Undertaken	Due to be Undertaken	Not Required	
	1 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1	
6. Data and Evidence to inform the proposal	Yes		No	
	1 of 1		0 of 1	
7. Biodiversity and the resilience of Ecosystems	Maintained	Enhanced	Reduced	Neutral/Not Applicable
	1 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1
Summary				
The main positive impacts are:	This is a long-term proposal for more cohesive communities that have a key focus on positive future outcomes for all children and young people.			
The main negative impacts are:	N/A			

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BACKGROUND PAPERS			
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location	
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?			No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.