

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Date Written	29 <sup>th</sup> August 2023
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Service Area	Learning
Committee Date	18 <sup>th</sup> September 2023

### **Community Focused Schools - North Cluster**

#### **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report outlines the work undertaken to support the Community Focused Schools (CFS) agenda in the North cluster during the academic year 2022/23.
- 1.2 The report considers the background to this work and the benefits of this approach in supporting the aspirations on the Corporate Plan and the Education Raising Aspirations Raising Standards Strategy.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 Members discuss and debate the content of the report, reflecting on dialogue from previous meetings and identify if there are further aspects of this agenda that need scrutinising.

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 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:

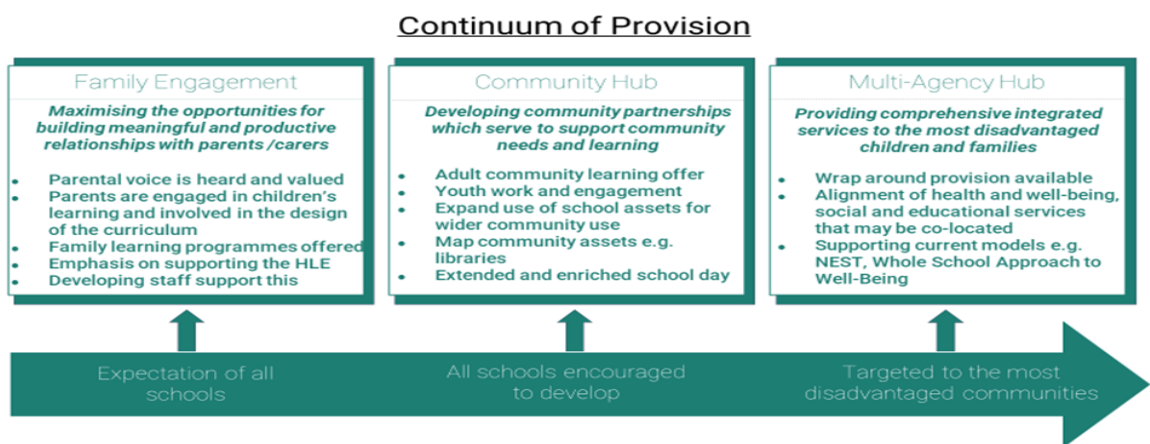
*“Tackling the impact of poverty on attainment is essential if we are to achieve high standards and aspirations for all. We know that the life chances of children and young people are hugely influenced by their home and community and that teachers need more support in addressing the issues some children 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 will work to develop this model 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 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.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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. As members are aware this is a key driver for the authority particularly post-Covid.

## **4.0 WHERE WE WERE**

- 4.1 In 2022/23 Merthyr Tydfil was 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.
- 4.2 This research focused on the North of the County (within the Vaynor, Gurnos, Pant & Dowlais and Penydarren wards) - through SPF funding the activity was extended to the other clusters in 2023/24 and further work is planned with Cardiff Metropolitan University and Welsh Government to support our work.
- 4.3 In 2022/23 a 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)
- 4.4 In September 2022, the CFS North Cluster team was set up with a Manager and 2x Family & Community Engagement Officers in post.

- 4.5 The schools in the North cluster originally contributed £5k to the CFS Manager but due to underspend in funding this was given back to schools before the end of the financial year.
- 4.6 Capital funding has been made available to schools by Welsh Government to develop community access to facilities. 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.
- 4.7 Scrutiny members took part in a workshop in September 2022 with a subsequent report being presented for discussion. This work fed into the Council report.
- 4.8 A report was taken to Full Council in October 2022 to secure agreement for the future roll-out of this work. A further report is planned for November 2023

## 5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 Schools referred to in this report that sit within the north cluster, Merthyr Tydfil are as follows:

<b>Penydre High School</b>
Dowlais Primary School
Pantyscallog Primary School
Goetre Primary School
Gellifaelog Primary School
Gwaunfarren Primary School
Ysgol y Graig Primary School
<b>Blessed Carlo Acutis (3-16 School)</b>
Bishop Hedley Campus
St Aloysius Campus
St Illtyd's Campus
St Marys Campus

- 5.2 A mapping exercise has been undertaken to enable the CFS team to understand the community and what services and provisions are available. Every community provision has been engaged in the programme which supports the development and understanding of the CFS programme. The team has gathered information on each provision and the services they provide. The same exercise has been undertaken in each school so there is an understanding of the logistics and delivery of CFS priorities within schools. There are timetables set up for each school showing availability and space for community use.
- 5.3 The team work closely with Headteachers and leaders in schools and community provisions to understand their needs and to support the implementation of opportunities for collaboration. Various leads in the Local Authority have been met with to discuss how CFS links to their area of responsibility. The following services have been engaged with:

Education Welfare Service (EWS)  
Engagement and Progression Coordinators (EPC) / Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEETS) Coordinator  
Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service for BETP (Business Enterprise Training Partnership)  
Head of Prevention  
Childrens Services - Early Help Hub  
Youth Services  
Play Services  
Early Years Services  
Regeneration Department - Compass Community Hub

- 5.4 The team have also met with the following services to gather information on how we can work in partnership:

Active Merthyr  
StreetGames  
LTA Service - Tennis  
Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association - Fit and Fed project  
Merthyr Tydfil College - Public Services and Physical Education Lecturer  
Voluntary School Merthyr Tydfil - Health and Wellbeing Forum and Children and Young People's Partnership  
Play Wales - Stay and Play  
Merthyr Valleys Homes - Youth Provision  
Cwm Taf Morgannwg - Speech and Language service  
Cwm Taf Morgannwg - Shine project  
Cwm Taf Morgannwg - Implementation Coordinator for Whole School Approach  
Homestart  
Merthyr Tydfil College  
Morgan Sindall  
Public Health Wales - PIPYN (Pwysau Iach Plant Yng Nghymru) team / Healthy Children Healthy Weight in Wales team.

- 5.5 The team also met the following community provisions across the cluster to establish utilising them for school activities through enhancing the curriculum and to explore opportunities to promote these provisions to the children and families in our community that do not access provisions outside of school:

Calon Las Community Hub  
3G's Development Trust  
Dowlais Engine House  
Stephens & George Community provision  
Cefn Coed Community Centre

- 5.6 Due to attendance being one of the priorities, the team met with the Education Welfare Service to gather data on persistent absentees in Year 6 (Penydre cluster) to plan a programme to support transition and improve attendance in Year 7. The delivery of this programme started on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and will continue until 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023 where attendance and engagement data will be reported on. The programme includes family engagement during the school holiday periods as it is

vital to engage with families to break down barriers to engagement and to support parents and carers for transition as well as supporting pupils. These families are often the most difficult to engage so consistent engagement is paramount to success.

- 5.7 The team have participated in training with Foundations of Community Engagement to enable them to undertake Community and Family Engagement audits with all schools in the cluster. These audits have been completed with each school except for 2 and these are planned to take place in the autumn term. The CFS Manager has supported the consultant in developing community provision guidance ensuring that key information is included in the pathway for community provision. These audits will enable us to establish a baseline of where our schools and community provisions are on their family and community journey. There are plans for 2 community provisions within the cluster to be audited to allow the CFS team to track Community and Family engagement work across the cluster supporting the work of our schools and community provisions. To date, Dowlais Engine House have started their audit with a plan for the completion and evidence to be gathered in the autumn term. The CFS team will be producing action plans as part of this process so clear targets can be set around CFS priorities.
- 5.8 Funding from the LA Play Team was gained to run a play festival at Pantyscallog Primary School. The event was a success and 248 individuals attended. Partner agencies also attended to ensure families were aware of the support they can offer. The PIPYN team attended the event and families signed up to the project.
- 5.9 Funding has been secured from Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association for Fit and Fed to deliver a free holiday hunger provision that enriches the lives of children and young people through sport and physical activity, music, art, drama and dance. The provision will ensure that one meal per day will be provided along with a range of healthy snacks for at least one day of the school holidays throughout the year.
- 5.10 A pilot programme in partnership with Play Wales was started on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2023 to support a Stay and Play project at Pantyscallog Primary School. The aim of the programme was for parents/carers to use school grounds to play with their children at the end of the school day. The project ran for a 6-week period with the CFS team supporting the delivery with between 50-70 children and 16-40 parents/carers attending. Due to the success of this project the Headteacher decided to continue this provision by employing school staff to support delivery. Goetre Primary School and BCA St Aloysius Campus are piloting Stay and Play at their schools, these pilots will restart in the autumn term with the support of the CFS team.
- 5.11 Opportunities for parental engagement have been undertaken through the delivery of coffee mornings at schools, parents' evenings and events where parents and carers are in attendance allowing the team to engage with families. The team have engaged in 21 events where they have engaged with parents, carers and community members. At these events engagement questionnaires have been completed to enable the CFS team to establish the needs of the schools and/or community. Analysis of the information and data captured will be fed back to the schools during the inset/staff training events that the CFS Manager has been delivering. During these sessions an overview of CFS is given and analysis of the data is shared with

each school and then to the cluster as a whole. Programmes and projects are being planned based on these findings. Every person that has completed a questionnaire has consented to working with the CFS team which will allow discussions and planning around CFS priorities.

- 5.12 The team delivered the Food and Fun programme at Gellifaelog Primary School during the summer holidays. This multi-agency project provided healthy meals, nutrition education, sports and other physical activity opportunities to children and families and promotes learning through a programme of enrichment activities. Feedback from children and parents/carers was extremely positive and every family expressed an interest in attending this programme again next year.
- 5.13 A pilot project has been delivered in Partnership with Dowlais Primary School and Dowlais Engine House to deliver an afterschool club for Dowlais Primary School pupils at Dowlais Engine House once a week over a 4-week period. This programme was a success with 24-26 pupils attending on a weekly basis. A joint training session between school and provision has been delivered where shared visioning and planning was discussed. A joint action plan has been developed by CFS who will support delivery in the autumn term.

## **6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE**

- 6.1 The aim is for the north cluster (schools and community provision) to achieve the Foundations of Community Engagement Bronze Award. The approach to cluster working has enabled us to gather information on schools and community provisions as their own entity and then as an overall cluster. This will aid identification of priorities to take forward that will positively impact the community.
- 6.2 CFS funding has given us the opportunity to explore and identify where a school or particular area or community is at a disadvantage. This allows us to offer opportunities to children, young people and families that may not otherwise be available. The aim is for the schools and community provisions to be proactive in working together to support children and their families holistically.
- 6.3 All agencies working with children and their families working together in partnership to ensure children and young people have access to the most appropriate support to meet their needs.

## **7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT**

- 7.1 Report on persistent absenteeism through the family engagement programme.
- 7.2 Develop a vision, pledge and logo for the north cluster.
- 7.3 Develop a similar approach across the other cluster areas.
- 7.4 Link with other community hub provisions within the county borough.

## **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 and Collaboration.
- Performance Management and System Governance.

## **9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES**

9.1 The contents of this report relate to the following Wellbeing Objectives:

- An aspirational Merthyr Tydfil, focused on learning.
- A healthier Merthyr Tydfil.

***SUE WALKER***  
***DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION***

***COUNCILLOR MICHELLE JONES***  
***CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION***

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