

Special Educational Needs Joint Committee

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 20 September 2013

- PRESENT:** Councillor Gwilym O.Jones (Chair)
Councillor Caerwyn Roberts (Vice-Chair)
- Gwynedd Council**
- Councillors Annwen Hughes, Beth Lawton, Gareth Thomas,
Eirwyn Williams
- Isle of Anglesey County Council**
- Councillors Llinos Medi Huws, G O Jones, R.Meirion Jones, D R Hughes and
Jeffrey M.Evans
- Councillor Ieuan Willimas (Education Portfolio Holder – Isle of Anglesey County
Council) (Non-Voting Member)
- The Church**
- Mr Rheinallt Thomas (Free Churches)
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr Gareth Payne (Principal Educational Psychologist)
Mr Dewi Jones (Head of Education – Gwynedd Council)
Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Pupils and Inclusion Senior Manager – Gwynedd Council)
Mr William E. Jones (Senior Finance Manager – Gwynedd Council)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor Elin Walker Jones, Councillor Peter Read, Councillor Trefor Lloyd
Hughes, Councillor Robert Llewelyn Jones, Dr.Gwynne Jones, Gwilym Ellis
Jones and Mair Read
- ALSO PRESENT:** Mrs Bethan Morris Jones (Head of Ysgol Glancegin, Bangor) (for item 3),
Amanda Hughes (Wales Audit Office)
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WELCOME

The Chairman extended Members and Officers a warm welcome to this meeting of the Joint Committee.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 5TH JULY, 2013 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Joint Committee held on 5 July 2013 were submitted and confirmed as correct.

3 THE FIVE STEPS TO ESTABLISHING A SOUND PROCEDURE FOR CARE, SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Bethan Morris Jones, the Head of Ysgol Glancegin, Bangor to the meeting and invited her to address the meeting on the five steps to establishing a sound procedure for Care, Support and Guidance.

Mrs Bethan Morris Jones explained that she had been requested to give the Joint Committee, as the forum responsible for overseeing additional learning needs in both counties, an overview of the work done at Ysgol Glancegin, Bangor during the last six years to address problems highlighted at the school in the Estyn inspection held in 2007. She reported that the period in question had been a journey for all the school's population leading to the publication of Estyn's latest inspection report earlier this year that judged the school's current performance and the prospects for improvement to be good. In addition, in the 2013 report the Inspector found that welfare standards at the school were outstanding and that the care, support and guidance it provides in promoting the spiritual, moral and social development of the pupils is equally outstanding. The Head therefore stated that she would be focussing in her presentation on the section of the inspection report dealing with additional learning needs and would draw upon it to demonstrate how the strategies and schemes implemented following the inspection six years ago have borne fruit and have culminated in very positive outcomes at the school in the form of particularly good behaviour; positive attitudes to learning; pupils taking pride in their responsibilities and playing a lead role in a number of activities; pupils feeling that their voices are important and that they are being listened to by adults, together with a considerable increase in attendance levels and standards generally.

In her subsequent presentation, the Head of Ysgol Glancegin referred to the following information and considerations –

- **The Context** – The social environment of Ysgol Glancegin on the Maesgeirchen estate in Bangor, which is an area considered to be socially deprived. Over 97% of the pupils live in an area that is amongst the 20% of the most deprived areas in Wales. 42% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and 41% have been identified as pupils with additional learning needs. A Nursery Group has been established in the school funded through Communities First which receives 60 children and provides Welsh medium education for 12 ½ hours per week with the aim of giving them a solid start.
- **The Five Steps**
 - Promoting the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils.

The Inspector found that teachers and ancillary staff at the school are thoroughly committed to high quality pastoral support that meets the needs of all the pupils. A range of effective strategies was implemented consistently and robustly to foster respect for others and promote good conduct. The Head referred in particular to a strategy entitled Solution Focused Therapy that concentrates on the positives in any situation rather than negatives and which encourages and trains children to think positively about themselves. This has led to significant increases in the children's welfare standards and has had a positive impact on staff and parents.

Another key step has been to establish a specific system for special educational needs based on three tiers of intervention, where tier 1 concentrates on basic skills and on conducting daily skills exercises with the children with a view to improving those skills whilst at the same time fostering and increasing the children's self-confidence. The Head clarified that there were expectations upon staff and pupils in every situation.

- The school benefits considerably from the expertise of a wide range of services in order to maintain the personal and social health of pupils across the school.

The school has worked closely with an Educational Psychologist to create an intervention scheme and a progress monitoring document. A Communication and Provider Group has been established to promote effective collaboration with the health and welfare service. The school has developed a methodology of community collaboration with Communities First, The Maesgeirchen Partnership in order to raise the school's profile within its community and

links have been forged with the Psychology Department of Bangor University. The school participated in the University's Reaching Wider Partnership.

- In the Inspector's opinion, the provision for additional learning needs is very robust at the school.

This position has been reached through setting up effective systems to identify individual needs from an early age in order to assess and track pupils' achievements and progress constantly through the use of internal data and statutory tests to confirm the progress and change the intervention level. The Head referred to a graph showing the positive change in the school's performance after one year of implementing the intervention procedure and targeting children's skills, with fewer than 5% of pupils subsequently performing below the expected threshold.

- The inclusion team provides comprehensive support for teachers and works very closely with them to ensure continuity and the progress of pupils with additional needs.

In Ysgol Glancegin, there are six assistants between both departments and the leader of the inclusion team is part of the Communication and Provider group. There is regular contact between the team and the Additional Needs Co-ordinator and daily communication between the assistant and the teacher. The targets are set by the Speech and Language Therapists. The Head referred to the Welsh and English Literacy Assessment and Monitoring manual used to carefully track children's progress and demonstrated its impact by referring to a colour chart to illustrate pupils' progress.

- Effective use is made of every room in the building with some being used to provide additional resources.

The Head showed how the school's environment has been improved, and made attractive and stimulating for staff and children alike. For example, status has been given to parental meetings by creating a designated meeting room to that end. Artistic projects have been undertaken focusing mainly on the Maesgeirchen community and parents have been involved in that work. One feature of the school's activities is the Fostering Group focusing on those children who have lost out in their early years in terms of skills development. The Head said that positive messages are also reinforced visually throughout the school's classrooms and corridors. In addition, one classroom has been made to resemble a room in a home for those children whose basic skills are weak, with a view to them developing those skills in an informal and relaxed setting.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Ysgol Glancegin for an informative presentation.

The Senior Pupils and Inclusion Manager of Gwynedd Council stated that Ysgol Glancegin's journey had taken several years and had been achieved through collaboration between the school and a range of services. First and foremost, the school has ensured that it is an inclusive school that does not close its doors to anybody. Multi-disciplinary co-operation has been crucial to its success, particularly in the early years period and it has developed a positive ethos and culture as well as positive teaching methods. None of the strategies and plans adopted by Ysgol Glancegin was intended to be an overnight solution to its problems – the arrangements have been embedded and have taken effect over a period of time carrying with them every member of staff on every step of the journey. The school is now a school with high expectations.

The Members of the Joint Committee acknowledged the commitment, effort and perseverance involved in turning Ysgol Glancegin around and giving the children and the community the best opportunity to realise their potential and the Head, staff and support services were congratulated for their achievement. On the other hand, it was pointed out that it is very difficult for children in any area identified as deprived to free themselves from the attendant economic and social influences, despite the input into their development. As a consequence, children from such communities frequently do not achieve to the same degree as children from more prosperous areas. The expectations for less privileged communities are lower and, in the main, these

communities do not exceed those expectations. However, the encouragement and support for children of the kind in Ysgol Glancegin is a step forward.

The Head of Ysgol Glancegin opined that if children leaving school are equipped to think that they can succeed there is a greater likelihood of their doing so.

The Head of Education of Gwynedd Council stated that the Head of Ysgol Glancegin was invited to give a presentation to the Joint Committee following the previous meeting's discussion around the school questionnaire wherein it was highlighted that the teaching profession felt that it is increasingly encountering more of the kind of issues seen at Ysgol Glancegin around behaviour and attainment. Ysgol Glancegin is an example of innovation involving the entire school community to progress children regardless of their circumstances.

It was resolved to note the information presented and to thank the Head of Ysgol Glancegin for her time in attending this meeting of the Joint Committee.

4 JOINT-COMMITTEE'S FINAL ACCOUNTS AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2012/13

4.1 The Joint Committee's post-audit Final Accounts for 2012/13 were presented together with the Annual Governance Statement.

The Senior Finance Manager of Gwynedd Council reminded the Members of the discussions at the previous meeting on 5th July regarding the additional reporting requirements for accounting and auditing the accounts of Joint Committees, namely that the Accounts and Audit (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 require all Joint Committee to prepare annual accounts i.e. an income and expenditure account, and where the turnover exceeds £1m, a statement of accounts must be prepared in accordance with the CIPFA code for the Joint Committee. The Officer stated that he had noted in the previous meeting that the accounts submitted at that time were subject to a separate audit by the Wales Audit Office. That audit has now taken place and the minor amendments since the pre-audit version have been outlined in the WAO ISA260 report by the Wales Audit Office. The Appointed Auditor intends to publish an unqualified audit report on the financial statements once the Letter of Representation is completed based on that which is outlined in Appendix 1 of the Auditor's Report, namely the response of Gwynedd Council as the organisation with financial oversight of the Joint Committee's activities.

4.2 A report by the Wales Audit Office was submitted for the Joint Committee's consideration on the audit of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee's Financial Statements.

Amanda Hughes of the Wales Audit Office confirmed that the Appointed Auditor's opinion on the Joint Committee accounting statements is that they give true and fair view of the financial position of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee on 31 March 2013 and its income and expenditure for the year then ended and that they have been prepared appropriately in accordance with the Code of Practice for Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom for 2012/13. However, Members' attention was drawn to the fact that prior to the 2012-13 financial year, the Joint Committee as a local government body for the purposes of Section 12 of the Public Audit Act (Wales) 2004 had not complied with the requirement in Section 13 of that Act to maintain accounts that are subject to annual audit, and that it had failed to produce financial statements in accordance with statutory requirements. She declared that it is unlikely that this would have had a material effect on the accounts of both constituent authorities (Anglesey and Gwynedd) and that it is mainly an accounting issue and not a matter relating to the payment of the respective contributions of the constituent authorities for the Joint Committee. However, although the Appointed Auditor proposes to publish an unqualified report on the financial statements, this is noted as another matter to report upon in the Appointed Auditor's report. The Senior Finance Manager of Gwynedd Council explained that although independent accounts had not been prepared for the Joint Committee in previous years, the financial activities of the Joint Committee had been reported as part of Gwynedd Council's accounts as the lead body on the Joint Committee's financial affairs.

It was resolved to approve the -

- **ISA 260 Report from the Appointed Auditor on the Financial Statements together with the**
- **Statement of post-audit Accounts for 2012/13.**

5 NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE JOINT-COMMITTEE

Friday, 22 November, 2013 at 10:30 a.m.

**Councillor G.O.Jones
Chair**