

TASK AND FINISH REVIEW 2015/16 ACTION PLAN

MONITORING: Narrowing the attainment gap: learners eligible for free school meals.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. At its meeting on 24th September, 2015, the Education and Children Scrutiny Committee resolved to earmark improving the performance of those learners eligible for free school meals as one of its priorities for 2015/16.
The Committee agreed to progress this matter by establishing a task and finish group to research and review the attainment gap for e-FSM learners.
- 1.2. The group was chaired by Cllr. Eirwyn Williams. In terms of membership: It had a politically balanced Elected Member representation of 6 County Councillors; 2 co-opted members (Parent Governor and Roman Catholic Church Member); 5 officers, as required.
- 1.3. A total of 7 meetings were held (December 2015-November 2016).

2. Scope and Objectives of the Group's work

2.1. **Scope:** *'Learners eligible for free school meals, including Looked After Children, and the attainment gap in Carmarthenshire'*.

2.2. Objectives:

- To research the attainment gap for learners eligible for free school meals in Carmarthenshire.
- To identify trends at all key stages and key indicators.
- To review how the Pupil Deprivation Grant is being used in our schools.
- To identify best practice interventions in the County's schools, across ERW, the rest of Wales and the UK.
- To raise the profile of the challenge of overcoming the attainment gap in the midst of shrinking budgets, other priorities and curriculum changes.
- To formulate recommendations for consideration by the Executive Board.

3. Methodology

- 3.1. Qualitative and quantitative evidence was considered, which included:
 - 3.1.1. Perusal of data pertaining to the attainment gap
 - 3.1.2. A detailed literature review
 - 3.1.3. Case study evidence
 - 3.1.4. The group also received evidence from the following individuals during its review:
 - Mr. Joe Cudd – Head Teacher of Maes-y-Morfa CP School, Llanelli
 - Mrs. Rhian Evans – Head Teacher of Carwe, Gwynfryn and Ponthenri School Federation
 - Ms. Lisa Davies – Teacher at Carwe School
 - Professor David Egan – Director of Wales Centre for Equity in Education
 - Mrs. Betsan O'Connor – Managing Director of ERW
 - Mrs. Tracy Senchal – Head Teacher of Coedcae Secondary School, Llanelli

4. Report Conclusions

- The impact of poverty on attainment is a well-known and well researched phenomenon, indeed, there is a wide range of research and good practice available from across the UK to inform and assist the County's schools in targeting the problem. Carmarthenshire needs to build and enhance on this research and good practice.
- There is evidence of much good practice within Carmarthenshire itself, as testified by the narrowing gap over a number of years. However, the good practice in Carmarthenshire and across the ERW region needs to be promoted and implemented by all schools.
- Minimising the impact of poverty on education attainment and reducing the attainment gap requires long term strategies and commitment from all agencies and organisations involved. There is no quick fix solution.
- Free School Meals Service has developed effective electronic and online systems. However, ensuring that those eligible for free school meals take up that opportunity, remains a challenge
- It is essential that rural poverty is not forgotten, especially, as the Public Policy Institute for Wales states: "there is evidence that rural poverty can be masked by the relative affluence of rural areas and by a culture of self-reliance in rural communities".¹
- It is clear that good leadership in schools as well as giving e-FSM learners a high priority in a school's development plan, is essential to ensure success in dealing with this matter as well as regular tracking and monitoring of pupils.
- Successful schools find creative ways of using the Pupil Deprivation Grant effectively.
- Engagement with parents is important and successful schools share information with and support them.
- The greatest impact of some of these initiatives undertaken by schools is not necessarily an improvement in standards but often is seen in the well-being of the pupils.
- School governors have a key role in monitoring and challenging the way in which their schools spend the PDG and seek to minimise the impact of poverty on education attainment.
- The loss of the PDG would have a significant impact on schools' ability to cater for and support e-FSM pupils.

5. Report recommendations

- I. Carmarthenshire County Council continues to consider the attainment gap as a matter of priority whilst acknowledging that it requires perseverance from all interested parties over a long period of time to ensure success.
- II. The County Council develops and publishes a good practice guide for Carmarthenshire schools, outlining effective methods and solutions to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and reduce the attainment gap.
- III. In developing a good practice guide, the County Council utilises existing and online systems to share with schools and practitioners (e.g. HWB).
- IV. The County Council support an event to launch the good practice guide / promote the deprivation agenda be arranged in Carmarthenshire, in association with the University of Wales Trinity St. David and the European Forum for Freedom in Education (EFFE).
- V. That the County Council considers and responds to the findings and implications of ERW's rural poverty research, when it is published in 2017.
- VI. That the County Council lobbies the Welsh Government on the importance of securing and safeguarding funding for the longer term to support our most disadvantaged pupils. *
- VII. In light of on-going financial pressures, the County Council should urge and support schools to make interventions such as those funded by the PDG, as sustainable as possible for the longer term as well as integrating such initiatives into everyday teaching practice.
- VIII. County Council departments be requested to ensure the promotion of the Free School Meals Service to eligible families through front line services (e.g. Housing Benefits Service), encouraging those in receipt of or applying for other benefits, to apply for free school meals.

6. Actions taken and possible future actions

6.1. Summary

Report Recommendation	Progress to Date (May 2018)	Possible Further Action in 2018/19
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<p>Carmarthenshire County Council continues to consider the attainment gap as a matter of priority whilst acknowledging that it requires perseverance from all interested parties over a long period of time to ensure success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PDG monitored by Challenge Advisers. This has also involved assessing individual pupil progress, reviewed in line with their own targets. - PDG plan is integral to the School Development Plan and a summary is required on school websites. - The Health and Wellbeing conference in February 2018 discussed and addressed many themes of relevance to disadvantaged learners. - A suite of training to better cater for vulnerable learners is in motion e.g. ACE and Attachment awareness - Team around the Family and Families First Working is making an important impact in various areas of delivery including schools and the Youth Support Service -The Department has continued to develop links with EFFE including supporting and attending a change management event and developing ideas with respect to pupil and parental participation - County Council Equity strategy drafted (see 6.2.2. below) - Have investigated developing ideas with Danish colleagues who were linked with our launch event - A comprehensive pilot project bid with the Nordic countries has been submitted under the ERASMUS+ scheme to the European Commission (see 6.2.3 below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More work with parents (communication; participation; home-school contact) etc. -Consider setting up a parent-governor forum and a pupil forum - Await outcome of Erasmus+ bid and implement proposal, if successful - Further develop Equity Strategy and take through corporate process
<p>The County Council develops and publishes a good practice guide for Carmarthenshire schools, outlining effective methods and solutions to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and reduce the attainment gap.</p>	<p>Good practice guide drafted and briefly demonstrated at the launch conference</p>	<p>Further refinement of guide and additional population of materials required Formal and more detailed dissemination to head teachers</p>
<p>In developing a good practice guide, the County Council utilises existing and online systems to share with schools and practitioners (e.g. HWB).</p>	<p>Good practice guide is electronically based and interactive. ERW's DOLEN interactive Resource references to good use of PDG and provides relevant case study material</p>	<p>Needs to ultimately reside on an accessible on-line platform e.g. sharepoint</p>
<p>The County Council support an event to launch the good practice guide / promote the deprivation agenda be arranged in Carmarthenshire, in association with the University of Wales Trinity St. David and the European Forum for Freedom in Education (EFFE).</p>	<p>Launch Conference held on 28.6.17 (see 6.2.1 below)</p>	<p>No further action other than post conference actions (as detailed in this memo)</p>
<p>That the County Council considers and responds to the findings and implications of ERW's rural poverty research, when it is published in 2017.</p>	<p>Research paper received and recommendations considered</p>	<p>Themes addressed in the paper will assist generally in shaping further strategic thinking</p>

That the County Council lobbies the Welsh Government on the importance of securing and safeguarding funding for the longer term to support our most disadvantaged pupils.	Letters (to Welsh Government and Estyn) were sent in August 2017	No further action.
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In light of on-going financial pressures, the County Council should urge and support schools to make interventions such as those funded by the PDG, as sustainable as possible for the longer term as well as integrating such initiatives into everyday teaching practice.	- Value for money with respect to provision is promoted. This entails ensuring that provision is efficient and effective and that differentiated learning is integral to all planning	-Seminar needs to be arranged and good practice guide disseminated further. - Further research of good practice re use of PDG to also focus specifically on the early years - Scrutinise data to ascertain latest position re achievement gaps
County Council departments be requested to ensure the promotion of the Free School Meals Service to eligible families through front line services (e.g. Housing Benefits Service), encouraging those in receipt of or applying for other benefits, to apply for free school meals.	- Promoted via head teacher meetings -Rolling out of cashless system takes stigma away from free School meal purchases - Challenge Advisers routinely remind heads to promote Free School Meals	- Continue to promote Free School Meals to those deemed eligible

6.2 Further detail

6.2.1. Launch Conference

Education Conference 28th June 2017, Parc y Scarlets, Llanelli



LEARNING & TEACHING FOR A NEW ERA - an equitable and innovative future for our schools



Background: i. This conference had an international flavour and was hosted in conjunction with:

The **European Forum for Freedom in Education** and **University of Wales Trinity St David**;

ii. There were a number of prestigious speakers, including *Dr Bill Maxwell* (Education Scotland); *Andrew Macintyre* (OECD, Paris); *David Taylor* (Stanley Park High School, Surrey); *Mette Hauch* (Autens Future Schools, Denmark), *Anna Bolt* (Glyncollen School, Swansea) and *Huw Foster-Evans* (Welsh Government). There were also contributions from *Gareth Morgans* (ECS CCC), *Fiona Carnie* (EFFE) and *Aeron Rees* (ECS CCC)

iii. The following Carmarthenshire schools had stands to showcase work in this area of provision: Johnstown; Carwe/Gwynfryn/Ponthenri Federation; Ysgol y Bedol; Ysgol Hendy; Bryngwyn/Glanymor Federation





iv. The conference was held as a platform to launch the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish report on '**Narrowing the Attainment Gap: Learners eligible for free school meals**' (see below). Introductory comments were provided by Cllr. Glynog Davies, Executive Board Member for Education and Children, who also referred to some priorities for the incoming administration. In addition, the launch session was augmented by a rousing performance by

Carmarthenshire Senior Girls' Choir.

v. The conference afforded an opportunity to debate how we can assist Schools to realise a more equitable future for our communities and how recent reforms, instigated in Wales, are contextualised in the European and global contexts. By nurturing a culture of intelligent curriculum design, developing Professional Capital and fostering inspirational leadership which is clearly focussed on standards and pedagogy – we can realise our moral purpose of transforming learning and achievement for all, irrespective of home circumstance and upbringing, thus 'deafating destiny' by counteracting the potential influence of poverty. In supporting pupils to become 'ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the world' we can aspire that our children and young people are fully prepared to play a full role in life, the world of work and contribute actively to a just and democratic society. Educational progress is deemed to be 'for the many not the few' and for 'all learners in all settings'.

Conference Outcomes

1. The speakers provided inspirational and thought-provoking insights into the conference themes from their particular perspectives:

- **Gareth Morgans** opened the conference, reminding us that early intervention is vital to promote inclusivity and equity and that we need to adopt a proactive rather than reactive mindset.
- **Huw Foster Evans** gave a comprehensive overview of how inclusivity is contextualised within the Welsh Education policy landscape and reform Process.
- **Fiona Carnie** sketched out the wider UK and European context and gave delegates early food for thought re. promoting equity in schools and the wider system.
- **David Taylor** outlined his school's transformation to Pathfinder status, stressing the primacy of relationships, redesigning the school to reflect shared values and the importance of an innovative curriculum and vibrant pedagogy.
- **Anna Bolt** drew attention to Glynollen's major focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and how these values were manifest in a rights based curriculum.
- **Mette Hauch** described the key elements of the Danish Schools' system and demonstrated how Hellerup School promotes project and 21st Century problem-based learning and how trust, relationships, room for error and social and emotional skills are given prominence.
- **Bill Maxwell** offered 10 lessons from Scotland about the transformation journey, which included basing reform on shared values and moral purpose, nurturing a strong guiding alliance to lead change and building professional capacity and trust.
- **Andrew Macintyre** appraised delegates of numerous policy options for greater equity and quality, contextualised the Welsh PISA results and outlined 4 strategies for attaining greater equity in Wales.
- **Aeron Rees** drew the conference to a close by reviewing the main themes of the day and encouraged delegates to concentrate on doing the little things conscientiously, which incrementally create the more coherent whole.

2. In discussion groups, delegates identified opportunities, challenges and barriers to the equity agenda, material which will be useful for managing and implementing the ongoing reform process.
3. There were five workshops: Evaluating Schools in different ways; Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment for learning; supporting the ongoing professional development of teachers; democratising school leadership and organisation and engaging with parents and communities. Detailed minutes were taken, providing a source of ideas for further action.

Conference feedback: (131 delegates attended)

Overwhelmingly, 95% of respondents offered positive responses to the event.

Soundbites:

'very interesting and inspirational'; 'interesting and useful'; 'presentation from Denmark was an eye opener'; 'excellent session'; 'discussing with others was useful'; 'seeing good practice by Carmarthenshire schools'

Conclusion: This conference permitted bringing a fresh and innovative external perspective to our deliberations as a county. The event afforded an opportunity to showcase and celebrate good work in Carmarthenshire Schools and the Local Authority on an agenda of some importance to us. Furthermore, the conference served to galvanise and deepen our links with external partners – which has spawned a number of following actions to take the agenda forward.

6.2.2. Emerging Strategy on Equity

The conference also provided food for thought as to how equity, inclusivity, wellbeing and high educational standards can go hand in hand. A draft strategy has been drawn up (see hyperlink above) and is currently being developed further. The guiding principles are that:

- Every Learner Matters
... and matters equally...
- Nurtured, supported, developed and challenged
...in rights respecting and motivating learning communities..
- And develops holistically
... as a well educated, well qualified and well rounded young person

The strategy is closely wedded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UNESCO Education 2030 publication on Educational Equity. Across the Department for Education and Children, at least 10 work streams have been identified to take this draft strategy forward. It is anticipated that this draft strategy will be finalised shortly, and then be subject to the corporate process.

6.2.3. Bid for European Grant Support (ERASMUS+)

The emerging Equity strategy provided a springboard to pursue more partnership working with colleagues from the Nordic Countries – where notions of equity and inclusivity are better established within educational systems. Over a period of 5 months, discussions have culminated in an ERASMUS+ bid for £450,000 Euros, which was submitted to Brussels on

March 20th, 2018. Carmarthenshire has acted as strategic project lead and was responsible for drafting the bid on behalf of 18 partners, including: The University of Helsinki (Innokas Project); Autens (a Danish education consultancy); FabLab (A Danish innovation partnership); a number of Schools: 5 from Carmarthenshire, 6 from Denmark and 4 from Finland. The University of Wales Trinity St. David, the European Forum for Freedom in Education and another Carmarthenshire school are associate partners. By design, schools selected in Carmarthenshire are primarily in disadvantaged catchments.

The bid has a 21st Century learning focus, closely tied in to Wellbeing and will:

- Develop world-class learning and teaching in Computational Thinking, Design Thinking and Product design – linked in to employability (and, for Carmarthenshire, linked into the City Deal and Swansea Waterfront Developments)
 - Learning activities will involve students in coding, robotics and virtual reality applications
- Has a strong research focus on:
 - Developing new learning and pedagogical paradigms in computational thinking.
 - How disadvantaged learners are empowered through their digital learning and skills development; how their personal characteristics develop (self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience, confidence, ambition etc.).
 - How achievement gaps are closed and inclusion promoted.

News as to the proposal's success or otherwise is expected no earlier than 10th August 2018. Should the bid prove to be unsuccessful, alternative arrangements have been sketched out to take the project objectives forward in a different manner.

6.2.4. Letter to the Cabinet Secretary

Recommendation VI and the conference outcomes resulted in a letter being sent to Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education, Welsh Government and Estyn (see hyperlink). It was affirming hear indirect reference to themes mentioned in our letter during The Cabinet Secretary's address during the launch of 'Education Wales – Our National Mission' in the Autumn of 2017.

7. Conclusions

The Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish group provided a strong basis for our current actions and thinking in this area of service delivery. Closing achievement gaps remains a strong focus for the Department, working closely in conjunction with our schools. New Local Authority Estyn inspection arrangements warrant close attention to the progress of all groups of learners, including the marginalised and vulnerable. This is a further incentive to pursue our stated aim of ensuring the wellbeing, equity and high achievements of all our young people, irrespective of upbringing or current or past circumstance. Strategic and operational developments will therefore be on-going, thus providing legacy to the Task and Finish Group's valuable work.