

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 21 st March 2024
Report Subject	Tackling the Impact of Inequality on Educational Outcomes
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been developed to give a further update to members since the overview report provided to the committee in May 2023.

Reducing the impact of inequality on educational outcomes is a high priority for national policy makers in Wales and across the UK.

The Council takes a cross-portfolio approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage. This is a key theme in the Council Plan for 2023-2028.

The Education and Youth Portfolio contributes to those priorities through its operational activity and support for schools. This report highlights some of the key actions taken and impact seen during this academic year to date.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members confirm they have received a continued level of assurance regarding the work of the Education & Youth Portfolio in supporting schools to tackle the impact of poverty and disadvantage on their learners.
---	---

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING HOW THE EDUCATION AND YOUTH PORTFOLIO CONTRIBUTES TO TACKLING THE IMPACT OF INEQUALITY ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.
1.01	<p>Flintshire County Council recognises the significant impact that poverty, in its many forms, has on its children, young people, families and communities. This provides the rationale for the major focus on poverty through the strategic improvement priorities in the current Council Plan and in the revised plan for 2023-2028.</p> <p>The Council Plan sets out the Council’s priorities under six themes: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poverty• Affordable and Accessible Housing• Green Society and Environment• Economy• Personal and Community Well-being• Education and Skills <p>The Well-being Objective for Poverty is defined as ‘Protecting people from poverty by supporting them to meet their basic needs’. The areas contributing to achieving this are contained within the following five priorities: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income Poverty• Child Poverty• Food Poverty• Fuel Poverty• Digital Poverty
1.02	<p>Indicators from examination performance in 2022/23</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils in Wales who were not entitled to free school meals scored higher in the Capped 9 indicator (interim measures version) with 293.8 points than pupils eligible for free school meals with 382.6 points. The gap has widened since results in 2018/2019 from 77.3 points to 88.7 points.• Flintshire pupils who were not entitled to free school meals scored higher in the Capped 9 indicator (interim measures version) with 375.5 points than pupils eligible for free school meals with 287.4 points. The gap was slightly smaller at 88.1 points compared to the national gap of 88.8 points.• There is no comparative data for free school meal entitlement at A Level, as the number of such pupils in the cohort is too low to allow meaningful comparisons.
1.03	<p>The related priorities in the Council Plan covering the period 2023-2028 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraging further take up of the free school meals breakfast for year 7 pupils eligible for free school meals.• Contribute to the network of school uniform exchanges across the county supported by enhanced web and social media promotion.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing free physical activity and well-being sessions within the summer Food and Fun programme (subject to funding)
1.04	<p>Encouraging further take up of the free school meals breakfast for year 7 pupils eligible for free school meals.</p> <p>The Education and Youth Portfolio encouraged schools to participate in this Welsh Government pilot scheme. The £450k pilot began in September 2020 across Wales to develop a model which enabled provision of a healthy and nutritious breakfast, free of charge for learners entitled to free school meals, before they commence their school day or during the morning break in secondary schools.</p> <p>By November 2022, 9 secondary schools in Flintshire were participating in the scheme and by the end of the academic year 2022-2023, all Flintshire secondary schools were engaged with this, supported by NEWydd Catering.</p> <p>This national pilot ended in July 2023 and the Welsh Government indicated that they were not able to afford to extend the programme further.</p>
1.05	<p>Contribute to the network of school uniform exchanges across the county supported by enhanced web and social media promotion.</p> <p>A baseline survey was completed with Flintshire schools during the summer term. This was a voluntary survey and not a statutory requirement. 30 schools replied to the survey and 21 of those indicated that they operated a uniform exchange scheme for their families.</p> <p>Examples of activities to support this work included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaying a selection of preloved uniform at school events for parents to make a small donation for or take for free • Staff volunteers taking donated uniform home to wash and sort by size • Organising a school Christmas jumper exchange • Engaging with the local community to make access to uniform easier • Uniform Exchange rack outside of school entrance <p>This enabled the Council to establish a better understanding of uniform exchange schemes across the county and help plan our future support strategy more effectively (funding dependent). Bespoke support through the Councils' Revenue and Benefits team was focused at secondary schools during the summer term. The Council website has been updated to provide information regarding these pre-loved uniform exchange schemes.</p>
1.06	<p>Food and Fun Programme Summer 2023</p> <p>The Food and Fun scheme has been delivered by Flintshire County Council for 5 years, in partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr and the Welsh Local Government Association.</p> <p>This year, over 300 primary and secondary age children took part between July 24th and August 10th, 2023.</p>

	<p>Over the 12 days of the programme, the children participated in a broad range of engaging activities focused on health, happiness, and wellbeing. Children attending enjoyed a healthy breakfast, snack and a hot lunch provided each day by NEWydd Catering.</p> <p>Aura Leisure delivered a wide variety of sporting activities and interactive games alongside a broad offer of enrichment activities coordinated by each school. In the feedback received from the children, dodgeball, circus skills and parachute games all proved popular this year.</p> <p>Children learnt about nutrition and healthy diets, gained new cookery skills and enjoyed food tasting sessions. Harlech Foodservice in partnership with Newydd Catering supplied a food bag for each child during the third week of the programme with a range of ingredients to encourage families to get cooking over the holidays.</p> <p>Food and Fun enables families to benefit from structure during the summer holidays. It helps parents with meeting childcare costs and offers paid employment to local people which is hugely beneficial for all communities.</p> <p>Participating schools in 2023 after successfully delivering the programme in previous years were: Ysgol Bryn Garth, Ysgol Bryn Gwalia, Ysgol Gronant, Ysgol Glan Aber, Queensferry Primary School, Ysgol Maesglas, Connahs Quay High School and Ysgol Treffynnon.</p> <p>St David’s High School, Saltney and Flint High School also reintroduced the programme this year.</p> <p>The number of schools participating has continued to grow and during the 2023 summer holidays Ysgol Pen Coch, Ysgol Maes Hyfryd, and Argoed High School, introduced the scheme for the first time. Preparations are now underway for summer 2024.</p>
1.07	<p>Charter for Change; Protecting Welsh Children from the Impact of Poverty - ‘Cofia Ceri’/ ‘Check with Ceri’.</p> <p>During the Flintshire Headteacher Conference of March 2020, a commitment was made by the Council to promote resources provided by the Commissioner’s office to address issues of poverty with our schools. At the Conference, the then Children’s Commissioner for Wales introduced her Charter for Change; Protecting Welsh Children from the Impact of Poverty. All schools signed a pledge at the conference to adopt this approach.</p> <p>The resource produced by the Commissioner, “Check with Ceri”, is an assessment tool for schools to consider the financial impact additional activities routinely undertaken in schools can have on families.</p> <p>The Council has re-launched the resource for this academic year, now that schools have settled back into normal operations after the covid pandemic.</p> <p>The resource asks schools to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children and young people in their school to ‘put themselves in Ceri’s shoes’ and think about all of the costs around the school day

and over the school year for those living in poverty and the stigma that is felt by those who cannot afford to participate.

- Create a 'Ceri's Champion' role within their school. This could be someone within the school's governing body, or within the school staff body, who takes a lead on analysing the costs of the school day and over the school year to populate a 'calendar of costs', and create an action plan to reduce the financial burden on families.

It also asks schools to take account of issues such as:

- Stigma of living in poverty and social pressures
- Food at school - considering schemes like breakfast clubs, and actions to improve the take-up of free school meals by eligible children and young people in school.
- Sanitary, hygiene and health products
- School uniform and clothing
- Equipment required for school
- Access to technology
- School trips
- Special events
- Fundraising
- Budgeting, life skills and school savings schemes

Schools have been asked to provide feedback on how they have been able to use this resource. Responses to date have included:

- Presentations to school staff on these key issues
- Systems in place to offer learners entitled to free school meals (eFSM) discounted prices on non-curricular trips
- Involvement by schools in the Children's University scheme with particular support for eFSM pupils to be able to engage
- Equipment bank available for eFSM pupils to access including loaning of digital equipment
- One school used the resource with their School Council for Christmas Jumper Day. They planned for all children to make a Christmas t-shirt as an alternative to purchasing new jumpers. The School Council planned this knowing that some of their classmates might not have a Christmas jumper, and were not able to afford one.
- Another school runs its own social supermarket where all members of the community can shop for food on a pay as you feel basis, many families access free food in this way. They also provide food bank vouchers. The school provides free haircuts for families in need of this service and toiletries and self-care assistance for older pupils that need support to develop these skills independently. A team of parent support advisors also provide families with support and guidance around budgeting, accessing benefits, housing advice etc.

The Education and Youth Portfolio will continue to promote the use of this resource, alongside consideration of these important issues, at its regular meetings with Headteacher Federations.

1.08	<p>Schools in Flintshire continue to make effective use of the Pupil Development Grant provided by Welsh Government.</p> <p>Estyn reports for Flintshire schools continue to include references to the positive use of this funding. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ysgol Croes Atti (October 2023) <i>Leaders have purposeful arrangements for managing financial resources and are aware of the importance of trying to reduce the effect of poverty on pupils' achievement. They use the pupil development grant suitably to improve the standards and attendance of specific groups of pupils, for example by planning and implementing 'teulu time' family sessions. As a result, opportunities for parents to engage with the school are good.</i> • Ysgol Derwen (October 2023) <i>Leaders use the pupil development grant wisely to provide specific interventions across the school by staff, which provides beneficial support for pupils to improve their learning.</i> • Queensferry Primary School (November 2023) <i>The school monitors and allocates the pupil development grant and other grant funding carefully, ensuring that a range of intervention strategies are available to support identified pupils.</i> • Ysgol Bryn Gwalia (December 2023) <i>Effective use is made of the pupil development grant to provide interventions for pupils eligible for free school meals or from low-income households. This has led to improvements in the well-being, attendance and the progress of most of these pupils.</i>
1.09	<p>Community Focused Schools</p> <p>Flintshire has used grant funding to support the implementation of the Community Focused Schools initiative. The decision was taken to retain the funding centrally so that a team could be developed to target those areas with the highest levels of deprivation. The areas of Saltney, Holywell and Queensferry have been identified for access to this intervention. A community hub has been established in St David's High School to support collaboration between the school and the service.</p> <p>The Community Focused Team supported the delivery of the Food and Fun initiatives in 2 of the schools linked to their areas of focus and this has provided an opportunity to build and develop relationships with families in those communities. Further activities have been undertaken including community lunches involving a range of local residents including parents, town councillors, community groups and church groups. A number of collaborative projects are either underway or in planning, which include delivering a range of engagement activities to reduce the levels of anti-social behaviour in town centres and the development of a Community Growing Garden. The team are also actively involved in working with individual pupils and their families to secure improved attendance and overall attainment.</p>

1.10	<p>Central Services</p> <p>Central services within the Education & Youth portfolio also provide advice and support to families to access appropriate benefits and services that they may be entitled to. Services such as the English as an Additional Language service facilitate translation and interpretation of forms to support access appropriate benefits. Prevention of children becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) is also a priority for the portfolio. The Progression Service works closely with individuals who are known to be at risk of becoming NEET and potentially economically inactive, providing targeted and individualised support to access a range of engagement activities and accreditation. Similarly, Youth Services offer a range of experiences to young people, including those who may be disadvantaged. The service is building in a number of pathways that enable young people to build on positive experiences and access a range of accreditation to support them on a career pathway. The Youth Leader award is an integral part of the offer, but other examples include a young person recently qualifying as a ski leader. These opportunities are important for all our children and young people and especially those who find engagement with formal education challenging.</p>
------	---

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>The Pupil Development Grant is based on school's FSM levels. Support for schools ensure effective use of the PDG comes through the interaction between schools and their individual Supporting Improvement Adviser, through professional learning events and via the national learning platform Hwb. There are no financial implications arising from this report.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>There are no specific risks arising from this report and subsequent actions.</p> <p>The Council undertook a review of its Well-being Objectives during the development of the Council Plan. This includes a theme of poverty which is woven through individual portfolios to ensure a cross-council approach.</p> <p>The Council's Education Portfolio has a detailed risk assessment which outlines key risks related to the delivery of education services and method statements which describe how these risks are managed. These are regularly reported to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview Scrutiny Committee.</p>

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>Regular discussions are held between Education Officers and the Flintshire Headteacher Federations to ensure that tackling the impact of poverty remains a key focus for the Portfolio. This information is used to inform the Portfolio's ongoing cycle of self-evaluation and improvement.</p>

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	There are no appendices to this report.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Wales' Child Poverty Strategy; Progress Report 2022 https://www.gov.wales/child-poverty-strategy-2022-progress-report-html</p> <p>Inequalities in GCSE results across England and Wales September 2022 https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/inequalities-in-gcse-results-across-england-and-wales/</p> <p>Estyn Annual Report 2021 -2022 https://annual-report.estyn.gov.wales/annual_report/tackling-the-impact-of-poverty-and-disadvantage/</p> <p>Flintshire Inspection report 2019 https://www.estyn.gov.wales/provider/6649999</p>

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Vicky Barlow, Senior Manager for School Improvement Telephone: 01352 704054 Cymraeg/ Welsh 01267 224923 E-mail: vicky.barlow@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Disadvantaged – Pupils are classed as disadvantage if they were eligible for free school meals in the past six years</p> <p>Persistently disadvantaged- Pupils considered persistently disadvantaged if they were eligible for free school meals for 80 per cent of their time in education.</p> <p>Pupil Development Grant (PDG)and Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) – grant funding for schools and local authorities to improve outcomes for learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM), eligible learners in Early Years settings where Foundation Phase is delivered and children who are looked after by the local authority.</p> <p>Council Plan: the document which sets out the annual priorities of the Council. It is a requirement of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 for organisations to ‘set out any actions to increase the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements.’ Plans for organisations should be robust; be clear on where it wants to go; and how it will get there.</p>