

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 20<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2016

REFERENCE FROM LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:  
23<sup>RD</sup> MAY, 2016

“55 INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL PERFORMANCE PROGRESS PANEL MEETING  
(DLS) –

The Scrutiny Committee received an overview of the School Progress Panel meeting that had been held at St. Richard Gwyn R/C High School on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2016.

The Chairman, in presenting the report to the Committee, took the opportunity to thank both the Panel Members, the Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and Dr. Brown, Co-Opted member, for their support and work as Panel Members.

In September 2015, the Director of Learning and Skills had forwarded a letter to the Chair of Governors of the school which placed on record the Department's concern about the capacity for rapid and sustainable improvement with regard to outcomes. The letter also highlighted that during 2015 and compared to 2014, pupil attainment at Key Stage 4 had decreased for most of the key indicators. For example, the proportion of pupils attaining 5 GCSE A\* to C grades including English and Maths had reduced to 56%, which was a 2% drop on the performance achieved in 2014. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils attaining A\* to C grades in Science fell from 82% to 71%, in Maths fell from 64% to 62% and in English fell from 76% to 70%. The Panel had therefore been convened in order to provide an opportunity for the school to demonstrate through the democratic process their ambition and commitment to rapid and sustained progress and to ensure that any barriers that had been identified that the school may be facing which could be resolved by the actions of the Council.

The Chairman stated that in undertaking the Performance Progress Panel meeting a considerable amount of straightforward talking had been exchanged as had considerable transparency and openness. Having considered all of the evidence, the Panel had determined that it had a reasonable level of confidence that the school would achieve its targets for improved performance as members considered that the school had effective plans to improve results at Key Stage 4, but felt that the school should closely monitor its targets at Key Stage 3, particularly for Level 6 and Level 7 pupils. Full details of the work of the school had been presented to the Panel at their meeting with the Chairman outlining a number of those areas for the Committee's information.

The school had set itself ambitious targets in order that it could be classed within the top 25% of similar schools in Wales and reported that it was on track for all pupils to achieve the Level 1 indicator (5 GCSEs at Grade A\*-G), and it was confident that it would meet its target of 90% of pupils achieving the Level 2 indicator (5 GCSEs at Grade A\*-C).

In terms of the Level 2+ indicator, for 2016, the school had set a target of 70% of pupils achieving 5 A\*-C GCSE grades including English (or Welsh as a first language) and Maths. During January 2016, the school had reported that 57% of pupils had achieved the minimum pass rate and the data at the time for February indicated that this had risen to 64%. The Headteacher had explained that the school would be concentrating on those borderline pupils and that this would result in a revised timetable and an increase in curriculum time.

For GCSE English, the school's performance target for 2016 was for 80% of pupils achieving at least a C grade. As at January 2016, 68% of pupils had achieved this minimum, which during February had increased to 76%. With regard to Maths, the Headteacher had advised that the school was currently in a very strong position and that performance was well above where the school had been in the previous year. At the time of the Panel meeting, 65% of pupils had achieved the minimum C grade, which had been set against a target of 75%. Although Maths had been identified as an issue, the situation had been improved through staff changes and an amended timetable and also through the input of the Deputy Head who gave support to targeted lessons. The Panel were further informed that a modular Maths paper had been used for marginal pupils which had provided them with an extra opportunity to sit the examination as well as providing them with more focus and a higher degree of confidence.

For Science, the school was tracking 85% of pupils achieving the minimum C grade with it being reported that it was on track to hit its target of 89%. With regard to the Core Subject Indicator (the percentage of pupils achieving at least a GCSE grade A\*-C in each of English or Welsh first language, Mathematics and Science), again the school reported that it was confident that it would hit its target (70% pass rate) with 62% of pupils having reached the required minimum standards as at February 2016.

In relation to Key Stage 3, the Headteacher advised that the school was also evidencing a level of improvement in standards and that performance targets for 2016 were above attainment levels achieved in 2015. He stated that there was a relentless focus on standards in teaching and that there was a commitment to improve leadership at all levels. Following queries regarding more detail around what the school was doing in respect of Level 6 and Level 7 pupils at Key Stage 3. The Headteacher had responded by advising that for the school an important development had been the rearrangement of classes and had mentioned that all classes had pupils of mixed abilities and that the more able and talented pupils were interspersed into all classes because it was considered that this created healthy competition. He also added that pupil data was now at a fine level and based on upper, middle and lower categories. In addition, internal moderation by

the Central South Consortium had taken place which provided the school with a reference point and a description of the attributes that Level 6 pupils would possess.

The Panel had questioned whether the more able and talented pupils were being challenged enough with the Headteacher agreeing that more could be done by the school and that a pupil's ability should be recognised sooner and at the start of the academic year. He stated that some teachers had been reluctant to categorise pupils to the higher levels and some were unsure of the process. Further to this point, the Deputy Headteacher added that there was now a different mind-set of the pupils, particularly in relation to knowing what they needed to do in order to achieve better results. The Panel had questioned whether there was an issue with the school identifying the more able and talented pupils or whether there was an issue around the provision for taking this forward. The reply being that it was both and that this was more developed in some departments than others, and was something that the school was working on.

Other contextual data for the school highlighted that the current rate of exclusions had dropped to 30.5 days when compared to the same time period last year which was 57.5 days. In addition, overall pupil attendance for this academic year was currently at 94.5% (target being 94.6%) and teacher absence due to sickness was low at around 3% of the staff team. In advising the Panel, the Headteacher had also outlined that he had been appointed in April 2015 and it had been recognised that the school had been very traditional in the way it had been run and that one of his main priorities had been to do with gaining the trust of the staff to ensure that they were fully on board with the school's plans for improvement. As a result, a School Improvement Plan had been devised which had been based on four key strategic objectives:

- Learning: to improve and share effective teaching and learning practices across the curriculum
- Ethos: to further promote opportunities to develop wellbeing and the Catholic / Welsh identity
- Achievement: to raise attainment of all learners particularly at Key Stage 4
- Development: to improve the development of leadership at all levels.

The Plan would be reviewed through line management approximately midway through the year and more formally on an annual basis in conjunction with the school's self-evaluation process and document. The teaching staff in the school had also identified seven features that they considered would make up an "excellent lesson", which was referred to as the St. Richard Gwyn Seven.

Following consideration of the school's management performance, a revision of the school's policy had been made which was now closely aligned to teaching objectives and outcomes. In explaining how these improvements would be implemented, the Panel was advised that the school had recognised the requirement to develop leadership roles at all levels which could lead to many teachers working towards achieving a recognised qualification. The school would also share ideas and best

practice with other schools and a formal review of staff training would be undertaken. The senior leadership team had also made a commitment that there would be a greater presence of senior leaders out within the school, although capacity to provide this was an issue. At least one lesson would be observed each day, being divided out between members of the senior leadership team. This allowed the school to record and report on good lessons, around which a learning and teaching folder had been created so that the school could share what a good lesson should look like.

The Panel had queried how the school supported staff that may not be on board with the school plans for improvement with the Headteacher responding that this related to a very small percentage of staff and there were a number of approaches that the school had used to ensure that staff bought into the school's vision.

The effectiveness of pupil tracking was also questioned with an example of good tracking being highlighted in relation to the projection of pupil attainment for the January set of examinations.

The Challenge Advisor at the Panel meeting had stated that there was now a greater focus on outcomes and standards within the school and that she too was confident that the school was making progress. The Chairman of Governors, who had also been present at the Panel meeting, advised that the membership of the Governing Body was being refreshed, which would provide a better understanding around the school's future direction. A skills audit of all Governors was being undertaken and the Chair of Governors made positive comments around the training package that was provided by the Governor Support Unit which was focused on performance, the use of data and outcomes. The Governing Body was also keeping a close eye on staffing issues and had affected staff changes, particularly in relation to those individuals who were not fully on board with the school's plans for improvement. The Governing Body was however, mindful that as some departments were very small, any changes could have a profound impact.

The Chairman stated that overall the Panel recognised that the work of the Governing Body was improving but encouraged members of the Governing Body to undertake occasional learning walks and Subject Link visits. The Panel felt that although the school had developed a training strategy, it suggested that the school should look to establish links and dialogue with other schools and outside peers to broaden opportunities for learning and development. Following a query for her views in relation to learning walks the Director advised that learning walks helped Governors to familiarise themselves with the school and widen their perspective of the role.

The Director of Learning and Skills took the opportunity to advise Members that since the Panel's visit, information had been received from the school that the expected GCSE results were likely to increase from those discussed at the meeting by a further 2%.

In considering the report, Committee Members commented that they were pleased to note that there appeared to be no alarming issues that required immediate attention

and that although it could be said that previously the eye had been taken off the ball it was now encouraging to note the improvements that were being made.

In conclusion, the Chairman stated that supporting the school was one of the main aims of Governors and that learning walks assisted in familiarising oneself with the school and in understanding the issues at hand.

Having considered the report, it was subsequently

**RECOMMENDED –**

- (1) T H A T the Scrutiny Progress Panel findings as detailed in paragraphs 34 to 37 of the report be accepted.
- (2) T H A T an update report be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn following the GCSE results in August 2016.
- (3) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet for consideration and / or approval.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To apprise Committee of the findings of the Progress Panel.
- (2) To monitor progress.
- (3) For Cabinet's consideration."

Attached as Appendix – [Report to Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee: 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2016](#)