

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 9th May 2024

Title: Update on the work of the Mid Wales Education Partners (MWEP)

Purpose of the report: For information

Reason Scrutiny have requested the information:

As part of the Memorandum of Understanding between Ceredigion and Powys, it is agreed that the Strategic Lead will annually report on the work and impact of the partnership.

Cabinet Portfolio and Cabinet Member:

Councillor Wyn Thomas

Background

- Since September 2021 Ceredigion and Powys County Council have worked in a collaborative partnership on elements of the education service, as set out within the Memorandum of Understanding (2023 – 2026) for the Mid Wales Education Partners (MWEP). The areas of collaboration include:
 - Support for curriculum reform / development of the Curriculum for Wales
 - Leadership Pathways
 - Support for Newly Qualified and early career teachers
 - Professional development of Learning Assistants
 - Reduce the impact of rural deprivation, ensure equity for all learners and improve well-being
- The two Local Authorities are separately funded by the Welsh Government for the work carried out by MWEP, with the Strategic Leader being the only member of staff jointly funded by the two Councils. The role of the Strategic Lead is to provide strategic leadership of the partnership and oversight to the impact of the grant expenditure in conjunction with Ceredigion and Powys officers.
- Annually (June) a Business Plan is presented to the Welsh Government and every six months face-to-face meetings are held with Welsh Government officials to

report on the progress and impact of the partnership's work and grant funding received on MWEP schools and practitioners.

- Estyn regularly monitors the progress of the business plan and the work of the partnership, with the Strategic Lead contributing during Local Authority inspections, monitoring and thematic visits for both Counties.
- Internally to ensure strong governance, regular meetings are held with the Chief Executives and portfolio holders of both Counties. In addition, a headteacher reference group meet termly with representatives from primary, all age and secondary schools of both Counties. Working with the Strategic Lead, their role is to provide ongoing feedback on the impact of MWEP support and work.
- The collaboration across Ceredigion and Powys, for the benefit of our schools, practitioners and learners, continues to go from strength to strength, with progress evident in the areas of learner progress, officer collaboration and headteacher and practitioner awareness of the collaborative offer.

Current Situation

Review of financial year 2023 – 2024:

- Following a review of the work and impact of MWEP in 2022 – 2023, the following priorities were set for the financial year 2023 – 2024:
 - i. Support all MWEP schools to develop effective approaches to learning and teaching to ensure learners make progress in line with expectations.
 - ii. Support all MWEP schools in ensuring high quality curriculum design and implementation, building effective practices in pedagogy, progression and assessment with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy and digital competence skills.
 - iii. Develop further support for schools to establish a whole school approach that supports the well-being of learners and practitioners and ensures equity of experiences to alleviate the impact of poverty and deprivation on learner progress.
 - iv. Support MWEP practitioners to follow national and local leadership and development pathways so that the practices of all MWEP practitioners are strong and effective with a positive influence on learners' well-being and progress.
 - v. Further develop strong communications, stakeholder engagement and governance arrangements of the MWEP.
- As a result of the scheduling of business meetings for Ceredigion and Powys MWEP officers to share and discuss priorities, collaboration has further

strengthened. One of the main features of 23/24 was the agreement of questions to ask during each schools' autumn term 2023 support workshop to set a baseline for MWEP's work. From the October workshops, the following were identified as key headlines:

- Where leadership is strong, leaders have a strong understanding of school strengths and areas for development, leading to clear and precise school priorities. However, in a minority of schools (especially secondary and all age) on occasions, priorities are too broad.
 - Many secondary and all age schools note the need to strengthen middle leadership.
 - Many schools respond well to the feedback of key stakeholders such as parents with positive effect. This leads to strong progress in leadership and provision.
 - All schools across MWEP have adopted the CfW and mandatory elements such as publishing the summary of the curriculum for stakeholders. As part of the responsibility of schools to develop and maintain a shared understanding of progression, most schools are working well with schools across the cluster / region to strengthen their provision and understanding of progression. This is a strength.
 - Many schools are starting on the journey in ensuring they respond fully to the challenges of poverty and deprivation on learners and the community within all aspects of school life. This contributes to the work of MWEP and the two Local Authorities to ensure that all learners make the expected levels of progress.
 - A significant challenge, especially for small schools, is the capacity and funding of staff to attend courses / professional learning opportunities. This is further compounded by the availability of quality and Welsh medium supply staff.
- Reflecting Ceredigion and Powys school support officers' positive evaluations of the work of MWEP schools, recent Estyn inspection reports also identify strong practice. For example, Ysgol Cenarth's October 2023 report reported *"The school has a clear vision for learning that reflects the principles and culture of the Curriculum for Wales. Across the school, learning experiences promote this vision successfully and teachers provide a curriculum that develops pupils' skills effectively. An inclusive curriculum promotes a fair opportunity for all pupils to benefit from experiences, particularly pupils with ALN, vulnerable pupils and those who are eligible for free school meals."* Similarly, Ysgol Felinfach's December 2023 report stated *" Teachers work well with schools in the area to plan an inclusive and appropriate curriculum. They adapt it appropriately to ensure that it is up-to-date and responds to pupils' interests. On the whole, the school provides a suitable range of activities that develop pupils' numeracy and digital skills beneficially. As a result, most pupils develop their early skills soundly."*

- During the Autumn term, six face-to-face professional learning sessions were organised for each of the Areas of Learning and Experience for MWEP schools. A majority (66%) of MWEP schools attended at least one session. This was a significant increase from previous virtual networks where only around 10% of MWEP schools attended. Feedback from the sessions from the practitioners was positive, with 98% stating that it will have a very positive / positive impact on their personal practice and 95% indicating a very positive / positive impact on school practice. Practitioners noted their appreciation for the valuable resources and ideas shared, and the opportunity to collaborate with schools across both Counties. The next step for the practitioners and schools is to ensure that learning is delivered within the school to strengthen learning and provision.
- In October 2023, the first MWEP conference was held on reducing the impact of deprivation and poverty on learner progress. As part of the positive impact of the conference the need for a gold thread was emphasised throughout all school activities to support vulnerable learners and their families. The Autumn term support visit reports noted that across MWEP schools that this work is beginning to be implemented within many schools. In addition, a child poverty taskforce has been set up with representatives from Ceredigion and Powys, to work on robust strategies to ensure the best opportunities for all pupils.
- Termly, a meeting is held with the headteachers' reference group, with representation from both Counties. During the meetings open and honest feedback is received about the work of MWEP. Feedback from the headteacher representatives note that the MWEP termly newsletters are a useful source of information and that staff have benefited greatly from working together during the professional learning opportunities, particularly to share good practice and collaborate on a shared understanding of progress. However, there is a demand for further school-to-school collaboration across MWEP and an opportunity to share good practice.

Planning and priorities 2024 – 2025:

- Following an evaluation of the work and impact of MWEP by officers and the headteachers' reference group, and in line with Welsh Government expectations within our "Our nation's mission: high standards and aspirations for all"¹, the following priorities have been set for the financial year 2024 – 2025:

¹ [Our nation's mission: High standards and aspirations for all \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/our-nations-mission-high-standards-and-aspirations-for-all)



Effective and reflective learning and teaching:

- i. Pedagogy: Through local, cluster and partnership collaboration, support practitioners and leaders at all levels to be reflective and innovative to embed effective teaching practices so that all learners achieve their full potential.

Up to the 10th of April 2024, 38% of Estyn recommendations for Ceredigion and Powys schools (2023/24 school year) refer to elements of teaching. As a result, the intention of this priority is to focus on learning and teaching standards across MWEP to support all schools to embed reflective, innovative and effective pedagogical practices so that all pupils make strong progress. Professional learning for MWEP school practitioners will be offered on the theme of "Learning at its best" and "Innovative Learning", in conjunction with a continuation of the work of encouraging practitioners to undertake enquiries to improve specific pedagogical practices. As part of headteachers' feedback, all schools will be placed into triads, based on their priorities for 24/25, so that school-to-school support is strengthened across MWEP.

Through "Expanding Horizons" there will be an opportunity to celebrate and share identified effective practice with schools, leaders, teachers, support assistants and governors to innovate, inspire and improve. The effective practice will be identified through Estyn reports and recommendations from MWEP officers.

To support school leaders and governors in meeting the mandatory requirements for schools to address Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic experiences in the new curriculum and positively contributing to the Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan professional learning for MWEP practitioners, leaders and governors was held in early April. The professional learning successfully highlighted the need for schools to carefully consider the

content of their curriculum with regard to the breadth of text and histories used, the breadth of cultural experiences and the importance of ensuring a proactive response to and reporting of racist incidents. For many, the use of the term “global majority” as opposed to “ethnic minority” was impactful along with the importance of the work of DARPL in all elements of society and our schools, especially where the percentage of global majority is low, due to the potential lack of knowledge and experiences of the learners.

- ii. Secondary Support: Support subject disciplines, timetabling and WJEC Inset to assist in the introduction of new GCSE qualifications from September 2025.

The intention of this priority is to support secondary and all age schools to prepare for the “Made for Wales: Ready for the world” GCSE qualifications that will be implemented by WJEC. The new suite of GCSEs from September 2025 and the additional related qualifications from September 2027 such as the Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education (VCSEs) have been aligned to support the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. With this comes significant change and demands on school practitioners and leaders across MWEP in areas such as the timetabling of Non Examined Assessments and curriculum delivery, especially within a small rural school context. MWEP will support schools with this.

In addition, at a National level (from PISA, GCSE and Personalised Assessment results) and on a local level (from autumn term support visit reports, Estyn reports (up to the 10th of April, 2024, a fifth of Estyn recommendations for Ceredigion and Powys schools refer to elements of learner skills development) and school feedback) schools are concerned about learner standards in their basic skills, in particular in terms of maths, numeracy and literacy skills. MWEP will support schools with this.

A minority of teachers / middle managers seem unsure of the power and potential of the quantitative data available to them to effectively inform their planning so that all learners make the expected progress from their starting points. MWEP will support schools and practitioners with this.

A safe and inclusive learning environment:

- iii. Equity: Support schools in effective implementation and embedding of a community focused whole school approach that ensures equity of provision and experiences to alleviate the impact of poverty and deprivation on learners and their families and ensure high aspirations and expectations for all learners.

The intention of this priority is to continue to support all schools across MWEP to ensure that all learners have equitable access to school-based and extra-curricular education and opportunities to reduce the effect of poverty.

- iv. Wellbeing and the learning environment: Support schools in effective implementation and embedding of a whole school approach that supports the well-being and progress of all learners.

This priority is intended to support schools and MWEP practitioners to establish and embed a positive whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being and promote positive behaviour practices in their schools. This will support all leaders and practitioners to embody a whole school ethos to ensure a supportive learning environment where all learners are ready to learn and engage positively with their learning.

Strong leadership and a culture of continuous self-improvement:

- v. Leadership: Support leaders at all levels to develop a culture of continuous self-improvement so that all learners, practitioners and schools reach their full potential.

Up to the 10th of April 2024, 26% of Estyn recommendations for Ceredigion and Powys schools refer to elements of leadership and the Autumn term support workshop reports identify the need to specifically support the work of middle leaders in their work of carrying out effective self-improvement processes. Therefore, this priority is intended to support middle leaders in their work, to ensure that they adequately reflect on the impact of provision on learning and teaching within their areas of responsibility.

Further work will also be undertaken to try and recruit practitioners (particularly Welsh medium and Secondary practitioners) into the profession.

- vi. MWEP Governance: Ensure that the MWEP collaboration continues to support all Ceredigion and Powys schools and practitioners to achieve effective standards of innovation, inspiration and improvement.

- The intention of this priority is to respond positively to the January 2024, Welsh Government announcement, under the leadership of Professor Dylan Jones, and the then Education Minister, Jeremy Miles, on the outcome of their review to the future path of education partners. They reported the expectation of *"delivering more effective local collaboration, between schools and between local authorities, with an expectation that all schools and local authorities will work in partnership. It will provide greater consistency of support and empowerment, with school improvement at the heart of realising our education reforms. I want all partners to be clear that in undertaking this work our primary aim will be to improve educational outcomes through stretching our learners and reducing the equity gap."*

Ceredigion and Powys were the first two Local Authorities to confirm their intention to continue their collaboration at a MWEP level, thereby ensuring significant stability and certainty for officials and schools across both Counties.

- With the national expectation reflecting the MWEP model of collaboration, this announcement places MWEP in a very strong position for the future. Indeed, the Strategic Lead stands on the ADEW National Working Group alongside Professor Dylan Jones, Welsh Government Officials and representatives from Wales's Local Authority Education Directors. At these meetings, MWEP has shared its model of collaboration.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.

No

Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:

Long term: INSERT TEXT

Collaboration: INSERT TEXT

Involvement: INSERT TEXT

Prevention: INSERT TEXT

Integration: INSERT TEXT

Recommendation(s):

Note the work and impact of the Mid Wales Education Partners.

Reasons for decision:

Ensure that the work of the Mid Wales Education Partners fulfils the needs of Ceredigion Local Authority and all its schools.

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Date of Report: 16/04/2024

Acronyms:

- MWEP: Mid Wales Education Partners
- ADEW: Association of Directors of Education Wales
- DARPL: Diversity and Anti-Racism Professional Learning