



**To/
Councillor Jen Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning and Skills**

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20 July 2018

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 12 July 2018. It is regarding a visit to look at and discuss the Foundation Phase at Gowerton Primary School.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Visit to Foundation Phase at Gowerton Primary School – 12 July 2018

On the 12 July 2018 we visited Gowerton Primary School. After a tour of the facility we met with the Headteacher, Challenge Advisor and the Foundation Phase Advisor for Swansea. We chose to look at a Foundation Phase setting because it has been identified as a challenging area for Swansea and we wanted to understand those challenges and to see what an excellent Foundation Phase setting looks like. After consideration we chose Gowerton Primary School based on the comments highlighted in their recent Estyn Inspection, which said '*Pupils at Gowerton Primary School enjoy imaginative learning experiences planned by their teachers and make good progress as they move through the school. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across the school. The vibrant Foundation Phase is a particular strength. It provides pupils with comprehensive skills to make the most of the following stages of their education*'.

From our discussion we found a number of key factors that make a successful foundation phase including for example:

- The importance of school leaders being committed to and having a thorough understanding of child development and the principles that underpin the foundation phase philosophy. An understanding of how children learn and what learning through play means.
- A commitment to funding, as the foundation phase is resource intensive.
- Learning environments that are vibrant and inspire and facilitate learning that promote pupil independence and learning.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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- Excellent staff training and development that is shared and personalised for that schools practice.
- Teamwork and a whole school approach involving teaching assistants in planning meetings and when discussing pupil progress, sharing good practice, resources and ideas.
- Good systems and consistency in using them including class toolkits, learning environments, reading, writing and marking consistency across whole school
- Creative and engaging developmentally appropriate curriculum that is well balanced with basic skills.
- Planning for pupil involvement and participation.

We heard that it is not a quick fix and for Gowerton it has taken time and focus for the school to get to where they are now. It has taken a commitment to strategic sustainable school improvement, with regular meetings to share, review, revise and agree good practice and to ensure consistency. It is clear that staff are valued with a commitment to professional development and data is used to target and drive improvement.

We congratulated the school in their successful use of the outdoor learning environment and the Forest School Programme. We also heard about the partnership working with their cluster of schools, the City Consortium and Swansea Outdoor partnerships.

We discussed the support provided to schools for foundation phase, hearing that there is currently only one Foundation Phase Advisor who will in October be leaving us for a period of time. Given that the Foundation Phase has been identified as an area that needs development we were concerned to hear that there are currently no plans to fill this post therefore reducing specialist support to schools.

Funding of the foundation phase came through strongly in discussions particularly in how resources are prioritised both by the local authority and the monies coming through the regional consortium (ERW). There were concerns raised about the top slicing of funds particularly by ERW. It had been expressed that schools do not understand how funding priorities are agreed and why foundation phase is not one of those priorities.

There are three key things we would like to share with you, that were highlighted by the school, which could help improve the foundation phase across schools in Swansea:

1. Promoting the importance of the Foundation Phase Philosophy and ensuring it is a priority for Swansea (and in whole of Wales in light of the many curriculum changes)
2. Training – identifying good practice that exists across the authority and sharing it effectively. Effective communication systems to address the work/life balance agenda and to develop shared resources. Identify and develop Hwbs of expertise to support and work with other schools in a supportive capacity.

3. Funding – well trained staff and adult/pupil ratios need to be funded appropriately. Current Education Improvement Grant does not meet statutory guidance for staff training or resources. If this funding goes the foundation philosophy will go with it.

Finally, we were inspired and impressed by the school not only the wonderful new build facility which is truly pupil friendly but the commitment, knowledge and dedication of the senior leadership and staff at the school who clearly go above and beyond for their pupils. The panel would like to thank the school for their time and expertise and wish them the very best for the future.

We would welcome your thoughts on any issue within this letter but would particularly like you to give us your views on to the following points:

1. What are we or can we do to address the three key points in the above section regarding promoting, training and funding of the foundation phase in Swansea?
2. How the funding to schools is distributed via ERW and what are the costs of this to Swansea?
3. Given the focus on improving the foundation phase across Swansea, what is being put into place to ensure ongoing support to schools while the Foundation Phase Advisor is not in situ?

Can we please have your written response by 10 August 2018.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convened the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

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