



To:
Councillor Robert Smith
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

BY EMAIL

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Summary: This is a letter from the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 27 October 2022 where the Panel looked at an update on the Education Directorate, the Estyn Inspection, Partneriaeth and the Pupil Manifesto.

Dear Cllr Smith,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 27 October 2022

We would like to thank you and your supporting Officers for attending our meeting. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

We received an update on key activities within the Education Directorate including:

The recent Estyn Inspection of Education Services in Swansea

We heard that Estyn provide a single judgement on whether a local authority's education services should be placed into a category of 'causing significant concern'. Estyn judged that education services in Swansea do not fall into this category. The report identified many strengths and notable features and the local authority has been invited to submit two case studies on its work in relation to strong support for school improvement and the quality of support in mainstream schools for pupils at risk of disengagement, which will then be published by Estyn.

We understand two recommendations were made. The first is to 'review post-16 provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners', and the second is to 'strengthen Welsh-medium provision across all ages and areas of the local authority'.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We were told that work had begun to address the areas of recommendation prior to the inspection. New strategies for post-16 provision and vocational provision are in development and key stakeholders, including children and young people, sixth forms, further education institutions and work-based learning providers are involved in the continued development of these strategies. We were pleased to hear that one of the key strands will be listening to our Post 16 Learners. We agreed to build updates on progress with both the Estyn recommendations into our work programme this year.

We also heard Cabinet approved Swansea's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan in July 2022, which has since been approved by the Welsh Government. A ten-year vision for increasing and improving planning for Welsh-medium educational provision in Swansea is included in this plan. A delivery plan will be developed with stakeholders from Partneriaeth Addysg Gymraeg Abertawe (Swansea Welsh Education Partnership) during the autumn term.

We were pleased that Estyn also recognised the work of the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel as a critical friend, saying that *'the panel considers a broad range of relevant activity. There is a strong focus on understanding how schools support and contribute to delivering the local authority's agenda on reducing the impact of poverty. There is also a renewed focus on employability skills linked to the regional skills partnership. The panel engages well with schools and, where appropriate, includes the views of pupils and school leaders when evaluating agenda items brought before them. Pertinent and sometimes sensitive matters, such as school reorganisation proposals, are considered appropriately in pre-decision scrutiny activity. In addition, the panel convenes helpful working groups to consider relevant areas, such as school procurement'*.

We agreed with you that this was a highly successful inspection and a good reflection of the work taking place in our schools. You told us that although we have had this great outcome, we are not going to be complacent but look to continually to improve. We as a Panel wished to pass on a thank you to all those involved in getting this excellent outcome.

Partneriaeth

We heard about the new regional education partnership 'Partneriaeth' including a current position update. It was explained that:

- The new partnership is a regional collaborative arrangement designed to promote excellence in all of our schools and settings. It is a legal entity and services three local authorities in South-West Wales – Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire.
- The new model has addressed previous concerns (in previous partnerships) about communication and strong relationships across the region are developing as a result.
- The partnership key function is to deliver a professional learning service to schools and school leaders.
- The core school improvement remains as part of the local authority provision and Partneriaeth officer supplement when appropriate. This avoids duplication of support and adds value for money.

We were pleased to hear that the new partnership is working closely with our schools and has specific objectives that will meet our requirements. We agreed that this is a positive move forward.

The Pupil Manifesto

We were pleased and encouraged to hear about the Swansea Pupil Manifesto. We heard that a Pupil Voice Professional Learning Community (of secondary school teachers and pupils) came together to develop a pupil manifesto that outlines a range of innovative and positive ideas that Swansea council should consider as a means to help improve the communities of Swansea.

We asked about inclusion of those children and young people who may not be confident at expressing themselves or that may be disengaged from the education system. You told us that it is considered very important that we hear and focus upon getting involvement from those 'quiet voices'. Officers are looking at how best this can be done including speaking to other local authorities to see how they are approaching this. You told us that schools are one vehicle being used to reach children and young people but this is by no means the only way we are engaging with them. You also emphasised the need for it to be corporate approach.

We were pleased to hear that the intention is for the Pupil Voice Manifesto to feed into planning and consultation corporately including for the new Corporate Plan and revision of the Abertawe 2023. We will also look at ways in which we can, as a panel, include the voices of children and young people in our work moving forward.

Your Response

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter but on this occasion do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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