



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 17 November 2022

School Improvement Team

Purpose:	To brief the Scrutiny Panel on school improvement
Content:	A briefing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the progress of the School Improvement Team;• sharing effective practice; and• school improvement guidance.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views
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1. Background

- 1.1 Swansea Council's School Improvement Team (SIT) sits within the Achievement and Partnership Service and helps deliver local and national priorities and strategies for school improvement. In October 2021, the Primary and Secondary phase teams were merged and are now led by one Principal School Improvement Adviser. A Welsh in Education Advisory Team and Music Service are also situated within the SIT. An officer from within the team supports the provision for skills across Swansea's settings. Since the amalgamation, team members report a greater sense of agency. SIT members who are not School Improvement Advisers (SIAs) are now attending school visits which promotes the sharing of effective practice.
- 1.2 The SIT comprises of permanent and commissioned SIAs (known as Challenge Advisers prior to May 2021). For the academic year 2021-2022, the team had 3.3 full-time equivalent permanent SIAs (September to April) plus a full-time secondee. Ten headteachers were commissioned to support the work of the permanent team.

- 1.3 In addition to the SIAs, the team is supported by four performance specialists covering the areas of Literacy, Numeracy, Digital Skills and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)/Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE). From April 2023, only one permanent officer will remain in post (Digital Skills).
- 1.4 The core responsibility of the SIT is to support and build the capacity of all schools to be self-improving, to help raise standards and support schools to provide high quality provision. There are four key aspects to the role:
- supporting school self-evaluation and improvement;
 - brokering effective support and identify/share effective practice;
 - developing school leadership; and
 - building school-to-school capacity.
- 1.5 During the 2021–2022 academic year, there was a mix of virtual and face-to-face school visits undertaken by SIAs. For each school, two formal visits were arranged owing to the pandemic. Nine schools were inspected by Estyn. No schools were placed into a statutory category or monitoring. Five were asked to write at least one case study on the effective practice found. The SIT supports schools to share this work.

2. Briefing

- 2.1 The SIT support schools in a number of ways throughout the school year. The core of the work is centred around three annual support visits. The agenda for each visit is co-constructed with headteachers in order to support high levels of ownership and engagement. During visits, based on the needs of the school, SIT officers undertake a range of quality assurance activities. For example, meetings with senior leaders/governors, observations of learning and work scrutiny. The main aim is to support the school's own evaluations.
- 2.2 The SIT's objectives for the last academic year were:
- Support school self-evaluation and improvement.
 - *Engage in WG's school improvement guidance.*
 - Support school preparations to implement Curriculum for Wales (CfW) – broker effective support and intervention, build school-to-school support through partnership working.
 - *Facilitate professional learning (PL)*
 - Support implementation of the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being and the ALNET Bill develop school readiness for new curriculum and assessment arrangements.
 - Develop workforce and leadership (at all levels).
- 2.3 During the early part of 2021–2022, many schools were facing ongoing challenges as a result of the pandemic. High levels of staffing absence across our schools required the SIT to be dynamic in its approach to support and challenge. The team supported schools in a number of ways. For example, meeting remotely instead of cancelling planned visits, training governors

remotely and attending schools face-to-face and remotely to support leadership capacity shortcomings.

Autumn term visit agendas included updates on the school's plans to support pupil and staff wellbeing, support for vulnerable pupils, Curriculum for Wales preparations, Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) Act readiness, and grant expenditure. The discussion regarding grant expenditure included how each school used its Pupil Development Grant (PDG) funding to support pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM). The aims of gathering the information were to develop a greater understanding of what provision was being offered to Swansea pupils, what support schools needed to enhance provision, and to identify effective practice to share with others. School leaders shared their monitoring/quality assurance findings with the SIAs. Priority evaluations were considered and the SIAs continue to support schools in their reviews of pupil progress. This will be an ongoing requirement.

During summer visits, the SIT made excellent use of the temporary appointment of two performance specialists. Focusing on the provision for literacy and numeracy, the officers attended around half of Swansea schools to support the evaluations of school progress and to support the development of a Swansea strategy for literacy and numeracy. This will be shared once complete.

Continuity of learning was supported by the sharing of good practice through existing networks, for example the Digital Leads network across primary schools and the Secondary Curriculum and School Evaluation Network (SCASEN) for secondary schools.

SIAs collaborated with headteachers via the Continuity of Learning Partnership (COLP) group. This group met monthly and in addition to sharing good practice, created template policies and documents for primary schools to adopt and adapt as they saw fit. This partnership continued to support schools through curriculum reform and sought the advice from a range of officers and professionals, for example, curriculum specialists from the consortia. During 2021-2022, a new Swansea Curriculum and Assessment Network (SCAN) was established. This group, with representation from all sectors, is designed to support the development of a strategy for curriculum development in Swansea. It was effective in the amalgamation of practitioners and has led to a number of key workstreams eg the development of 'on-entry' assessment tool.

The Welsh in Education advisory team supported schools in a variety of ways that included:

- creating a wide range of resources for schools.
- facilitating coordinators' seminars.
- training for staff.
- providing 'live' lessons via Teams.
- ongoing support for the development pathway of Cymraeg Campus/Siarter Iaith.
- Strategic support and delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

Nearly all visit reports and headteacher performance management appraisals were completed by the end of the school year.

- 2.4 In addition to the professional learning (PL) referenced above, SIAs have brokered beneficial opportunities for headteachers, senior leaders and teachers. The PL opportunities focussed on curriculum design and the development of a shared understanding of progression as schools prepare to implement the Curriculum for Wales (CfW). This PL was provided by regional partners and well-regarded experts. Members of the SIA team continue to oversee the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs). This entails allocating external verifiers, providing training, reviewing and moderating profiles, and organising the allocation of NQTs to schools for the autumn term (a Welsh Government initiative that is virtually cost neutral to the schools involved).
- 2.5 SIAs have continued to support the Directorate's Governor Support Team by providing training sessions that have focussed on CfW, assessment, headteacher performance management and the Welsh Government's school improvement guidance. Governing bodies have also been supported with officer advice when making headteacher and deputy headteacher appointments. The SIA team oversee new appointments of other senior leaders, as required.
- 2.6 In schools, leaders use PDG funding well to support their learners. For example, facilitating professional learning for staff focusing on elements such as speech and language provision, wellbeing, disorders linked to attachment anxiety, learning catch-up programmes, emotion coaching, among others. Some uses include employing staff deployed to support pupils and families. A wide range of how schools use the grant was reported to Scrutiny in March 2021. What is common amongst the approaches is that they are often evidence-based and evaluated by school leaders as part of their self-improvement activities.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Despite the continued challenges, the SIAs have supported schools well, providing a wide range of PL opportunities alongside school support visits. Effective practice has been shared via headteacher meetings and established networks.
- 3.2 SIAs have supported governing bodies well to make headteacher and deputy headteacher appointments, provide PL and bespoke support as required.
- 3.3 Vulnerable learners and eFSM pupils are well supported by the local authority and their schools.
- 3.4 The Welsh Government's school improvement guidance (September 2022) has driven changes to the school visit agenda. Whilst complimenting the principles of CfW, in the context of the emergence from the pandemic and curriculum

reform, the SIT and the SIAs need to be sensitive to schools' capacity to take on change.

4. Legal implications

4.1 There are no legal implications.

5. Finance Implications

5.1 There are no finance implications.

6. Integrated Assessment Implications

6.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

6.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

6.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

6.4 An IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required for the following reasons:

- This is a report to share information. The summary of impacts is low. No mitigation is required.
- This is a report to share information regarding the performance and functions of the School Improvement Team, which is linked to the corporate objective of improving education and skills.

- This is a report to share information. No risks have been identified and no impact is envisaged.

Glossary of terms:

Acronym	Expansion
SIT	School Improvement Team
ALNET	Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales)
PDG	Pupil Development Grant
eFSM	Eligible for Free School Meals
COLP	Continuity of Learning Partnership
SCASEN	Secondary Curriculum and School Evaluation Network
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
RRRS: ALP	Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: Accelerated Learning Programme (<i>this is a WG grant</i>)
PL	Professional learning
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
RVE	Religion, Values and Ethics

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A – IIA Screening Form