



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 23 November 2023

School Improvement Team

Purpose:	To brief the Scrutiny Panel on school improvement
Content:	A briefing on the progress of the School Improvement Team
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Robert Smith, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
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1. Background

- 1.1 Swansea Council's School Improvement Team (SIT) sits within the Achievement and Partnership service area 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, Music Service and Minority Ethnic Learners and Equality team 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 2022-2023, the team had 4 full-time equivalent permanent SIAs plus a seconded Principal officer. 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 Digital skills, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)/Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE), Literacy and Research and Enquiry.

- 1.4 The core responsibility of the SIT is to support all schools to be self-improving, to help raise standards and promote 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.
 - building school-to-school capacity.
- 1.5 During the 2022–2023 academic year, industrial action, mainly affecting primary schools, prevented officers conducting school visits. As a result, reports could not be written in all cases. This action affected around 50% of primary schools. Normally, at least two formal visits are arranged for each school with reports compiled and submitted to the principal officer and the school.
- 1.6 Twelve schools were inspected by Estyn. One school was placed into a statutory category. Four schools were placed into Estyn monitoring. Four were asked to write at least one case study on the effective practice found. The SIT supports schools to share this work.
- 1.7 For the 2023 – 2024 academic year, the seconded principal officer was successfully appointed, following a competitive process, as a permanent member of staff. He is supported by 5 full-time, permanent SIAs and 4 commissioned SIAs who support Swansea’s 95 schools and settings. Secondees, funded by a regional grant, support schools in modern foreign languages (MfL), literacy and enquiry. In order to support the implementation and ongoing review of Curriculum for Wales (CfW), an additional secondee from a secondary school will support the team.

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 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 support schools/settings to 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 Welsh Government’s school improvement guidance.*
 - Support school preparations to review the impact of their curriculum designs.
 - *Utilise self-evaluation tools such as the National Resource for Evaluation and Improvement (NR:EI).*
 - Broker effective support and intervention, build school-to-school support through partnership working.
 - *Facilitate and promote professional learning (PL).*

- Support implementation of the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being and the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (ALNET) Bill
 - *Continue to prioritise and promote positive wellbeing.*
- Develop workforce and leadership (at all levels).
 - *Provide senior and middle leader self-evaluation training.*

2.3 During 2022–2023, many schools were facing ongoing challenges in relation to work force availability. High levels of staffing absence across our schools required the SIT to provide operational support and advice. The team supported schools in a number of ways. For example, meeting remotely instead of cancelling planned visits, training governors remotely and attending schools to support leadership capacity shortcomings. The principal officer deployed senior leaders to 3 schools from the consultative pool.

Autumn term visit agendas were an interpretation of Welsh Government's School Improvement Guidance and encouraged schools to self-evaluate in the areas of:

- Vision and leadership.
- Curriculum, learning and teaching.
- Wellbeing, equity and inclusion.

Nearly all schools were visited during the autumn term and visit reports were produced. Feedback from the quality assurance of these reports now inform the work of SIAs during 2023 – 2024.

Late in the Autumn term and during the early part of the Spring, the performance specialists delivered on the literacy and numeracy strategies before their secondments concluded. Good progress was made.

During the latter part of the Spring term, industrial action began to impact on the team's interactions with schools and less visit reports were written. SIAs engaged with all schools with an offer of informal support and began planning professional learning based on the outcomes from Autumn visits.

Secondary Curriculum and School Evaluation Network (SCASEN) for secondary schools continued to meet regularly to share effective practice. A useful conference facilitated worthwhile professional dialogue. This network is a strength of Swansea's schools/settings.

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).

During the Summer term, all secondary schools were visited, and reports written. A clear set of strengths and areas for development were identified within the three areas of self-evaluation above.

Industrial action continued to impact the work of SIAs in primary schools. Only a few schools permitted formal visits and the writing of reports. However, SIAs were able to visit schools more informally and in the majority of cases, supported schools during their quality assurance activities. In addition, SIAs developed a suite of training opportunities to support ongoing self-evaluation. These sessions have received exemplary feedback and were attended by around 400 practitioners across the city.

SIT plans to further develop these during 2023 – 2024.

- 2.4 In addition to the professional learning (PL) referenced above, SIAs have brokered beneficial opportunities for headteachers, senior leaders and teachers through the termly headteacher meetings. 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.
- 2.5 SIAs have continued to support the Directorate's Stakeholder and School Support Team by providing training sessions that have focussed on CfW, assessment, headteacher performance management and school improvement planning. 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 Pupil Development Grant (PDG) funding well to support vulnerable pupils. 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. One of the team's SIAs support schools in their work as community focussed organisations.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Despite the reduced interactions, 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 Eligible for Free School Meals (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. SIT has been able to support schools further in their ability to evaluate the impact of their planned actions on learner outcomes.

3.5 For 2023 – 2024, SIAs are focusing on:

- A differentiated/graduated approach to the number of school visits per school depending on the level of need.
- Supporting schools and settings to have a clear rationale for their priorities.
- Supporting schools to plan for improvement in a more focussed manner.
- Improving the quality of school-based evaluations.
- Supporting schools to undertake purposeful quality assurance that promotes an improving view of:
 - pupil progress.
 - the impact of their curriculum plans.
 - the provision to promote positive wellbeing.

4. Legal implications

4.1 There are no legal implications within this report.

5. Finance Implications

5.1 There are no finance implications within this report.

6. Equality and Engagement Implications

6.1 The report is for information and not for decision.

Background papers: None

Appendices: None