



**To:**  
**Councillor Robert Smith**  
**Cabinet Member for Education**  
**Improvement, Learning 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 Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 1 September looking at the changes to Estyn Inspection process, Covid recovery in education and regional education partnership developments.

Dear Cllr Smith,

### **Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 1 September 2021**

We would like to thank you and the Director of Education 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.

#### ***Estyn Inspection Process***

We were pleased to hear about the changes that are being made to the Estyn Inspection process and welcomed two Estyn representatives Kevin Davies and Ceri Jones to the meeting. We found their presentation very informative and useful to us in carrying out our scrutiny programme moving forward. Some of the key points we noted from the discussion included:

- How they recognise how difficult and challenging the last year and a half has been for learners and their families.
- The academic year 2021/22 will focus on supporting renewal and reform and as a result of that they are extending the suspension of the core inspection programme for schools and PRU units to include the autumn term 2021, so inspection of schools will not commence until the spring term. During the autumn term, they will continue to ask all stakeholders for their feedback on our new inspection arrangements and this can be done anytime via the Estyn website.
- They aim to pilot the new inspection arrangements in a small number of schools. So that they can check to see how the arrangements are working in the new

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climate, they will ask individual providers for their agreement to be involved in these pilots.

- At present they do not directly inspect regional consortia. Rather, they look at the work of the Consortia through inspection of local authorities, but this might change.
- Under the new arrangements there are still 5 inspection areas and they are pretty much the same. The first one has been renamed learning.
- In the most recent announcement from the Welsh Government it is expected that every sector uses the period between September and January to reflect on the guidance and begin preparatory work.
- The overarching changes to the inspection reporting and process will also include: a richer narrative describing the schools strengths and areas for improvement. Summative judgments have been removed with only the key strengths and areas for improvement to be reported. There is a change to the notice period that schools get and there are no changes to the follow up procedures, significant improvement as a statutory category and special measures will still be included.

### ***Education Covid Recovery moving into new school year***

We heard that the situation is still quite fluid, with some Welsh Government guidance coming through in August and the most recent guidance arriving last Friday.

We were pleased to hear that there is a clear imperative to try and normalise schools as much as possible this term, returning, where possible, to a state of business as usual. You told us that as we are now in alert level 0 our current policy means that any contacts of confirmed Covid cases are exempt from isolation if they do not have symptoms, have been double vaccinated and are under the age of 18. We agreed that this is potentially good news because whole groups in secondary schools and bubbles of classes within primary schools will not have to self-isolate. We were also told that there will be a change in operational guidance that schools have become used to. The new guidance has been produced at a national level and then considered again here in Swansea at a local level, it will come into force from 20th September. We also heard that

- there is no longer a requirement to wear face masks or face coverings. However, if a pupil feels that they would still like to wear a face mask that would be permitted. For secondary schools the wearing of face coverings on school transport will be required.
- working under relaxed duties will come to an end so schools will no longer stagger the start times and finish times.
- schools will continue to maintain the high level cleaning regime.
- all staff and secondary pupils are encouraged to take LFT tests twice a week and to report those results really to the online portal.
- the Chief Medical Officer in Wales considers that children, young people are no longer clinically extremely vulnerable and they are going to be removed from the list of shielding patients in Wales. However, there will be a small number of pupils who still receive specialist clinical advice.
- we are still awaiting more information from Welsh Government about the air quality and ventilation including what is recommended in our classrooms. Our Health and Safety Officer here in Swansea made the recommendation that a trickle of air flowing through a classroom would be sufficient. However, this will depend on the buildings themselves.

- as far as educational visits are concerned, any type of educational visit will need to be risk assessed, including international visits in light of the traffic light system.
- all parents have been written to in Swansea in advance of schools opening to convey the expectations we have of them as the new school term commences.

### ***Update on Regional Scrutiny moving forward***

We understand that the new regional partnership will be developed during the course of this autumn term, with, ultimately, the three Councils taking a report to their full Council to approve the new legal agreement. The approval for a new legal agreement is therefore pivotal. This new legal agreement will allow for the formation of a new formal Joint Committee for the new partnership. In the meantime there is a Shadow Joint Committee in operation.

We were pleased to hear that the new draft legal agreement does contain very precise scrutiny arrangements as well as governance arrangements for the new partnership. We heard that it will give details of the different layers of governance and the interrelationships between the different groups. The new legal agreement will allow a new Joint Committee to be given delegated responsibilities from each constituent Council so the new partnership can make decisions. It is planned that the Joint Committee will meet quarterly and will include the Leaders from each of the Councils and the three Cabinet Members for each of those Councils. The Chief Executives would be involved in a non-voting capacity along with Directors of Education and the Head of the new partnership. There will be a Scrutiny Councillor Group and this will operate in the same vein as the current ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group.

The new partnership will also have a Strategic Group which will feed into the Joint Committee. This will be made up of the Head of the new partnership with the three Directors of Education and also any strategic officers working within the new partnership. There will also be an officer's Operations Group who will feed into the Strategic Group. The final layer will be the Stakeholder Group and that will be made up of 12 Headteacher's covering the primary, secondary, special and pupil referral unit sectors.

We heard while there is a process of transition into a new legal agreement, there has to be a winding down of the current one. So the original ERW Joint Committee will need to meet at least once this term to wind matters down so that the new partnership can be formulated and sealed. It is anticipated that the new legal agreement will go to Swansea's Full Council in November 2021.

### **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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