



**To:**  
**Councillor Robert Smith**  
**Cabinet Member for Education**  
**Improvement, Learning and Skills**

**BY EMAIL**

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Date 18 October 2021  
Dyddiad:

**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 30 September looking at the school improvement.

Dear Cllr Smith,

### **Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 30 September 2021**

We would like to thank you and the Lead School Improvement Adviser 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.

### ***School Improvement***

We were pleased to hear about the positive work being undertaken by the School Improvement Team in the full and detailed report you provided. We were particularly keen to hear about progress with, for example, the City Deal and ensuring that our pupils in Swansea are in the best position to benefit from the opportunities it will bring.

We asked about the current situation with regard to school attainment. We previously had concerns about the level of attainment of pupils in receipt of Free School Meals (eFSM). We are keen for the Council to progress with improving this and asked when you will be in a position to focus back on this vital issue. We were pleased to hear that there is an evidence based approach to the spending of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) being used by schools which is helping to address this. We would be interested to see any information on the correlation between how PDG is spent and how it reflects in increased attainment, when it is available.

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

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We heard that in terms of measuring attainment, the Welsh Government have removed the foundation phase teacher assessments and end of key stage two teacher assessments, which you said was a good thing but a new way to measure attainment now needs to be developed. We heard that in future, assessment arrangements will be included in the design of the new curriculum. We agreed with you that a good question for the Welsh Government will be how we as a council, or indeed as a country, can we measure whether the new Curriculum in Wales is having the desired effect. We heard that this will be an ongoing question that we will need to keep asking as schools develop the new assessment processes.

We were reassured that in terms of the support visits this Autumn Term, School Improvement Advisers will be looking at how well pupils are doing. We were told what they found in visits last year and this is likely to be the case again this year. Last year schools found that it was the basic skills many of their pupils needed to focus on. Although before that it is essential that they continue to focus on pupil wellbeing, if pupils are not happy or comfortable in school it is difficult to learn.

We asked how the commissioning of Headteacher's worked and what sort of impact this had on the school releasing them. We heard that the commissioned Headteacher's log their days out of school and the school is financially remunerated for that time. This then in turn gives an opportunity, for say, the Deputy to come out of class and have the experience of running the school for a day or series of days. It is good professional development for senior staff in schools. It is also good professional development for the heads as well, visiting other schools and seeing different practices. You said that this has not been an easy thing to do, but it does give other people within school the opportunity to develop professionally and this will help build upon the pool of talent and assist in succession planning. We were keen to emphasise the importance of backfilling and associated budget provision to continue, so the financial impact for schools of releasing a commissioned Headteacher can be protected.

We asked what the key challenges will be over the next 12 months for the Team when supporting schools. We heard Covid is still a key issue and the pressures schools are facing with this and then balancing that with day to day duties was still very real. The other key challenge areas are the introduction of the new Curriculum and the Additional Learning Needs Reform. We were also told that it is important for the School Improvement Team to ensure schools are moving forward with all of these issues.

### ***Education Scrutiny Work Programme***

We reviewed our work programme and highlighted the item on harassment in schools to be followed up upon. The Panel deferred the issue earlier in the year for further work to be completed. They would now ask you to provide them with an update on the current position on this issue for our next meeting on the 21 October.

## **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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