



**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 Learning following the meeting of the Panel on 22 February 2024. The Panel met with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors from Clydach Primary School to discuss their school development plan.

Dear Cllr Smith,

### **Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 22 February 2024**

We thanked the Acting Headteacher and the Chair of Governors from Clydach Primary School for their presentation addressing the set of questions that were sent to the school in advance of the meeting. We are writing to you as the Cabinet Member to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

We welcome the good progress that has been made with the School Improvement Plan since the Estyn Inspection in November 2022. We were particularly keen to hear about the progress being made in relation to the five Estyn recommendations contained in that report.

We heard from the School Improvement Service that they are particularly proud of the progress that the school has made towards the recommendations provided by Estyn in the recent inspection. It was recognised that it has been a significant piece of work and required a number of changes to be made at the school in order to make the provision for learning much better.

Some of the points we noted from the discussion include:

- The school was placed in special measures in November 2022 by Estyn, who provided them with five recommendations for improvement. We heard from the Acting Headteacher that these closely interlink and have been the driving force of everything done since then.

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- When the Estyn inspection took place in November 2022 there was no Headteacher in the school, quite a number of staff at the school were absent and a number of agency staff were covering. There was also no admin, no caretaker, no cook. There was a real challenge with staffing.
- Now the school has a newly appointed Headteacher, a Deputy Headteacher who acted into the Headteacher role until that appointment, so he has clear experience of the difficulties experienced at the school and has been heavily involved in making improvements. The Senior Leadership Team has a full complement and almost all teaching staff are back in work, there are no temporary posts. So, there has been a significant shift in terms of staffing and consistency for the children of the school.
- Following the inspection, a post inspection action plan was written. It identifies the milestones that have been actioned and the next steps.
- Estyn revisited in June 2023 and said 'leadership at the school promotes a calm and supportive culture of continuous improvement based on clear communication and high expectations. As a result, staff respect leaders and value the professional development opportunities and that the role of the governors is evolving with the growing emphasis on reflection and the governing body includes well organised committees for finance and the monitoring of progress towards the post inspection action plan'.
- The school have developed communication with parents, pupils, governors and staff.
- When Estyn came in for their most recent visit in June, they stated that leaders have established clear structures for evaluating the school's progress to ensure the self-evaluation activities are strategic and effective.
- They have embedded a calendar of purposeful activities and provided clear expectations for all staff. This clarity has started to foster a growing culture of trust and respect. This is driving forward improvements, helping leaders identify strengths effectively and ensure that priorities and the findings are used strategically to plan next steps for professional learning. Leaders are seeking opportunities to involve parents in the self-evaluation process.
- The school has worked hard on developing teaching across the school. The leadership team has worked diligently focusing on the development of teaching and learning. They received a really positive quote from Estyn that summarises where they are at with teaching 'there has been a notable improvement in the quality of provision across nearly all classes. The consistency of teaching is having a positive impact on pupil progress, fostering good pupil well-being, and improving attitudes to learning'.
- Since inspection the school has worked hard to develop a curriculum, various new initiatives have been introduced to ensure the progressive development of pupil skills. Estyn said that 'leaders have developed a shared vision for teaching and learning and staff collaborate thoughtfully to establish the curriculum that systematically builds on existing knowledge, understanding and skills'.
- Leaders at the school have taken significant steps to develop useful professional learning opportunities. Notably, staff members have received training in consistent approaches to the teaching of reading and writing and staff members have also begun engaging in professional learning activities outside of the school environment. This includes participation in cluster events and observing good practise in other schools.

We asked about the challenges faced by the school and how they are working to address or mitigate them. The Panel heard:

- The new leadership team had inherited a significant deficit budget. The governing body have worked proactively with the local authority and the school to develop a robust recovery plan, which is reducing the deficit budget. Although it is a significant barrier that the school face on a daily basis in terms of their spending and what they have to work, with a knock-on effect to staffing. The governing body committees continue to monitor the school's finance and staffing situation in line of the budget.
- Premises have been an issue with the school spread over two sites. The school said they are excited about the opportunity and the prospect of moving to one site. Recognising there is a long journey ahead, but that this will be beneficial for the school. We heard that the infant building dates back to 1862. It needs significant repairs and they are frequently facing issues such as leaks, plumbing issues and most recently electrical updates.
- Another barrier that they faced was the post inspection action plan itself. Initially, they felt they were quite restricted by that and couldn't deviate towards anything else, but Estyn have now given them the autonomy to look into other areas that they have identified for improvement, like for example foundation learning provision.
- One of the big challenges faced was pace of change and the morale of staff but they believe they have made strong progress with this to date. Staff are fully engaged with the school improvement activities, but the pace and demands on this for staff are tough. The Chair of Governors said, as a school and as leaders, we are placing well-being at the centre of all our decisions particularly staff well-being alongside progress against the recommendations and this is always a key discussion point in governing body meetings.

The school also outlined how well they feel they have supported throughout this process to date, including:

- They had received excellent support from the School Improvement Adviser, particularly with the increased level of support required to assist the acting Headteacher.
- The brokered support. During the absence of the headteacher, the local authority provided interim leadership to the school by brokering support in the form of an experienced Headteacher.
- From Partneriaeth, with the development at the curriculum. Partneriaeth assigned a link officer to the school, who has provided support to the leadership team and training for staff, deepening understanding of the curriculum and provided additional general training in line with the needs of the school.
- They said that Human Resources support for the school has been valuable. They guided and supported the school through some very challenging situations.

The Panel recognised that supporting the school through this most challenging period has be no mean feat and we would like to thank both the Acting Headteacher and the Chair of Governors for their strong commitment to bringing about improvement at the school. We congratulate their success so far, in what was said to be marathon not a sprint. We are reassured that good progress is being made across the School Improvement Plan and with the Estyn recommendations and that there is now good

leadership and a full staff compliment to enable the school to continue to build upon those improvements.

### **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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