



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

To:
Councillor Jennifer Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education

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Date 07 April 2017
Dyddiad:

This is a letter from the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education following the meeting of the Panel on 16 March 2017. It is about Birchgrove Comprehensive School.

Dear Cllr Raynor

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

At our meeting on the 16 March 2017 we met with the school's recently allocated Challenge Advisor then the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors from Birchgrove Comprehensive School.

We spoke to this school because it has been highlighted as Amber on the support and categorisation matrix. We wanted to discuss what the school is doing to improve its current performance and prospects for improvement. We have detailed our thoughts in this letter.

As you will be aware the school was inspected by Estyn in November 2013 and was judged to be good for current performance and good for its prospects for improvement, but performance had declined since that time. We discussed these points both with the Challenge Advisor and the School.

We heard from the Challenge Advisor that:

- The school has a new Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher who have redesigned the Senior Leadership Team. They are doing well in this task and starting to drive improvements forward but need to develop more consistency in leadership to ensure stability and resilience.
- The Challenge Advisor has put together an ERW Action Plan with the School to drive improvement (which we looked at).
- Quality Assurance at the school needs to be strengthened, which they are aware of. They must develop their self-evaluation so that it can be correctly reflected in the School Improvement Plan and drive improvement. The Challenge Advisor will assist with this moving forward.
- Outcomes in English Language and Science need to be improved .

The Headteacher then outlined the context in which the school is working explaining that it has a 3 year average of 25.4% free school meal pupils, 29.1% special educational needs pupils and that 40.2% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived parts of Wales (as per the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015). The School has a specialist teaching facility with 21 learners.

There are 494 pupils on the school roll, in recent years pupil numbers have shown a falling trend with an increase intake in Year 7 for 2016. The Panel was interested to explore the reasons for this and what could be done to improve numbers. The Headteacher explained that the school was located between three schools two of which are newly built or refurbished and one in Neath Port Talbot which has an aggressive pupil recruitment policy. The school indicated that they are working on a number of levels to increase pupil numbers and are aiming at present to maintain at least 100 new pupils per year.

The Headteacher and Chair of Governors recognised that the school needs to improve its performance in English Language and Science subjects. We were concerned to hear about the secondment of the Head of Science to ERW as a subject specialist. We struggled to understand why this was the case when Birchgrove Comprehensive clearly needed its Head of Science especially when the subject area was identified as one that needed to improve. We felt that the rationale of ERW seconding senior teaching staff from schools that might be causing concern and, in particular using subject specialists that are heading departments that are not performing needs to be revisited.

We were pleased to hear that the financial situation at the school has improved and we would like to praise the staff and governing body. We were also encouraged to hear that:

- the school has a new and enthusiastic Headteacher and Deputy who are reinvigorating senior management at the school. They are clarifying roles and putting systems in place that will help lay the grounding for the school to improve.
- the school has a supportive, engaged and knowledgeable governing body that has the necessary skills to help to drive improvement.

Your Response

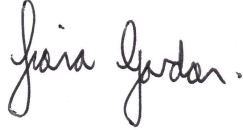
There were three particular aspects that arose from this session that we believe affects education more widely in Swansea and we would ask that you look into these further:

1. The use/release of senior teaching staff for ERW where a school is causing concern and cannot afford to lose that key role. Also is consideration given to the performance of their originating department when seconding challenge advisors and subject specialists?
2. The performance of Science subjects across Swansea has been raised a number of times in conversations with schools and we would like to hear more about what is being done to raise the levels of science in our schools particularly how we are supporting and challenging schools on this aspect.

3. How we work across local authority borders particularly where schools have more aggressive pupil recruitment policies?

Please could we have your response by 28 April 2017.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Gordon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

Fiona Gordon
Convener Schools Performance Scrutiny Panel
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