



**To/
Councillor Jen Raynor
Cabinet Member for Children,
Education and Lifelong Learning**

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9 November 2017

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning following the meeting of the Panel on 18 October 2017. It is about Education Improvement Service and the 21st Century Schools Programme.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel – 18 October 2017

The Panel would like to thank Helen Morgan Rees and Brian Roles for attending the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel on 18 October 2017. We received our annual progress update about the Education Improvement Service and we also explored progress with the 21st Century Schools Programme.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the panel, and where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response. The main issues discussed are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Education Improvement Service

We heard about the ten objectives in the operation plans for 2016/17 and that success is being rated on improved outcomes (impact) and qualitative feedback (quality control). Of these ten objectives the panel particularly focused on:

- *Improve outcomes in Foundations Phase*, where they heard that there has been a slight improvement in the Foundation Phase indicator. We heard that further work is required to reduce the gap in performance of pupils who receive free school meals.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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- *Improve outcomes in maths, numeracy, English and literacy:* improvements have been seen across all phases apart from key stage 4. Changes in the national qualifications have had an impact on the results across the Board at key stage 4 and a similar pattern has been shown across Wales. We heard that further work was required to support English and Mathematics at secondary level.
- *Improve provision for digital competence and building on requirement of new Digital Competence Framework.* We heard that further work was needed including ensuring adequate staffing. We wished to emphasise the importance of ensuring that schools have enough staff trained and the right facilities for pupils to become digitally competent. Especially in light of the City Deal and what this will have to offer people with the right skills. We wanted to ensure that we are going to be 'ahead of the game'. We felt that using people who have the 'know how' like local business and the university to move this agenda forward quickly and effectively was important.
- *Monitor and evaluate schools effectively:* we were informed that it can be difficult to get an honest dialogue with a few schools so further work was required to stabilise staff to ensure consistency.
- *Build leadership capacity in schools:* we were pleased to hear that there is a good range of provision afforded to develop staff in schools currently but that we must ensure that provision is in line with new National Academy for Leadership.

We were pleased to hear that EIS has improved and developed through engaging more fully with regional partners to provide a clear professional learning prospectus and menu of support to schools. That the breadth of leadership support to schools has improved and that strategic opportunities for schools to work with others have increased. We welcomed the good support for leaders in schools that will help improve key areas of teaching. The use of HWB in improving collaboration across schools was praised recognising that as a result teachers have better access to useful resources, networks and training materials.

Education Improvement Officer capacity including Challenge Advisors in Swansea are currently at the optimum level of 12 core funded full time employees.

We asked about the professional learning available to teachers and the consistencies in which this is taken up. We heard that there is a lot of interschool activity around professional learning and more use of cost effective ways of developing staff like for example. We were pleased to hear that there is a strong performance management process in place that schools use and where training needs are identified and monitored.

We asked if there are any potential barriers to further improvement, we heard that

- There is uncertainty and a lack of clarity about the role of ERW in delivering an education improvement services and that this may create unhelpful tensions and misconception for employees and services users.
- Unstable staffing levels can hamper continuity and progression in the service provided to schools.
- The publication of National Categorisation outcomes can work against the trust and rapport required for schools and challenge advisors to work in a collaborative way.
- The pace of change for schools does not always provide time and space for self-improvement. The effect on the wellbeing of headteachers continues to be a concern.
- Regionally agreed core visits to schools are perceived to be creating a workload issue for headteachers and this is at odds with reducing workload.
- The simple act of monitoring a school is becoming less authentic as a result of electronic systems that cannot compete with real time.

21st Century Schools Programme

We were pleased to hear that Band A of our 21st Century Schools Programme was progressing well and that most of the projects are complete or progressing recognising the difficulties with the one outstanding new build.

We heard that for Band B the grant for capital projects remains at 50%. The Voluntary Aided Schools receive 85% from Welsh government and require 15% from that voluntary body. We also heard about the potential contribution rate for Mutual Investment Model which will be 75%. We understand that Swansea should hear about the outcome of the submission for Band B funding in late October / early November 2017.

We were interested to hear that some projects could be delivered by a Mutual Investment Model as a form of public private partnership. Also that the Mutual Investment Model, unlike traditional forms of Private Public Partnerships (PPP), includes long-term obligations to secure community benefits, create apprenticeships and training places for Welsh workers and for sustainable development, in which the private partner will be required to support the delivery of the Well-being and Future Generations Act. We understood that potentially four schemes might be identified for the Mutual Investment Model but these would be unlikely to be delivered early within Band B.

We were pleased to hear that the priorities contained in the submission were identified through a robust and objective set of assessment criteria and consistent with previous extensive stakeholder engagement. We also heard that the proposed submission to the Welsh Government reflects the natural development of the previously approved longer term strategy but also reflects further consideration of changes in demands and priorities. We were also informed that the programme has been repeatedly scrutinised by Welsh Government.

We asked what the potential risks to the programme might be and these were identified as:

- Getting the full Welsh Government funding envelope required for Swansea's Band B submission
- Working through the complexity of the Mutual Investment Model
- Meeting the required local capital contributions
- Officer capacity to develop the detailed business cases and then deliver schemes
- Construction industry capacity to deliver schemes
- Voluntary aided body contributions

Your response

We are interested in hearing any further thoughts you have about the issues raised in our letter but would ask that you respond to the following issues by the 30 November 2017

1. We would like further information on how schools and the local authority are including others, like for example, the private sector and the university in moving the Digital Competence Framework for schools forward in order to ensure that our up and coming pupils are being prepared for the employment opportunities that the City Deal will offer.
2. Can you inform us of the outcome of the Band B submission to Welsh Government once it is available?

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR MO SYKES

Convener, Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

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