



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

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1 February 2018

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 January 2018. It is about Annual Education Performance Data.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel – 18 January 2018

The Panel would like to thank you and Nick Williams for attending the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel on 18 January 2018. We received your annual update on Education Performance and also looked at progress with the recommendations contained in the 2013 Estyn Inspection of services for Children and Young People.

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.

Annual Education Performance Data 2016/2017 (including verified data)

You told us that Swansea has a strong record of improving outcomes for learners across all stages in schools.

We heard that performance at Foundation Phase has shown a positive trend of improvement over the last five years. However, the overall Foundation Phase outcome indicator remains below the national average and Swansea's rank position has fallen over time. Overall performance is adequate. Swansea is 19th out of 22 authorities in 2016-17.

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We did express our concern about the Foundation Phase data. You told us that there have been issues with the consistency of use of the Foundation Phase philosophy across schools. There are a small number of schools which are not completely working to this philosophy while there are some schools that are very strong in this area. You said you recognised how important it is to get this right especially because the New Curriculum will build upon the Foundation Phase. The Panel were pleased to hear that the inconsistency on how Foundation Phase philosophy is used within some schools will be one of the issues of focus this year.

We heard that performance at Key Stage 2 showed a positive trend of improvement during the last five years with the rank position of 13th and an improvement on 2015/16. Overall performance is good with nearly 90% of learners achieving the core subject indicator before they leave primary schools.

We were pleased to hear that performance at Key Stage 3 has shown a year upon year improvement during the last five years and that Swansea is now above the national average. Rank position is above expectation. National test performance is very good. Overall performance is strong.

We recognise that the performance at Key Stage 4 between 2012 and 2016 was outstanding with schools showing continuous improvement across all main indicators. However, we heard that in 2016-17 new examinations have resulted in re-calibrated performance across Wales. Swansea performance remains relatively strong despite drops in performance indicators. We were pleased to hear that this will be monitored over the coming year.

We heard that nearly all learners in Swansea schools entering 2 or more A levels (or equivalent) have achieved the level three threshold at A level during the past three years. However, in 2017 results were below Wales and ranked in 18th position and the average point score showed variability between years and sixth forms. You told us that you will be working with schools and colleges to work to improve this position.

We asked about Free School Meal (eFSM) learner performance and you told us there is still a substantial gap across all Key Stages between those who receive eFSM and those who do not. This will remain a key focus for schools and the education services as a whole moving forward.

We raised the issue of stretching more able pupils and you told us that schools must put challenging measures in place for all pupils which should include access to after school clubs. We also heard that primary and secondary schools work closely to ensure a child is stretched throughout school life. We agreed with you when you said that it would be useful for Governing Bodies to allocate a designated Governor to champion this in each school.

We asked if there has been an improvement in children's readiness for school that can be attributed to the early intervention services like Flying Start. You told us that hard evidence is difficult to give at present but anecdotally yes and it is improving. The Panel queried whether there needs to be a way of measuring this.

Ensuring all school staff have the skills needed to manage, teach and inspire children and young people was raised. We heard that the upskilling of all school staff was a key area for development and focus for the coming year.

We also asked whether as an authority, we are paying enough attention to getting good qualified teachers to become future and inspiring school leaders. You told us that the importance of this was recognised and gave an example of the Leadership Academy that is currently in place.

We heard about and agreed with the key areas for improvement over the coming year based upon this data as:

- Consistency in Foundation Phase
- Pupils in receipt of free school meals at all key stages and particularly at KS4 and science
- Improve outcomes at A level through collaborative working with colleges
- Improve outcomes for new qualifications in key stage 4, particularly science

Estyn Inspection of Local Authority Education Services for Children and Young People 2013, Update on progress

We heard that Swansea was inspected in 2013 and at that time a Chief Executive's Improvement Board was established to monitor progress with improvements to the recommendations contained in this report. The progress has been reported to Cabinet annually since that time. We were told that this will be the last report that will update on the 2013 inspection progress.

We were pleased to hear that good progress had been made with all five recommendations. We looked in most detail at Recommendation 4: *Improve the quality of provision for those pupils who are educated other than at school, particularly to raise standards of achievement and to assist with the reintegration back into schools.* You told us that the rate of improvement on this recommendation had now moved up a gear, with a newly appointed Headteacher for the Pupil Referral Unit, who is bringing about a number of the improvements needed within the teaching and learning. It had been recognised that the current accommodation and facilities for these learners is not at all adequate and that a new build facility is planned through a recent Band B Wales Government submission.

Your response

We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the issues raised in our letter and would ask that you respond to the following issues by the 22 February 2018.

1. Ask Governing Bodies to allocate a designated Governor to champion the 'stretching of the most able pupils'.
2. Investigate the development of a way of measuring how effective early intervention services are for improving children's readiness for school.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR MO SYKES

Convener, Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

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