



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

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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 15 March 2018. It is about Bishop Vaughan Catholic Secondary School Performance and its prospects for improvement.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel – 15 March 2018

On the 15 March 2018 we met with the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher from Bishop Vaughan Catholic Secondary School along with the relevant Challenge Advisor.

We chose to speak 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 on how the school is progressing in this letter.

We heard from the Challenge Advisor that:

- In 2016 a number of issues were identified at the school that had caused concern and needed to be addressed, in particular: the need for stable, strong leadership, the academic data dipping and a large financial deficit.
- The school received an 'Amber' support package last year and has now been categorised as 'Yellow'. The Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team have welcomed and embraced the support given.
- A new acting Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team were appointed in the September of 2016 and since that time a number of measures have been put in place to bring about improvements at the school. This has resulted in stronger and more stable leadership at the school, an up-lift in academic performance and the managing down of the financial deficit.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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- In January the school had an Estyn Inspection which has evidenced a more positive picture and is in line with how the Challenge Advisor had assessed the school had progressed. We heard that the Inspection outcome is not yet public but will be published on 4 April.

The Headteacher outlined the context and answered a number of questions asked by the panel which covered, for example:

- The support the school had received from the Local Authority, ERW and other schools
- Support for and training of new and aspiring school leaders and the need to include financial and human resource management in that package of learning
- The work to improve pupil performance and outcomes at the school, improvements made and areas still requiring improvement
- The innovative use of the pupil deprivation grant to improve EFSM pupil performance
- The ongoing work to manage down the financial deficit and the implications of grant reductions. We heard that this will disproportionately affect the school because they have a reduction in pupil numbers currently, imminent changes in support received from the Ethnic Minority and Achievement Service and the post 16 budget reductions
- Attendance and exclusions
- The condition of some of the school buildings at the school and the need for some major maintenance or replacement of some aspects

From this discussion with the Head and Deputy Headteacher and the Challenge Adviser we concluded that there is now a much improved picture at the school as compared to the situation in 2016. We felt that this is mainly due to:

- The school now having a new and confident Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team that are proving to be creative and innovative in driving improvements at the school
- Leaders at all levels in the school, and school staff, having worked together and responded well to the drive to improve pupil outcomes
- The school having welcomed support and challenge from the Local Authority, the Challenge Advisor and assessing of school to school support
- The school is working with the Challenge Advisor to develop its self-evaluation processes
- A much improved financial situation at the school and clear plan to come out of deficit
- The school has well considered plans in place to support pupils from vulnerable backgrounds. Using their Pupil Deprivation Grant, the school focuses on improving pupils' outcomes in literacy and numeracy and breaking the link between disadvantage and educational attainment. This has shown positive impacts in pupil performance for EFSM pupils. This has been identified by Estyn as good practice and worthy of sharing with other schools.

We did recognise, however, that some areas of particular improvement are required. These are being addressed through the school continuing to seek 'school to school' support and assistance from the challenge advisor and subject specialists including in its self-evaluation processes, mathematics and science and outcomes at 6th Form. The Panel did feel that the appointment of a permanent Headteacher should be made soon to ensure stability moving forward.

We congratulate the Headteacher and school staff, the challenge advisor and the governing body at the school for the improvements made at the school since 2016 and look forward to seeing this continue from a now strong base. Overall, we are pleased to see the new strong leadership team taking the school forward and would particularly celebrate the use of the innovative thinking the school is using to solve the challenges that it faces.

We welcome your thoughts on any of the issues raised in our letter and would ask that you respond to the following points by 17 April 2018.

1. We recommend that a permanent senior leadership team be appointed soon to ensure ongoing stability and improvement.
2. Look at whether the financial implications of budget reductions across a number of services that will affect the school can in some way be mitigated?
3. Look at how the serious maintenance issues within some of the school buildings can be addressed?
4. We recommend that the support and training for new and aspiring leaders include the management of human resource and financial matters.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR MO SYKES

Convener, Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

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