



**To/
Councillor Jen Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning and Skills**

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BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 11 December 2018. It is about the Education Improvement Service, Education through Regional Working and the Pupil Development Grant spend.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel – 11 December 2018

We would like to thank you and Helen Morgan Rees for attending the meeting and answering our questions about the Education Improvement Service, Education through Regional Working and the Pupil Development Grant spend.

Education Improvement Service

We heard that the Education Improvement Service now sits within the Achievement and Partnership Service and its role is to help deliver regional strategies for school improvement that take account of our local priorities. You told us that there are currently three units within the education improvement service: Primary Phase, Secondary Phase and Curriculum Phase. All units aim to work with ERW to deliver a regional service on behalf of Swansea Council and each Head of Unit takes responsibility for working in alliance with the ERW central team, where possible. However, communication and clarity with the ERW central team have declined during this reporting period.

We understand that the new professional standards for teaching and leadership came into force in September 2018. We were pleased to hear these are ambitious and link closely with curriculum reform and that performance management within schools is aligned with the new leadership standards. We agreed with you that the current and future work of the Education Improvement Service must be

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underpinned by these standards, curriculum reform and the Education Directorates five top priorities.

We heard that progress during the year has been strong. Local performance is considered to be Yellow (as identified by the RAYG evaluation) although the details given were a high level overview and there is more detail kept on all the key aspects. The Panel would be interested to see this, if possible.

We were interested to hear about the teaching and use of the Welsh language in English speaking schools. We heard that there are now much higher expectations for all pupils to be able to hold a conversation in Welsh and have equity of opportunity for that. We agreed with you when you said it important that all pupils get the opportunity to enjoy the Welsh language.

We were encouraged to hear about the strand of the new curriculum around Health and Wellbeing and we felt that this was an aspect that has been missing formally from the curriculum until now.

It was mentioned in the recent press about the state of Digital Competence in Schools in Wales and we heard that it was a relatively positive picture across schools in Swansea. Although there are areas for improvement including getting consistency across the authority and ensuring we have the right technologies and kit to move forward effectively.

Education through Regional Working (ERW) Business Plan priorities

We heard that of the five ERW regional priorities three are currently Amber and two of Yellow status. That the School Improvement function is divided between local and regional officers and that this can create duplication. Also that the review and reform programme has created uncertainty and disengagement at a local level.

We heard that during the academic year 2017-2018, engagement with the Education through Regional Working (ERW) central team had reached a hiatus. The planned service review and reform of ERW has not taken place and as a result the collaboration and service delivery has fragmented in comparison to previous years. We are pleased to hear that a plan will be discussed, to move ERW forward and resolve a number of important issues, at ERW Joint Committee in February.

We did question whether ERW diluted valuable resources from going to the front line and whether it was an extra layer of bureaucracy. The idea of a 360 degree review of ERW was suggested where stakeholders could give full feedback from all angles. It was also felt that the voice of the child must be included in any reviewing of education related activity.

Pupil Development Grant spend

The main areas of expenditure for the Pupil Development Grant for the financial year 2016/2017 were outlined to the panel. We understand that the use of the

pupil development grant is most effective where schools have followed the Welsh Government's Practitioner Guidance and used research evidence to support their spend.

We were concerned to hear that some schools may not be following the guidance or using the toolkit available. We were pleased to hear that the Education Improvement Service has been working with schools around this and signposting them to advice about how best to spend the grant. We were also encouraged to hear that the PDG grant spend is monitored and unpicked to see what has been most effective etc. We agreed that it is important to identify and build on strengths. We felt that the PDG was a lifeline for some schools and would have concerns if it was discontinued at any time in the near future.

We heard that the quality of homework clubs is monitored and inspected via CSSIW (that is those that run for more than 2 hours a day). If they are run for less than 2 hours they are not monitored formally. We were encouraged to hear from Pupil Voice sessions that homework clubs are valued by pupils; who appreciate a safe and quiet place to study where they have access to the ICT equipment they might need.

We would welcome your thoughts on any issue within this letter, on this occasion we do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR LYNDA JAMES

Convener, Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

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