



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 30 September 2021

School Improvement

Purpose:	To brief the Scrutiny Panel on school improvement
Content:	A briefing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the progress of the Primary and Secondary Phase Teams towards each team's priorities for the previous academic year;• sharing good practice;• supporting eFSM pupils; and• readiness for the City Deal.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views
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1. Background

- 1.1 Swansea Council's school improvement service sits within the Achievement and Partnership Service and helps deliver local and national priorities and strategies for school improvement. Since February 2016, the school improvement service in Swansea consists of two teams, the Primary Phase Team (PPT) and the Secondary Phase Team (SPT). A Welsh in Education advisory team is part of the PPT and the music service is part of the SPT.
- 1.2 The PPT and SPT comprise of permanent and commissioned school improvement advisers (challenge advisers prior to May 2021). For the academic year 2021-2022, the PPT had five permanent school improvement advisers (September to April) and seven headteachers were commissioned to support the work of the permanent team. For the same period, the SPT had two main school improvement advisers (1.5 FTE) and three commissioned headteachers.

- 1.3 The core responsibility of the improvement teams is to support and build the capacity of all schools to be self-improving schools, to help raise standards and support schools to provide high quality provision. There are 4 key aspects to the role:
- supporting school self-evaluation and improvement
 - brokering effective support and intervention
 - developing school leadership
 - building school-to-school capacity
- 1.4 Children and young people in Swansea have experienced another disrupted year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, facing periods of enforced closures in both the autumn and spring terms of the 2020-2021 academic year. Since the re-opening of schools in April 2021, many schools have instructed contact groups to isolate due to positive Covid cases. The disruption inevitably influenced the work of the school improvement teams and this is reflected in each team's priorities as outlined in the main body of the report. Despite the disruption, the PPT (including the Welsh in Education advisory team) and SPT (including the music service) continued to support schools.

2. Briefing/Main Body of Report

- 2.1 The school improvement teams support schools in a number of ways throughout the school year. During the pandemic, many meetings, support 'visits' and professional learning activities took place via Microsoft Teams. Face-to-face support was also provided and increased as restrictions were relaxed throughout the year.
- 2.2 The PPT's objectives for the last academic year were:
- to support schools and learners throughout the ongoing Covid-19 crisis in terms of wellbeing, continuity of learning and professional development
 - broker effective support and intervention
 - develop school readiness for new curriculum and assessment arrangements
 - develop workforce and leadership (at all levels)
- 2.3 The school improvement advisers (SIAs) made regular well-being check-ins with their schools and would support schools, senior leaders and headteachers. For example, the Head of the PPT supported a headteacher with regard to the school budget and staffing arrangements. Other work that supports the well-being of our school leaders includes the scrutiny of Welsh Government consultations and dissemination to headteachers, and the reviewing and updating of risk assessments as they concentrated on school operations.

In July 2020, the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, announced school categorisation was to be suspended for the academic year 2020-2021. As a result, support visit agendas included updates on the school's blended learning provision, arrangements for pupil and staff wellbeing, support for vulnerable pupils, Curriculum for Wales preparations, ALNET Act readiness, and grant

expenditure. The discussion regarding grant expenditure included how the school used its Pupil Development Grant (PDG) funding to support pupils eligible for free school meals (**eFSM**). The aims of gathering the information were to get a greater understanding of what provision was being offered to Swansea pupils, what support schools needed to enhance provision, and to identify good practice to share with others. School leaders shared their monitoring and evaluation findings with SIAs and considered how their findings would be reflected in school priorities.

Continuity of learning was supported by the sharing of good practice through existing networks, for example the Digital Leads network across primary schools and the Secondary Curriculum and School Evaluation Network (SCASEN) for secondary schools.

Primary Phase SIAs collaborated with headteachers in a Continuity of Learning (COL) group. This group met monthly and in addition to sharing good practice, created template policies and documents for primary schools to adopt and adapt as they saw fit. This productive partnership will continue in the current academic year. The Welsh in Education advisory team supported schools in a variety of ways that included:

- creating a wide range resources for schools
- facilitating coordinators' seminars
- training for staff
- providing 'live' lessons via Teams

Secondary SIAs used their monitoring visits to identify emerging and effective practice to share through secondary senior and middle leader networks. For example, SIAs identified good practice in areas such as supporting and engaging vulnerable pupils, live and recorded lessons, Centre Determined Grades (CDGs), assessment, supporting disadvantaged learners and teacher professional development. Network sessions ran roughly on a monthly basis and were responsive to the varying conditions created by the pandemic.

Nearly all visit reports and headteacher performance management appraisals were completed by the end of the school year. All were completed with new objectives aligned to the circumstances created by the pandemic. For example, 'Covid-secure' schools, pupil/staff wellbeing and continuity of learning etc.

- 2.4 In addition to the professional learning referenced above, SIAs have brokered beneficial opportunities for headteachers, senior leaders and teachers. The professional learning opportunities focussed on assessment and curriculum design as schools prepare to implement the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) in September 2022 (secondary school implementation has been delayed by one year). It was provided by regional partners and well-regarded experts. Members of the PPT continue to oversee the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs). This entails allocating external verifiers, providing training, reviewing and moderating profiles, and organising the allocation of NQTs to schools for the autumn term (a Welsh Government initiative that is virtually cost neutral to the schools involved).

- 2.5 School improvement advisers have supported governing bodies by providing training sessions that have focussed on remote learning, the recovery agenda via the accelerated learning programme, CfW, assessment and being 'evidence-informed'. Governing bodies have also been supported with officer advice when making headteacher and deputy headteacher appointments.
- 2.6 As referred to in 2.3 above, the school visits/meetings would include discussions focussing on the support schools provided to their eFSM pupils. Since March 2020, leaders in the local authority have worked strategically to ensure that learners have access to online learning. They acted quickly to ensure that vulnerable learners received laptops and Mi-Fi devices and they have used Welsh Government grants prudently to purchase additional equipment when necessary. The local authority has distributed more than 11,000 devices to homes across Swansea.

In schools, leaders use PDG funding well to support their learners. For example, facilitating professional learning for staff focussing on elements such as speech and language provision, well-being, attachment, and catch-up programmes. Other uses include employing staff to support pupils and families. A wide range of how schools use the grant was reported to Scrutiny in March 2021. What is common amongst the approaches is that they are often evidence-based and evaluated by school leaders as part of their self-improvement activities.

3. Readiness for the City Deal

- 3.1 The Skills and Talent programme is a unique programme within the suite of 9 City Deal projects that will deliver a skills training solution; offering the best value sustainable skills infrastructure to develop the future workforce of the region. The programme is led by the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP), a partnership of industry employers and public sector training and education providers.
- 3.2 The RLSP has completed a business case for the Skills and Talent programme which has been approved by all 4 local authorities. Approval is currently being sought from the Welsh and National governments, and is expected by October half term 2021.
- 3.3 A Regional Programme Manager has been appointed to take forward school-based projects, engagement, and other initiatives at a local level. The aim of this is to create a clear career pathway from school education through further and higher education in the key areas of digital, construction, energy, smart manufacturing and life-science and wellbeing. Specifically, the Skills and Talent programme seeks to influence curriculum development and delivery to ensure the adequate supply of young people with the right skill sets.
- 3.4 The Director of Education has endorsed the submission of the business case for the Skills and Talent programme as part of a gateway review. The governance and delivery of the programme is placed within the RLSP and the engagement between the board and Education has been suitable.

4. Conclusions/Key Points Summary

- 4.1 Despite the challenges faced over the last 12 months, the SIAs have supported schools well, providing a wide range of professional learning opportunities. Good practice has been shared effectively.
- 4.2 SIAs have supported governing bodies well to make headteacher and deputy headteacher appointments.
- 4.3 eFSM pupils are well supported by the local authority and their schools.
- 4.4 To date there has been an initial meeting with the RLSP, with the decision to work in local authority pairs. Swansea and Neath Port Talbot councils will work together to design and develop programmes for schools to support the skills needed for the City Deal. Secondary schools teachers will very much be involved in the co-construction of projects. This is subject to government approval.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications.

6. Finance Implications

- 6.1 There are no finance implications.

7. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 7.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs
- 7.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

- 7.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 7.4 Given the nature of this report to the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel it has been agreed that an IIA screening is not required on this occasion.

Glossary of terms:

Acronym	Expansion
PPT	Primary Phase Team
SPT	Secondary Phase Team
ALNET	Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales)
PDG	Pupil Development Grant
eFSM	Eligible for Free School Meals
COL	Continuity of Learning
SCASEN	Secondary Curriculum and School Evaluation Network
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
RRRS: ALP	Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: Accelerated Learning Programme (<i>this is a WG grant</i>)
CDG	Centre Determined Grades
RLSP	Regional Learning and Skills Partnership

Background papers: None

Appendices: None