

Cllr. Lyndon Jones  
Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance  
Panel

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(By Email)

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*Our Ref:* RS/JG  
*Your Ref:*  
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Dear Cllr. Jones,

**Re: - Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 19 January 2023**

Thank you for your letter on 1 February 2023. Please find the following response below:

**How is this and other good practice in relation to cluster working being shared across schools in Swansea?**

**Context**

Swansea has fourteen cluster partnerships which, in the main, consists of one secondary school and four to seven primary schools. In most cases, schools are grouped by their geographical location although some, for example, Bishop Gore has schools in both Swansea East and Swansea West. The local authority maintains a cluster of faith schools which are not grouped geographically. Two special schools and one pupil referral unit (PRU) are not officially part of a cluster.

**Activity**

The pandemic has provided additional opportunities and challenges to the approach to cluster/partnership working. Pre-pandemic times saw a requirement for cluster schools to meet annually for the purpose of moderating and standardising end of key stage learner records. Welsh Government's (WG) removal of this assessment measure has removed the requirement to meet. However, in many cases, the pandemic forged stronger relationship between partners as there was a requirement to open cluster-based childcare 'hubs' where school staff were shared to provide key workers with daytime childcare while schools were shut. School leaders needed to meet regularly to plan arrangements forging stronger working relationships.

As we emerged from the pandemic, during local authority funded Curriculum for Wales (CfW) professional learning, the School Improvement Team (SIT) took the opportunity to refresh its cluster contact database. Following this work, a number of useful meetings have taken place resulting in further improved links between schools both within clusters and beyond.

The SIT has plans to further develop this work in 2023 through its curriculum networks.

During 2022, as an outcome of SIT's support visits, officers were able to identify effective practice. Online events took place to share the curriculum design journey of schools via termly headteacher meetings.

As part of curriculum guidance, WG prioritised the development of a shared understanding of pupil progress through curriculum design. This became a focus for SIT and was the rationale for a series of cluster based CfW training events intended to support a partnership approach. This was highly effective and attracted over two hundred practitioners and leaders. This has provided a platform from which clusters have begun to embed their partnerships.

In April 2022, the regional consortium 'Partneriaeth' was formalised. SIT supported officers to allocate regional officers to each cluster in Swansea. Grant funding was provided to support each school equitably. This funding has been used to provide release time for practitioners to meet their colleagues. Around half of the clusters have skilfully planned a series of meetings designed to support a cluster approach to curriculum design and assessment. One example of this is the Pontarddulais cluster.

Swansea's Principal School Improvement Adviser now meets regularly with strategic leads across the region to further promote this work and signpost the effective practice that exists e.g., Pontarddulais.

The autumn term 2022 school improvement visit agenda contained items to support dialogue around each school's involvement in cluster/partnership working. In nearly all cases, effective practice is shared. In some cases, practitioners across the cluster have visited each other's schools, taught lessons, observed practice and co-constructed curriculum planning maps for specific areas of learning, for example, Literacy. In the best examples, schools are widening the scope of this work to include all areas of learning.

During the spring term 2023, school improvement advisers are set to evaluate the impact of such work by participating in, and facilitating, quality assurance activities such as book looks and listening to learners in order to support each setting's understanding of impact. In the best examples, schools and settings have changed their methods following cluster work, indicating that practitioners are making good use of the opportunities to share.

### **Plans for the future**

- SIT to re-establish Swansea Curriculum and Assessment network (SCAN) that begun as a cross-phase group during the pandemic. A clear term of reference (ToR) has been established and a refresh of the membership is being undertaken. There is wide representation from across the directorate.
- Specialist teaching facility (STF) review being undertaken with a clear focus to provide a cluster-based solution to planned provision.
- SIT to continue to collate effective cluster practice as an outcome of support visits.
- Primary, Secondary and cross-phase headteacher meetings used as a conduit to share identified effective practice.
- Development of a regional database to support the collation and signposting of effective practice.
- Establishment of areas of learning and experiences (AoLE) leader's database.
- SIT to signpost and promote regional AoLE network meetings.
- Officers continue to challenge and support the work of regional officers linked to each cluster.

- SIT to facilitate curriculum planning workshops in each cluster.

Yours sincerely

*Robert Smith*

**Y Cyngorydd Robert Smith / Councillor Robert Smith**  
**Aelod y Cabinet Dros Addysg a Dysgu**  
**Cabinet Member for Education & Learning**