

Councillor Mo Sykes
Convener
Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

Please ask for: Councillor Jennifer Raynor
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Our Ref: JR/CM
Your Ref:
Date: 9th April 2018

BY EMAIL

Dear Councillor Sykes

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel – 15 March 2018

I am writing in response to your letter dated 27 March 2018 in relation to the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel held on 15 March 2018.

In response to the four questions you have put in your letter please find below the responses.

1. We recommend that a permanent senior leadership team be appointed soon to ensure ongoing stability and improvement.

The local authority (LA) fully supports the recommendation that a permanent senior leadership team is appointed soon to ensure the ongoing stability and improvement. The LA will continue to work with the acting headteacher and senior leadership team and governing body to secure a more permanent arrangement. The final decision regarding appointments will, however, be the responsibility of the governing body

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?

The current financial context is challenging for all schools with real terms reductions in the funding available both through the school budget shares and also the level of grant funding that is available to be devolved to schools.

Pupil numbers remain the key driver for the level of funding a school receives and where schools have to manage a reduction in pupil numbers this will inevitably add to the scale of the challenges. The school has seen a significant reduction in pupil numbers (78.6 FTEs or 7%) and is also impacted by changes in post 16 funding. These are factors outside of the control of the Council and inevitably will require further robust management action by the school.

Officers will continue to work with the school as it continues to deliver its budget recovery plan and the school may wish to consider submitting a business case to seek to access one off funding from the corporate Restructure Reserve, earmarked for schools in the latest Council Budget, where such funding would assist in managing the changes necessary.

3. Look at how the serious maintenance issues within some of the school buildings can be addressed?

Officers will continue to work with the school and Diocese (which have the direct responsibility for these matters) to seek to manage the challenging short term structural issues that have been identified. These would rank highly in terms of relative priority within the Authority's annual structural maintenance programme as regards future roofing works, however, this would only meet the required 15% contribution and the remaining 85% would need to be provided by the Welsh Government and / or the Diocese (as for any Aided school). The total available through the annual structural maintenance programme is over-stretched to meet all the needs identified across all schools.

The school has benefited from the late one-off additional funding allocated by the Welsh Government specifically to support repair and maintenance needs within schools and which has provided a sum of £32k for Bishop Vaughan which could be utilised in 2018-2019. A more targeted and planned allocation by the Welsh Government might have benefited the school more.

Officers have sought specific additional capital funding from the Welsh Government towards the urgent roofing works required and is awaiting a response from officials. This may not be successful but a similar request accessed a sum of £0.5m which addressed similar needs some years previously.

The wider capital investment needs of the school have been recognised within the Authority's most recent submission under the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme and the Authority will continue to work with the school and Diocese to deliver the necessary works at the earliest opportunity. However, whilst 85% of the cost for the aided sector is met by the Welsh Government this leaves the remaining 15% to be met from the Diocese.

4. We recommend that the support and training for new and aspiring leaders include the management of human resource and financial matters.

The LA ensures that new and aspiring leaders can access appropriate training in human resources and school finance. The new and acting headteacher training programme calendar was reviewed and published in September 2017. The LA will re-distribute the calendar of events on 16 April 2018 to ensure full visibility of the range of training opportunities available

More generally it is good to note the number of positive school inspection outcomes over recent months. The LA is extremely pleased with the outcome of the most recent inspection and fully supports the Acting Headteacher and senior leadership team at the school. It is pleasing to note the achievements within a relatively short period of time.

Following the inspection in January 2018, the report has highlighted that leadership at all levels contributes successfully to a shared commitment to achieving the school's aims and ambitions which has a significant impact on pupils' wellbeing and the standards they achieve. The report acknowledges that the Acting Headteacher is supported well by an extended leadership team who promote high expectations a shared sense of purpose and commitment to the school's values and ambitions.

The report also recognises that the governing body supports and oversees the school's work appropriately and governors generally have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas of development.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Raynor', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Jennifer Raynor
Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning