

1 April 2016

Dear Councillor Ali Thomas,

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group on the 11 March 2016

The Chairs and Vice Chairs of all six local authorities' Education Scrutiny Committees came together in Swansea on the 11 March 2016 for their twice yearly joint seminar. This was the second meeting of the group – the first was hosted by Neath Port Talbot Council. At this meeting we agreed our terms of reference. We agreed that all of our meetings and associated papers will be available to the public.

At this meeting we reviewed the ERW Business Plan for 2016/19 and looked at school standards and categorisation across the region. We also exchanged good practice in Schools Scrutiny.

The meeting gave us the opportunity to share scrutiny work plans and, from this discussion, a number of common issues emerged. We would like to share these with the ERW Joint Committee for awareness and for you to consider as part of your ongoing work. The issues are:

- Vulnerable Learners and work works including use of Pupil Deprivation Grant, the impact of poverty on attainment and the take-up of Free School Meals for example
- The capacity of challenge advisors across the region and whether all local authorities in the region are working at full capacity.
- Public perception of school categorisation and communication with parents
- The role of School Governors

We also discussed the following issues that we know are outside the scope of ERW but wanted to share for your awareness.

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service across the region
- Elective Home Education in Wales
- Post 16 Transport

**Cyngyrair o 6 awdurdod lleol yw ERW a reolir gan gyd-bwyllgor cyfansoddiadol cyfreithiol.
Y nod yw gweithredu strategaeth a chynllun busnes rhanbarthol cytunedig a chefnogi gwelliant ysgolion.**

ERW is an alliance of 6 local authorities governed by a legally constituted joint committee.
Its aim is to implement the agreed regional strategy and business plan to support school improvement.





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The Group agreed to discuss two of these items in more detail at their next meeting in September, namely:

1. Vulnerable Learners and a framework for 'what works' including use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant
2. Special Educational Needs reform and how local authorities are preparing for change (outside the scope of ERW)

As a Group we would like to recommend that the ERW Joint Committee:

1. **Provides written clarification about the capacity of challenge advisors across the region.** In particular are all local authorities working to full capacity in relation to their numbers of Challenge Advisors?
2. **Reviews how the results of categorisation are provided to parents.** The Group is concerned that the current presentation in the media causes unnecessary worries for parents when their schools have been placed in a lower category.

A further issue, also outside the scope of ERW, which the group is concerned about, is the lack of guidance around the identification and safeguarding of home educated children and young people. We will therefore be encouraging our respective Cabinet Members for Education to write to the Welsh Government about this.

We look forward to your reply and responses to our recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Fiona Gordon

Convener of the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel
City and County of Swansea Council

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