

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

SCRUTINY

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SUBJECT: Briefing on Local Authority Estyn Inspection and emerging
Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP)

REPORT FOR: Discussion / Information

1. Foreword

In July 2019, Powys Education service was inspected by Estyn. Eleven inspectors consisting of 6 HMI, two Welsh Audit Officers, and two peer inspectors inspected the service over the course of a week and were supported by the local authority (LA) appointed nominee. As stated in the Estyn Guidance for Local Authority inspections, the team inspected the following three areas:

- Outcomes
- Education provision
- Leadership

There six local authority questions were:

1. How well does the LA challenge the performance of schools and support them to improve?
2. How effectively does the LA promote strong leadership in its schools?
3. How well does the LA meet the needs of its more able pupils?
4. How effective is the provision for pupils with additional learning needs?
5. How effective is the LA's provision for behaviour support?
6. How well does the LA address school organisation issues including the provision for post-16?

The inspection schedule included:

- Interviews with elected members, chief executive officer (CEO), head of service, officers from school service, school staff, officers from finance, officers from human resources (HR), pupils
- Focus Groups with Headteachers, Governors and pupils
- Scrutiny of documentation
- Data analysis
- Analysis of the last three years' inspection outcomes for educational settings in Powys

Feedback was provided on a daily basis to the CEO and the Head of Service.

2. Outcomes

The Estyn report identifies the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Strengths:

- In Powys, inspection outcomes indicate that pupils generally make sound progress over their time in statutory education
- Pupils make sound progress in early years and primary schools
- Wellbeing is good
- Primary attendance is good
- Vulnerable learners broadly perform in line with the average for their peers across Wales
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of physical activity
- The LA has a broad range of strategies to help pupils improve their mental and emotional health
- The proportion of Year 11 leavers known not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) has remained low
- Young people benefit from effective bespoke support from the youth service in order to deal with their individual needs

Areas for improvement:

- Good progress in primary schools is not sustained in all secondary schools
- Performance in capped 9 and A* - A across our schools is varied
- Secondary schools take a long time to be removed from a category and once removed do not sustain progress - **significant concern**
- Almost half of secondary schools have been in the bottom 25% when compared to similar schools over the past two years
- The rate of permanent exclusions in secondary schools is high
- There are useful opportunities for pupils to have their say, but contributions to the strategic direction of education services are underdeveloped

3. Educational provision

There were six questions that were inspected.

Local Authority Question 1 (LAQ-1)

How well does the LA challenge the performance of schools and support them to improve?

Estyn Inspectors identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Strengths:

- Overall the LA knows its schools well
- The LA has built capacity in the challenge adviser team and they provide helpful challenge and support
- Challenge advisers have improved their knowledge of excellent practice and share this well and have developed a culture of support across schools

- The Team Around the School approach is a useful way for schools to gain suitable support and challenge from the LA and its challenge advisers.
- Constructive systems are in place to challenge schools e.g. through school improvement boards

Areas for improvement:

- The LA has been slow to address issues in schools where they have failed to meet requirements of warning notices
- Challenge adviser work at secondary level is hampered by historical weaknesses in strategic leadership of senior officers and elected members in terms of school organisation, financial management, school governance, action on schools causing concern and coordination of additional learning needs (ALN)

Local Authority Question 2 (LAQ-2)

How effectively does the LA promote strong leadership in its schools?

Strengths:

- Challenge advisers support school leaders well
- There has been a reduction in the number of schools requiring monitoring by Estyn, particularly in primary
- HR and finance teams provide valuable support
- The LA provides worthwhile opportunities for school staff to develop leadership skills
- Governors have access to a good range of training and development opportunities

Areas for improvement:

- Judgements in relation to secondary school leadership are weaker than the national average, with more adequate and unsatisfactory outcomes
- The LA has difficulty recruiting headteachers, particularly in secondary schools
- Over time, support to promote effective governance has been weak

Local Authority question 3 (LAQ3)

How well do the LA's strategies meet the needs of more able pupils?

Strengths:

- The LA offers a suitable range of opportunities e.g. SEREN and careers fair
- Challenge advisers share good practice

Area for improvement:

- The LA needs to consider the impact of its provision and support for more able pupils

Local Authority question 4 (LAQ-4)

How effective is the provision for pupils with additional learning needs?

This is an area of significant concern

Strengths:

- Vulnerable learners, including pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils with special educational needs, broadly perform in line with the average for their peers across Wales
- The ALN policy provides adequate information
- There is a range of provision across the authority, including special schools, the pupil referral unit (PRU) and specialist centres
- Outreach is beginning to have a positive impact

Areas for improvement:

- There is inadequate co-ordination, evaluation and planning of ALN services across the LA
- The service's vision is not communicated effectively
- There is limited data analysis, which limits the LA's ability to plan for the future
- Provision for groups of pupils who may require extra support is too variable
- There is limited joint working across teams

Local Authority Question 5 (LAQ-5)

How effective is the local authority's provision for behaviour support?

Strengths:

- There is a range of provision, including a special school and PRU
- There is a defined vision, set of key principles and pathway to support learners
- The Team Around the School provides an opportunity to work across teams
- Education psychologists, the Learning Inclusion and Support Team (LIST) and behaviour teams provide useful interventions with some evidence of impact
- Healthy schools, KIVA and Incredible Years provide effective strategies to improve pupil wellbeing, and have contributed to a reduction in bullying
- There is a clear managed moves policy
- The LA promotes early identification to support pupils in mainstream schools

Areas for improvement:

- There is no LA approach to the monitoring of bullying incidents
- Systematic evaluation and reporting in relation to behaviour and exclusions is underdeveloped
- Exclusions remain too high

Local Authority Question 6 (LAQ-6)

How well has the LA addressed school reorganisation issues including the provision for post-16?

This is an area for significant concern.

Strengths:

- The LA has a clear rationale for school reorganisation
- The strategic policy and delivery plan provide a suitable framework for future development
- Officers have sharpened their use of data
- The transformation team work well to ensure that consultation processes are transparent and well organised

Areas for improvement:

- The LA has been unable to deliver on a few key proposals
- Surplus places remain too high
- There are heavy demands on a small team of officers
- A minority of school buildings are in poor condition
- The LA has a suitable long-term vision for provision for Welsh learners. However, the LA's record on stimulating the growth of Welsh-medium education is weak
- Officers do not have a clear enough understanding of whether there are sufficient early years places, within a reasonable distance of children's homes and in the language of their choice
- Until recently, very little progress has been made in addressing the challenges of post-16 provision

4. Leadership and Management

Strengths:

- Vision 2025 provides a clear vision for the future
- The new CEO has, in a short amount of time, understood the main strengths and areas for development.
- She has brought new vigour to addressing key areas, which are in the early stages of development
- There is better joint planning to co-ordinate the work programmes
- Recently challenge is more robust
- Challenge advisors shadow colleagues in other authorities and are all Estyn inspectors
- There are clear safeguarding policies and procedures. Schools are supported well. Good checks are in place for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) for staff and volunteers
- Finance officers provide helpful indicative allocations for the next three to four years
- The formula review group has been well led
- There has generally been appropriate consultation with schools
- The new formula is based on sound principles and brings greater transparency

Areas for improvement:

- The LA has not made strong sustainable improvements to address many of the shortcomings identified during previous inspections
- Recommendations from 2011, such as ALN and school reorganization, remain as areas for concern
- Over the last five years, there have been too many schools in Estyn categories and too many with high deficit balances
- The LA is too slow to intervene using its powers
- Over the last three years, there have been significant changes in senior officers – this has affected the continuity and delivery of action plans
- The LA is slow to develop scrutiny arrangements. Until very recently, challenge has been weak
- Staff in the education service have participated in a wide range of professional development but very few have undertaken courses linked to the leadership pathway
- The quality of officer reports varies. Reports contain insufficient detail
- There are too few education seminars for elected members to develop necessary understanding in order to make informed decisions
- Over many years, members have been reluctant to take robust decisions in areas such as post-16 education and secondary school reorganisation
- The relationship between the LA and schools is generally collaborative but over time it has not been challenging enough
- The LA does not have robust self-evaluation processes for the education service. Pace of improvement continues to be slow
- Improvement planning in the education service is weak. Targets are not always linked to key priorities. Monitoring has a high tolerance level
- Performance management arrangements are not given a high enough priority
- Financial management in a few schools remains an area for concern. An historic lack of challenge has resulted in a small number of schools failing to recover from deficits and contravening the LA's scheme for financing schools – ***this is a significant concern***
- The LA's reluctance to use its intervention powers to address financial issues has exacerbated the problem and reflects weakness in corporate leadership
- The LA needs to monitor the recruitment of volunteers more robustly

5. Recommendations

Estyn made five recommendations:

1. Improve the standards in secondary schools, and especially the performance of more able learners
2. Improve the evaluation, planning and co-ordination of provision for learners with special educational needs and other pupils who may require extra support
3. Improve the consistency and impact of senior leaders in improving the quality of education services and continue to strengthen the rigour, scrutiny and challenge about performance of the authority's services
4. Ensure that the organisation of the provision for non-maintained, post-16, Welsh-medium education and secondary education meets the needs of the children and young people of Powys
5. Continue to improve the financial management in schools and take appropriate action to address schools with significant deficit budget

The LA has identified key priorities which sit below each of the five Estyn recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Improve the standards in secondary schools, and especially the performance of more able learners

Priorities:

- a) Improve pupil outcomes in secondary schools particularly Capped 9 scores and A-A*
- b) Reduce the number of secondary schools in an Estyn follow up category and sustain progress over time.
- c) Improve the quality of leadership in secondary schools including middle leaders to ensure succession planning.
- d) Sustain standards in primary and develop effective transition arrangements that ensures the continued progress of pupils into KS3 and beyond
- e) Improve the performance of more able learners.
- f) Improve attendance in secondary schools by reducing the number of schools in the bottom 25% when compared to similar schools.
- g) Continue to reduce the level of permanent and fixed-term exclusions.
- h) Improve the skills and ability of Governing Bodies to impact school improvement, undertake effective decision-making and budget management.
- i) Implement a strategic approach for developing mental and emotional health across all schools in the local authority.

Recommendation 2: Improve the evaluation, planning and co-ordination of provision for learners with special educational needs and other pupils who may require extra support

Priorities:

- a) Ensure that senior officers provide strong leadership that drives improvement.
- b) Ensure that schools and other stakeholders have a clear understanding of the services that are available to support pupils with SEN/ALN and other pupils who may require support and that processes for accessing these services are clear and robust
- c) Improve communication and consultation with schools
- d) Develop robust procedures for the planning of services, to include an audit of current provision, based on reliable data, a rationale for proposed changes, costs and clear timescales
- e) Ensure that information management systems are fit for purpose and allow officers to analyse data to inform planning
- f) Develop robust procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of services and interventions
- g) Improve the coordination of provision for pupils with SEN and other groups both within the Schools Service and with external agencies
- h) Continue to develop a co-ordinated approach to behaviour across the local authority

Recommendation 3: Improve the consistency and impact of senior leaders in improving the quality of education services and continue to strengthen the rigour, scrutiny and challenge about performance of the authority's services

Priorities:

- a) Establish clear approaches to communication and stakeholder engagement to strengthen relationships with our key partners, including learners in our schools
- b) Implement an effective workforce development strategy that supports service wide improvement and individual professional development
- c) Develop and establish effective scrutiny and governance so that decision-making is made from a well-informed position and effective challenge is facilitated
- d) Embed a service wide culture that is underpinned by the PCC staff values (positive, professional, progressive, open and collaborative)

Recommendation 4: Ensure that the organisation of the provision for non-maintained, post-16, Welsh-medium education and secondary education meets the needs of the children and young people of Powys

Priorities:

- a) Ensure that school organisation priorities (non-maintained, post-16 and Welsh-medium) are integral to the wider reviews of all primary, secondary and special provision in the authority, and bring forward proposals at pace (to agreed dates) to deliver a cohesive vision for learners and schools in Powys.
- b) Review the School Organisation Policy to ensure that all proposals utilise clear, agreed criteria for determining their level of priority, and criteria to be deployed by elected members to help determine those proposals.
- c) Develop a new Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, and ensure that proposals are brought forward at pace to deliver the priorities in that Plan.
- d) Agree the resources required within the council in order to be able to formulate coherent proposals, manage sustained stakeholder engagement and formal consultations, and to see plans through to completion.
- e) Ensure that elected members and key stakeholders are fully aware of the evidence base and the risks and benefits associated with different options (including, 'do nothing' options) and maintain effective risk registers and business cases for all emerging and implemented proposals

Recommendation 5: Continue to improve the financial management in schools and take appropriate action to address schools with significant deficit budget

Priorities:

- a) Develop a whole-authority approach to improving the quality of, and support for, school financial management through encouraging schools to share expertise whilst developing proposals with schools for a sustainable model of deployment and professional learning for business managers.
- b) Maintain a rolling programme of review of the school budget formula including improved benchmarking and inter-authority comparisons to ensure that the formula meets the needs of all schools/learners in Powys.

6. Next Steps

- Education Services are causing significant concern and require follow-up activity
- Estyn will review the progress made by the LA through an Improvement Conference and progress conferences
- The LA is required to produce a Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP)

- Estyn will return in November 2019 for a Post Inspection Improvement Conference to discuss and approve the PIAP
- Developing an appropriate model of engagement to enable stakeholders to contribute to the necessary improvements
- Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to ensure that improvements are made at an appropriate pace and include
 - Schools Transformation Board
 - The Leader's newly established Group Leaders meeting which will meet monthly
 - The regular report to Scrutiny Committee
 - The Education PIAP is now within the remit of the Improvement and Assurance Board
- In terms of Leadership, robust interim arrangements have been put in place, whilst a substantive Director of Education is recruited and appointed.