

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

16 SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

HOW CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM SUPPORTS BRIDGEND SCHOOLS

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 in respect of how:

- Central South Consortium supports all schools in the local authority;
- Central South Consortium works alongside all schools and the local authority to ensure the support is balanced; and how
- through the 'Team Bridgend' approach, the local authority is working to satisfy expectations and guidance from Welsh Government

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

Supporting a successful sustainable economy - taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.

Helping people and communities to be more health and resilient - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.

Smarter use of resources - ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The local authority commissions Central South Consortium to provide a school improvement service on behalf of the local authority. The local authority and Central South Consortium have developed a close and effective working relationship which has proved to be extremely beneficial in supporting schools. The effectiveness of this relationship is reflected by positive comments in Estyn's inspection of Bridgend's local government education services in March 2019.
- 3.2 The core focus of all school improvement activity is providing support and challenge to schools to ensure learners across the local authority have the right educational experiences to allow them to make progress and be successful in the next phase of learning or employment.
- 3.3 In 2014, Welsh Government introduced the National School Categorisation System (NSCS) to raise the standard of education across schools in Wales. On behalf of the local authority, Central South Consortium carried out the categorisation process and reported outcomes to both the local authority and Welsh Government.
- 3.4 Through the NSCS process, schools were allocated a fixed number of days of support based on their colour category (eg 'Green' schools received up to 4 days of support and 'Red' schools received 15 days of support).
- 3.5 As part of wider educational reforms that Wales is undertaking, the NSCS was under review prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2020, Welsh Government announced that the NSCS was to be suspended.
- 3.6 In response to the suspension of the NSCS, in September 2020, Central South Consortium developed, used and refined a new model of support for schools which was closely linked to the emerging new guidance from the Welsh Government: 'School improvement guidance - framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability' (appendix 1).
- 3.7 The most notable difference between the NSCS model and the newer Central South Consortium model is that the NSCS model followed a 'done to schools' approach based on high challenge and linked to narrow, test data points and short-term outcomes. In contrast, the new model is following a 'working alongside schools' approach based on school priorities for improvement and more time allocated for all schools.
- 3.8 It is important to note that, under the new model, the local authority still retains the statutory power to intervene in schools causing concern, where schools are not providing a good enough standard of education for their pupils.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 Central South Consortium continues to provide the local authority with effective school improvement services. This includes the following:

- an improvement partner linked to every school;
- A Welsh in Education officer linked with every school;
- the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) programme;
- the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH);
- professional learning for all school-based staff at all stages of their career (including all leadership programmes for middle leaders, senior leaders and experienced leaders);
- extensive professional learning linked to emerging school priorities;
- mandatory training modules for school governors;
- funded collaboration projects;
- a central repository of case studies, research and innovation projects linked to best practice;
- extensive professional learning linked to national priorities (eg intensive support for the development of the Curriculum for Wales); and
- oversight of grant-funded activity.

4.2 The document 'Supporting School Improvement September 2021 and Beyond' (appendix 2) outlines the detailed approach that Central South Consortium, with the approval of the regional Joint Committee, will take to supporting schools.

4.3 This approach builds on the principles set by Welsh Government. They are:

4.3.1 There will be a discussion/collaborative meeting with schools and governing body representative to:

- share and agree school improvement priorities based on self-evaluation and the national reform agenda;
- agree the additional support needs of the school/setting (local authority and regional support) (ie the agreed support should be reference within the school development plan); and

- identify where the school/setting has strengths and its capacity to support others.

4.3.2 Regions will collate an overview of school improvement priorities and the support being provided by both the local authority and region.

4.3.3 Support provided to schools/settings will be documented.

4.3.4 In collaboration with schools, regions and local authorities will provide a termly evaluation on the school's progress towards meeting its priorities, identifying or amending bespoke support as necessary.

4.3.5 In collaboration with schools and governing bodies, regions and local authorities will identify and discuss any potential risks to progress, identifying or amending bespoke support as necessary.

4.3.6 Work collaboratively with schools to undertake a range of self-evaluation activity where appropriate and facilitate opportunities for school-to-school peer working to support self-evaluation processes.

4.4 Each school in the local authority is allocated an improvement partner to work alongside them. With the significant reform agenda that is in progress across Wales, it is important that Central South Consortium continues to ensure the support provided by improvement partners is holistic, efficient and effective in line with the national principles. It is essential the improvement partner forms a strong professional relationship working with the headteacher.

4.5 As well as providing support and challenge to schools, the improvement partner also ensures that schools are well prepared and display behaviours that positively support the complete national reform agenda. The complete national reform agenda encompasses five areas:

- Curriculum
- Assessment and evaluation
- Equity, excellence and wellbeing
- Teaching
- Leadership

4.6 Central South Consortium provides schools with excellent professional learning opportunities, resources and guidance to support schools through this transformational reform. School leaders need the time and space to be able to make sense of transformational reform and the plethora of national and regional supporting resources that go with it. The improvement partner role is a hugely significant one in 'signposting' school leaders and other stakeholders to use the pertinent documents (eg Central South Consortium's 'Equity and Excellence' strategy and professional learning that is available in the region, a conduit between policy and practice). This

will enhance the school's ability to develop as a learning organisation and support putting the new curriculum and other reforms into place.

- 4.7 Improvement partners will continue to support the governing body with the headteacher's performance management and will support the governing body to understand its role in school improvement. Improvement partners will also collaborate with the Regional Leads for Governors to support school governors to fulfil their responsibility in holding schools to account.
- 4.8 Support will take the form of 'core' or 'enhanced' support that is provided in a fair way that is inversely proportional to needs of the school. All schools will receive a basic minimum allocation of days and further time will be allocated based on the support needs identified. This minimum is:

Setting	Days
Primary/Nursery	7
Special/PRU	10
Secondary	10
3-16/19	16

- 4.9 Enhanced support schools will receive additional time to reflect the development needs and monitoring requirements. This support will be agreed between the school and improvement partner and shared with the local authority when the school improvement priorities are agreed. Specified days might not all be from the same improvement partner but might include work of others that are more specialists in certain areas. The impact of this support will be monitored half termly and will be shared with local authorities in the termly review meetings. Central South Consortium quality assurance processes will ensure that support is targeted and is meeting the needs of the school. Our processes will focus on the impact of support in school and will ensure consistency across the local authority.
- 4.10 The improvement partner will support schools through appropriate challenge to identify clear, manageable, improvement priorities as a consequence of effective self-evaluation. The improvement partner will work with school leaders to review first-hand evidence and ensure that this is rigorous and accurate. This will work in conjunction with the school systems and will not generate additional work for school leaders. This is in line with the Welsh Government guidance where it is the intention that these priorities will in part replace target setting.

- 4.11 Each school will have their own unique set of priorities, based on their own context, self-evaluation, needs and improvement journey, ultimately seeking to improve learner outcomes. Therefore, priorities will need to ensure a focus on pupil progress. Furthermore, the improvement partner will also support schools in ensuring that improvement priorities are drawn together in a single, strategic school development plan, helping to reduce workload, streamline schools' strategic planning processes and avoid unnecessary duplication and bureaucracy. These priorities will be made available to the local authority for its approval. All support will be referenced in the school improvement plan and the improvement partner will work in partnership with local authority colleagues based on a shared understanding of their respective roles in supporting schools, to engage with schools on their respective development plan. It is important that improvement partners also capture strengths and emerging practice worth sharing. This can be shared with school governors and other improvement partners.
- 4.12 The documents found at appendix 2 and appendix 3 offer more detail regarding the typical working programme of an improvement partner in supporting schools.
- 4.13 Maintaining close working relationships and clear communication between Central South Consortium, the local authority and schools is pivotal in ensuring that everyone has a common and consistent understanding. The 'Team Bridgend' approach is central to making this a success and Central South Consortium plays an active role within 'Team Bridgend'. Improvement partners will continue to develop and foster collaborative working partnerships with local authority colleagues. Improvement partners are mindful of the individual systems and process in each local authority and will work accordingly. Joint collaboration will facilitate an effective sharing of information to ensure a mutual understanding to enable effective school improvement. Termly local authority performance meetings provide the opportunity for dialogue and information sharing.
- 4.14 Improvement partners will continue using the successful strategies in place and will work with local authority colleagues to adapt and improve where needs emerge. The principal improvement partner will continue to be a pivotal link with each local authority and will ensure an effective two-way flow of information. Central South Consortium will ensure that local authorities have regular feedback on the quality of provision and impact of support in all of their schools. Further links with local authorities are identified in the 'Framework for School Improvement'.
- 4.15 Schools will continue to have the support they require and this will be monitored by improvement partners and shared with local authorities. Where schools cause significant concern specific support and follow up mechanisms will be in place.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socioeconomic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an equalities impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The well-being goals and principles prescribed for within the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 connect directly to the approach to supporting schools. The approach to supporting schools is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle and more specifically as follows:

Long-term	The approach to school improvement focuses on meeting the needs of children and young people from the age of 0-25.
Prevention	The focus of the school improvement is upon early identification of need and ensuring that there is appropriate learning provision in place to meet individual needs.
Integration	The approach to school improvement addresses the need for a coherent delivery of economic, social, environmental and cultural outcomes.
Collaboration	A fundamental principal of the approach to school improvement focuses on improving collaboration and creating a unified system.
Involvement	Ensuring that children and young people, parents and carers are at the heart of the system and that needs are discussed in a person-centred way.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications linked to this report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 The committee is requested to:

- consider the content of this report; and
- provide feedback.

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Background documents: