

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

13 MARCH 2023

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT NEW FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO SUPPORT THE CURRICULUM FOR WALES

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on:

- the 'School Improvement Guidance: Framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability' (Welsh Government, 2021); and
- the implications for the local authority and regional processes and systems.

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

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being 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 healthy 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 continues to work in partnership with Central South Consortium to provide school improvement services for all schools across Bridgend County Borough.

3.2 The core focus of all school improvement activity is to provide 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 As part of wider educational reforms Wales is undertaking, the National School Categorisation System (NSCS) was under review prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2020, Welsh Government announced that the NSCS was to be suspended.
- 3.4 In response to the suspension of the NSCS, in September 2020, Central South Consortium, in partnership with the local authority, developed 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'.
- 3.5 Within Central South Consortium's new model of support for schools, there is a clear focus on working alongside schools to agree school priorities for improvement with more time allocated for all schools. 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.
- 3.6 The pandemic has caused significant disruption to schools and their learners. Schools have made important steps forward over this time in many areas of school provision to better meet the needs of learners due to the circumstances faced by our communities. Examples include:
- the wellbeing provision for learners and staff;
 - the use of digital technology to support learning and communication; and
 - the assessment of basic skills to ensure teaching is focused on skill gaps for learners.
- 3.7 Schools have received additional funding from Welsh Government in the form of the Recruit Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS) Grant and Accelerating Learning Programme (ALP) Grant over this time to support these developments with additional staff being used to provide increased support for identified learners.
- 3.8 Schools will continue to utilise the range of self-evaluation evidence to focus on areas for development as they continue to recover from the pandemic, with aspects of provision or certain year groups being a focus for development due to the impact of the pandemic.
- 3.9 The emerging guidance emphasises that the purpose of assessment is to support individual learner progress and that assessment information should not be used for accountability purposes. As a result, local authorities and regional consortia must not collate and aggregate school level data or create specific local arrangements to gather individual pupil level information. The guidance also emphasises that external examinations data should not be taken out of context and used for accountability purposes. It is important to note that both information from schools' assessment arrangements and analysis of external examinations data should continue to inform school self-evaluation arrangements and lead improvement in teaching and learning.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The draft national guidance became non-statutory from September 2022 and provides a point of reference for schools, pupil referral units, local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional consortia and Estyn, which outlines Welsh Government's expectations of them in contributing to school improvement, in the context of their wider legal duties. Welsh Government plan to update the guidance, building on learning in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, and to issue it as statutory guidance to come into force in September 2024.
- 4.2 The purpose of school improvement is to help schools give learners the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background, to achieve high standards and aspirations for all. Under Curriculum for Wales, a fundamental part of this will be to ensure schools support every learner to make progress.
- 4.3 The guidance supports that objective by setting out a framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability that will deliver sustainable school improvement and drive behaviours and practices that are required by the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. It is crucial that all aspects of the school improvement system are aligned with and support the new curriculum and its underlying principles.
- 4.4 The guidance states that schools have the central role in driving improvements and that governing bodies are the accountable bodies for their schools. In this role, they take responsibility for strategic leadership of the school, for its effective governance and ultimately for driving improvements in their schools for the benefit of learners. For most schools, governing bodies should be free to oversee the evaluation and improvement process, supported by advice, resources and services from the local authority and regional consortia. However, where schools are causing concern, the local authority is expected to take swift and effective action, advised and supported by regional consortia.
- 4.5 Within the framework, there is a clear distinction between evaluation and improvement activities; accountability; and transparency. Much of the energy and focus on the system should be on delivering school improvement, guided by effective self-evaluation, improvement planning and support in all schools. Underpinning the arrangements will be a broad range of high-quality information about schools and their locality, and other parts of the system, which will need to be used in a timely, intelligent and supportive way.
- 4.6 The guidance makes clear that accountability should not drive school improvement activity (although it can contribute to it) and it should ensure that problems are identified and addressed. The guidance defines two strands within the accountability system:
- the role of effective democratic accountability and governance arrangements at all levels of the school system; and
 - the role of Estyn in delivering regular, consistent, comprehensive and accurate inspections of schools, local authorities and regional consortia.

4.7 Under the new framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability, schools will be inspected more regularly by Estyn and inspections will provide fair and rigorous evaluations of learner progress, the quality of leadership, teaching and learning in schools, realisation of the new curriculum and the wellbeing of practitioners and learners.

4.8 All parts of the schools' system will need to see self-evaluation as a mechanism for improving individual schools and the wider schools' system, and ultimately supporting learner progress, rather than as a compliance exercise within the accountability system. To further enhance their improvement planning, schools are encouraged to engage peers in the self-evaluation process to gain external perspective on improvement priorities.

4.9 Learner progress is central to Curriculum for Wales, so progression needs to have similar importance within evaluation and improvement activities and accountability processes. The guidance suggests that schools use the following two questions as a starting point for their improvement activities:

- Are learners progressing towards the four purposes and in the ways described in the 'Principles of Progression'?
- Is the pace of learners' progress in line with the expectations of teachers and the curriculum?

4.10 Schools' answers to these two questions will need to be informed by a wide range of information and evidence and, in turn, will determine the focus of subsequent self-evaluation and improvement work. Given the centrality of progression to the success and aims of Curriculum for Wales, governing bodies and Estyn – the key elements of the school accountability system – will have a legitimate interest in evidence schools hold about the progress made by their learners.

4.11 In using information, schools, the local authority and Central South Consortium should:

- Reduce reliance on narrow measures of learner attainment to draw conclusions on school performance.

The analysis of data and information is important but should not be valued more highly than other sources of evidence for self-evaluation (for example, listening to learners; work scrutiny and learning walks).

- Be aware that qualification and summative assessment/attainment data will not be sufficient to make a judgement on learner progress.

They will therefore need to draw on wider sources of information and evidence. These are likely to include: information from teachers who will be assessing learner progress; information relating to learner progress in respect of the Principles of Progression; data on attendance, behaviour and welfare, observations of learning and teaching; discussions with learners and teachers.

- The local authority and Central South Consortium support schools to develop appropriately ambitious evaluation and improvement processes with clear targets based on robust benchmark measures (available to schools) related to pupil progress.

Improvement partners work with schools to use these measures to evaluate performance and identify ambitious targets for improvement.

4.12 The outcome of a school's self-evaluation provides more meaningful transparency about areas of strength and priorities for improvement, which will be reflected in their school development plan, than un-contextualised attainment data. To help increase confidence in, and commitment to, the school and its development plan, schools should publish the summary copy on its website. This summary should include a:

- high-level summary of the school's self-evaluation;
- high-level priorities for the current year;
- progress against those for the previous year; and
- external support the school will access to help it achieve its improvement priorities.

4.13 When setting their school improvement priorities, schools should have regard to how their school evaluation and improvement processes align with:

- the three strategic priorities for education in Bridgend (that is, safety (includes safeguarding and health and safety), wellbeing and literacy);
- the local authority's four recommendations in Bridgend's local government education services post-inspection action plan (PIAP) ; and
- our overarching business priorities within the Central South Consortium business plan.

4.14 From September 2022, the 'national priorities' defined in the School Development Plans Regulations have been updated to be consistent with Curriculum for Wales, similarly emphasising the importance of progression. The new 'national priorities', which schools must have regard to when setting their improvement priorities, will be:

- improving pupils' progression by ensuring their learning is supported by a range of knowledge, skills and experience; and
- reducing the impact of poverty on learners' progression and attainment.

4.15 Schools' own improvement priorities and development plans are published in summary form for the benefit of learners, parents, and other stakeholders. This supports a culture in which schools are open about the support they need and where middle tier partners work with schools in a supportive, non-judgemental way.

- 4.16 With the school's self-evaluation and development plan as the starting point, the local authority and Central South Consortium will need to agree with each school the additional support it needs to improve and to build its own capacity. The agreed support schools will receive is incorporated in their development plans, including published summaries, providing an incentive for schools to ask for the help they need and enhancing transparency.
- 4.17 The wide range of information being used at school level to evaluate improvements and identify future priorities, supports regional consortia and local authorities to identify schools' support needs, as well as helping them to identify their own improvement priorities to improve service delivery.
- 4.18 Additionally, to support governing bodies in fulfilling their accountability function, Central South Consortium will provide a short, termly report for governing bodies that will:
- provide wider feedback on the school's self-evaluation processes, improvement priorities and progress towards the improvement priorities;
 - highlight any of the school's strengths which it feels could, or already are, being used to support other schools;
 - draw attention to the governing body of any particular issues they need to be aware of and monitor in the school, as its accountable body; and
 - identify the professional learning support that has been brokered to develop improvement priorities and engagement in the wider professional learning offer.
- 4.19 Within the local authority, there are a range of mechanisms to monitor schools' performance and levels of support. These include:

Performance and Financial Monitoring Board

- 4.20 A Performance and Financial Monitoring Board, comprised of senior managers from the Education and Family Support Directorate, Central South Consortium's Principal Improvement Partner and officers from Human Resources (HR) and Finance, meets monthly to review the performance of all schools. This allows the local authority to identify early any cause for concern that needs to be addressed. It reports and makes recommendations for action directly to the School Improvement Group.

School Improvement Group

- 4.21 The School Improvement Group is comprised of the Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council, the Deputy Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration, the Chair of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1, the Chief Executive, senior managers from the Education and Family Support Directorate, Central South Consortium's Principal Improvement Partner and officers from HR and Finance. The School Improvement Group meets every half term to review any schools causing concern and to make decisions

based on recommendations from the Performance and Financial Monitoring Board. The School Improvement Group plays an integral role in school improvement and provides a high level of scrutiny.

Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

4.22 Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 is comprised of elected members and supported by Democratic Services and is designed to hold executive officers and Cabinet members to account over decisions that are made. The Committee makes reports and recommendations which advise the Cabinet and the Council on its policies, budget, and service delivery. The Committee supports the work of the Council as a whole in the improvement of public services.

Business Plan Progress Tracker

4.23 In 2020, the Education and Family Support Directorate introduced a Business Plan Progress Tracker to support its ongoing self-evaluation and business planning processes.

4.24 The Business Plan Progress Tracker illustrates progress against each of the inspection report's four recommendations and identified areas for improvement. This helps to identify the areas of good practice and areas for development/improvement and feeds directly into the directorate's business planning cycle.

4.25 Improvement partners work with school leaders to set appropriate targets, monitor the progress of school priorities through a range of self-evaluation activities and broker increased support if necessary. This early intervention is an integral part of the self-evaluation process. Progress against the schools' strategic priorities will be reported to the Performance and Financial Monitoring Board in its all-school review meetings. If it is felt that insufficient progress is being made, the Performance and Financial Monitoring Board will make recommendations to refocus a school's plan and/or increase levels of support. The local authority may resort to using statutory powers if it felt that limited progress continues to be made.

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, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report.

6.2 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.

6.3 This is an information report therefore, it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts because of this report.

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

7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment provides a comprehensive summary of the outcomes expected from the implementation of the service.

Long-term Supports the improvement of progress and outcomes for children and young people.

Prevention Development of evaluation, improvement and accountability processes and systems to help schools have the right levels of challenge and support to secure the best outcomes for all children and young people.

Integration Ensuring the evaluation, improvement and accountability processes and systems being developed are in line with the new guidance and complement the democratic and accountability processes within the local authority.

Collaboration The local authority works closely with schools, Estyn and with the Central South Consortium to assist with the evaluation, improvement and accountability expectations and to deliver school improvement services. The local authority inspection report from Estyn informs the work conducted within the directorate and with Central South Consortium to deliver the support for education improvement services.

Involvement This area of work involves all stakeholders in local government education services.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this information report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1:

- notes the content of this report in respect of the changes to the monitoring and evaluation of schools; and
- provides any feedback as necessary.

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Background documents:

- School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability
- Education in Wales: Our National Mission
- Welsh Government interim school performance measures (May 2018)
- 'Interim Key Stage 4 School Performance Arrangements: Measures and Analyses' (June 2019)