Meeting of:	SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1
Date of Meeting:	16 JANUARY 2025
Report Title:	DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT RESEARCH EVALUATION PANEL
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF OFFICER-LEGAL AND REGULATORY SERVICES, HR AND CORPORATE POLICY
Responsible Officer:	RACHEL KEEPINS DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure.
Executive Summary:	The Committee is requested to consider establishing a School Improvement Research and Evaluation Panel, draft Terms of Reference for the Panel and the proposed topic areas for consideration by the Panel.

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   The purpose of this report is for the Committee to consider establishing a School Improvement Research Evaluation Panel, the Terms of Reference for the Panel and the topic areas for consideration by the Panel.

2.   Background

2.1   Supporting school improvement is one of the main functions of a Local Education Authority and therefore monitoring and discussion are essential.

2.2   A Research and Evaluation Panel was established in 2013 in order to engage with Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors. The purpose of the panel was to explore school performance and improve levels of understanding in support of the Committee's accountability function. Annual summary reports were provided back to the Scrutiny Committee to keep Members informed of the work of the Panel, as well as key findings and any recommendations.

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2.3   This Panel continued for a number of years and made a series of recommendations for improvement.

2.4   In 2018 Welsh Government made the decision to stop publishing comparative school performance data, to discourage the direct comparison between schools and colleges.

2.5   Despite no longer having detailed comparison data, as stated in the 'School Improvement guidance: framework for evaluation improvement and accountability' document (https://hwb.gov.wales/evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/school-improvement-guidance-framework-for-evaluation-improvement-and-accountability), 'accountability is a process underpinned by effective governance within schools, democratic scrutiny and inspection not simply the release of information into the public arena.

Scrutiny is an important way for:
- democratic accountability to be discharged within the overall framework, while also enhancing transparency.
- effective scrutiny to enhance improvement, account and transparency within the local authority.'

2.6   In addition to this, the Estyn Guidance for inspectors https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/202408/LGES%202024%20What%20We%20Inspect.pdf) advises 'Inspectors should look at impact of the structural arrangements for scrutiny on the quality of their work such as the use of scrutiny task groups to analyse specific aspects of the education service whilst developing the understanding and expertise of members'.

3.   Current situation/ proposal

3.1   It is therefore proposed to establish a new School Improvement Research and Evaluation Panel to offer a platform for engaging conversations between Scrutiny Members and Schools. Similar to that of the earlier 'Member and School Engagement Panel', the aim would be for Members to develop a deeper level of understanding of the priorities and challenges currently facing schools in the Borough, how they are responding to these and what impact this is having on school improvement and performance of pupils.

3.2   However, it is proposed that instead of Panels meeting with individual schools, Members meet with school Cluster groups, in order to provide a range of perspectives, exploring and undertaking research regarding school improvement and pupil progress.

Archbishop McGrath Cluster
Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School
Archdeacon John Lewis Church in Wales Primary School
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
St Mary's and St Patrick's Catholic Primary School
St Roberts's Catholic Primary School

Brynteg Cluster
Brynteg School
Brackla Primary School
Litchard Primary School
Oldcastle Primary School
Penybont Primary School
Tremains Primary School

Bryntirion Cluster

Bryntirion Comprehensive School
Bryntirion Infant School
Cefn Glas Infant School
Llangewydd Junior School
Maes yr Haul Primary School
Pen-y-fai Church in Wales Primary School
Trelales Primary School

Coleg Cymunedol y Dderwen Cluster

Abercerdin Primary School
Betws Primary School
Blaengarw Primary School
Bryncethin Primary School
Brynmenyn Primary School
Coleg Cymunedol y Dderwen
Ffaldau Primary School
Nantymoel Primary School
Ogmore Vale Primary School
Tondu Primary School
Tynyrheol Primary School

Cynffig Cluster

Afon-y-Felin Primary School
Cefn Cribwr Primary School
Corneli Primary School
Cynffig Comprehensive School
Mynydd Cynffig Primary School
Pîl Primary School

Maesteg Cluster

Caerau Primary School
Cwmfelin Primary School
Garth Primary School
Llangynwyd Primary School
Maesteg School
Nantyffyllon Primary School
Plasnewydd Primary School

Pencoed Cluster

Croesty Primary School
Coety Primary School
Coychurch Primary School
Pencoed Comprehensive School
Pencoed Primary School

Porthcawl Cluster

Nottage Primary School
Newton Primary School
Porthcawl Comprehensive School
Porthcawl Primary School
West Park Primary School

YGG Llangynwyd Cluster
YGG Llangynwyd
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Calon y Cymoedd
Ysgol Cynwyd Sant
Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr
Special Schools Cluster
Heronsbridge School (attached to Brynteg Cluster)
The Bridge
Ysgol Bryn Castell (attached to Bryntirion Cluster)

Research Areas

3.3   In exploring school performance and improvement in Bridgend it is suggested that various topics are considered, choosing one for each cluster. Some suggestions that Members may wish to start with, many of which relate to areas that the Committee have already expressed concern over or a wish to explore deeper, are provided below:

- Exclusions, behaviour and attendance
- Numeracy, Literacy, Digital Skills and Welsh
- Curriculum Development, Teaching and Assessment Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
- Shared understanding of progression across the transition Estyn Inspection Framework
- Role of Governors
- Leadership & Improvement - School Improvement Planning, Self-Evaluation and School Organisation

Engagement

3.4   The following is a proposed, but not exhaustive, list for key invitees and stakeholders the Panels may wish to engage with or consult with on the various topics listed above:

- Headteachers
- School Governors
- LA Education Officers
- Central South Consortium
- School Budget Forum

Draft Aim and The Terms of Reference

3.5   As well as facilitating engagement between Scrutiny Members and Schools and enabling Members to gain a deeper understanding of the priorities and challenges currently facing schools and how these are being responded to, the Panel would also aim to consider both the direct support provided by the LA to schools, children and young people and also identify potential transferable best practice examples.

3.6   With the above in mind, the following Terms of Reference are proposed:

- To explore and identify challenges and key areas facing schools which impact on pupil progress within schools;
- To explore and identify methods of improving the Local Authority support to schools, children and young people which can have a beneficial impact on pupil progress;
- To identify and share potential areas of best practice in schools;
- To make recommendations for improvement based on these findings.

Panel Membership

3.7   It is proposed that the membership of the Panel be determined on a rota basis, to allow all Members an opportunity to be involved, and to minimise potential for conflicts of interest, given that a significant number of Members are also school governors.

Schedule of Meetings

3.8   The aim would be to start with two of the proposed research areas listed above in 3.3, which will be agreed by the Committee, with two Panels and cluster groups proposed before the Summer term.

4.   Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1   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. 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. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5.   Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1   The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6.   Climate Change Implications

6.1   There are no Climate Change Implications from this report.

7.   Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1   There are no direct Safeguarding or Corporate Parenting implications arising from this report however Members of any future Panel should consider how, or whether,

the subject matter under exploration has any links to safeguarding in schools or impacts on Care Experienced children and young people.

8.   Financial Implications

8.1   There are no financial implications.

9.   Recommendations

9.1   The Committee is asked:

    i.   to agree to establish the School Improvement Research and Evaluation Panel;
    ii.   to agree the aim and Terms of Reference for the Panel;
    iii.   to amend and agree the topic areas for consideration by the various Panels.

Background documents

None