

Richard Parry Jones
Chief Executive
Anglesey County Council
Council Offices
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Anglesey
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20 December 2013

Dear Mr Parry Jones,

Estyn Monitoring Visit 7-8 November 2013

Following Estyn's inspection of education services for children and young people on 21-25 May 2012, the authority was placed in special measures. A monitoring plan was agreed through your link inspectors and the first of the monitoring visits was held between 7 and 8 November 2013. This letter records the findings of that visit.

Iwan Roberts HMI led a team of three inspectors to evaluate the progress that had been made by the authority against three of the recommendations that arose from the original inspection in order to consider the authority's current performance and to identify any further needs for improvement.

Further visits will judge progress against the remainder of the recommendations.

The team had discussions with the portfolio holder, the chief executive, senior officers, school headteachers and representatives of partners. The inspectors also scrutinised documentation, including evidence of the progress that had been made against Estyn's recommendations.

At the end of the monitoring visit, the team reported to the senior officers of the education service and the chair of the recovery board on their findings.

Outcome of the monitoring visit

The authority has identified a number of obstacles and responded appropriately to overcome them. Restructuring at head of service level has strengthened corporate capacity to lead transformation projects to ensure specific improvements. One of these projects is school reorganisation. Transformation projects are managed at a higher level, which enables the authority to build a political consensus.

Shortly after the inspection in 2012, the Director of Lifelong Learning took up his post. The post of senior standards and inclusion officer was filled on a temporary basis and provided effective support for the director. The post has now been filled on a permanent basis.

Elected members have a better understanding of the authority's responsibilities, they are involved increasingly in holding schools to account and identify priorities for scrutiny.

The authority has established effective arrangements for monitoring progress against the post-inspection improvement plan and has worked well with a recovery board that provides an external challenge.

Recommendation 1: Raise standards in all key stages and make sure that all learners who are can do so achieve functional literacy by the end of key stage 2.

The performance of schools in Anglesey has improved since 2011 and it is now higher than the average for Wales in all key stages. In key stage 4, no schools are in the bottom 25% for any of the five main indicators. However, the majority of schools are in the bottom 50% for two of these indicators. In the Foundation Phase, and in key stages 2 and 3, the majority of schools are in the top 50% compared to similar schools.

Overall, the percentage of pupils in schools in Anglesey who achieve higher levels in the National Curriculum is better than performance levels in similar schools.

Standards of reading in Welsh and English at the end of key stage 2 have improved in the last two years. However, performance in reading in Welsh continues to be lower than the average for schools in Wales.

In key stages 3 and 4, the difference in performance between boys and girls at the core subject indicator is less than across Wales. In key stage 2, the difference is greater. However, the gap has reduced over the last two years. In the Foundation Phase and in key stage 3, performance in Welsh as a first language is higher than the average for the whole of Wales. In key stage 2, performance continues to be lower.

Following the 2012 inspection, the authority has reviewed the partnership agreement with schools in addition to adapting it further to reflect the partnership with GwE, the regional school improvement service. The plan outlines an appropriate expectation for schools to take responsibility for their own performance and to lead the discussion on improvement. It outlines the role of the authority and the role of schools in relation to supporting, monitoring and challenging well.

Recommendation 2: Plan more effectively with the relevant professionals to improve pupils' attendance rates.

The authority's procedures for monitoring and promoting learners' attendance are having a positive effect. Officers, schools and relevant agencies have co-operated effectively to form a clear policy for promoting good attendance. Stakeholders are

aware of the policy and comply with it. As a result, attendance rates have improved in the primary and secondary sectors since the core inspection.

Attendance rates in the secondary sector have risen by 2.3 percentage points over two years. This improvement is significantly better than the average for Welsh schools during this period. In comparison with similar schools on the free school meals benchmarks, 60% of schools were in the top 50% in 2013.

In the primary sector, attendance is consistently higher than the average for Wales. However, it has improved at a slightly lower rate than Wales since 2010.

Recently, the authority has developed appropriate procedures for analysing information about the attendance of specific groups of learners. However, it is too early to see the effect of any intervention on the attendance rates of these learners.

Recommendation 5: Secure more thoroughness and consistency in requirements for self-evaluation both operationally and strategically.

Since the inspection, the authority's arrangements for self-evaluation in order to identify strengths and improvement needs have strengthened. Leaders and managers have developed and ensured consistency in the self-evaluation arrangements across the authority's services. Service providers understand self-evaluation arrangements and are included appropriately in them. This ensures that staff have an increasing understanding of their individual contribution towards the education service's strategic aims.

The authority provided a self-evaluation report for the visit which is evaluative, precise and identifies strengths and areas that need attention. Education officers hold regular meetings in order to track progress and challenge staff on developments in their areas of responsibility. However, there is no formal process to record decisions and this weakens the element of accountability. There is now a common formula for planning across services which facilitates the process of self-evaluation, impact assessment and risk assessment.

Education service officers know their services and their schools well. Officers at GwE, the regional school improvement service, present a balanced evaluation of schools' performance to the authority. The target-setting process has been honed by using data more effectively, including appropriate attention to the performance thresholds of free school meals families and regression lines. The authority now monitors and evaluates performance, and challenges schools and individual subject departments much more effectively. The authority uses the guidelines in the revised partnership agreements to categorise schools in order to identify those that need an additional challenge or support to improve. The process is transparent and thorough.

Officers present a balanced evaluation of performance across the authority to elected members. To date, the information does not include the names of schools that are causing concern or underachieving. The authority has established a Schools Standards Monitoring Group to scrutinise in detail the performance of schools that are underachieving and hold them to account. Three schools have already been

brought before the group and further meetings have been arranged for the near future. It is too early to judge the impact of this work.

Comprehensive arrangements are in place to ensure effective accountability and scrutiny. The authority recognises that there is a need to rationalise the system as the process matures. The authority provides useful guidelines and training for members of the scrutiny boards and members are developing their understanding of their role.

At a corporate level, the Council's priorities are steered by project boards that use project management disciplines effectively. As a result, there are early signs that there is timely and appropriate progress in achieving the operational aims of the individual projects.

Next steps

Further monitoring visits will evaluate progress against the remaining recommendations.

Your link inspectors will continue, through their normal role with the authority, to monitor overall progress and to clarify arrangements for the further monitoring visits.

I am copying this letter to the Welsh Government and the Wales Audit Office for information.

Yours sincerely

Clive Phillips
Assistant Director

cc: Welsh Government
Wales Audit Office