

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 8TH FEBRUARY, 2016

REFERENCE FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (LIFELONG LEARNING):
11TH JANUARY, 2016

“ FEEDBACK FROM ESTYN MONITORING VISIT 2015 (DLS) –

For this item, the Committee welcomed Mr. Gerald Kerslake, Lead Safeguarding Officer and Mr. Tony Bate, Estyn Lead Inspector.

Mr. Bate began by advising the Committee that since the Autumn 2014, Estyn had undertaken a process of providing Scrutiny Committees with direct feedback of their findings following detailed inspection work. He stated that although the inspection had concluded ongoing regular contact would be maintained with the Directorate as was the case for all Councils in Wales.

As a background summary, Mr. Bate advised Members that following the outcome of the inspection of the education service in May 2013, the Authority was identified as requiring Estyn monitoring. Following this the Directorate developed a Post Inspection Action Plan, the purpose of which was to address the six recommendations made by Estyn. Estyn's first monitoring visit took place from 13th – 15th October, 2014 and a final monitoring visit took place from 16th – 20th November, 2015. The visit during October 2014 had focused on two specific recommendations, these being Recommendations (2) and (6) which related to the level of challenge provided to schools and the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the wellbeing of children and young people. Previously, back in December 2015, against these two recommendations the Committee heard that good progress had been made.

In terms of Estyn's final monitoring visit in November 2015, the Committee heard that of the six recommendations, very good progress had been made in two, whilst strong progress had been made with the remaining four recommendations. The Authority, therefore, no longer required Estyn monitoring.

The Committee was then provided with a summary of some of the key messages to have come out of the recent monitoring visit.

In terms of Recommendation (1) around the need to raise standards in schools at Key Stage 2 and 3, the Committee heard that strong progress against this recommendation had been made by the Directorate. The performance of schools within the Authority at the Foundation Phase had remained relatively strong. Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils achieving expected Outcome 5 had gradually improved, and at a similar rate

of improvement to that of the Wales average. Performance at the higher than expected level (Outcome 6) had also improved over the last three years.

At the time of the inspection at Key Stage 2, the performance of schools was below average when compared to the performance of similar schools on the Welsh Government's Free School Meal benchmark around which too few schools were in the top 25% or higher 50%. The Committee noted that in 2015, there was a marked improvement, with the majority of schools now in the higher 50%.

Overall performance in respect of Key Stage 3 showed consistent improvement over the last three years, the percentage of pupils achieving the Key Stage 3 core subject indicator had improved at a faster rate than the Wales average. In 2012, three quarters of secondary schools had performance significantly below average in Key Stage 3. In 2015, the performance of the majority of secondary schools was now above average when compared to similar schools, with half of the secondary schools in the top 25%.

Since the inspection, there had been improvement in most of the Key Stage 4 indicators. For example, the percentage of pupils achieving the Key Stage 4 core subject indicator had improved consistently, and this was the highest in Wales in 2015. However, Estyn had noted that performance in 3 of the 8 secondary schools was below average in 2015 when compared to similar schools.

In terms of the performance of pupils entitled to Free School Meals, Members were advised that their performance had improved since 2012 although this was not always at the same rate as other pupils. Since 2012, in the Foundation Phase and at Key Stage 3, the performance of pupils entitled to Free School Meals in the Authority had improved and the gap to those pupils not entitled to Free School Meals had narrowed.

Estyn had also recognised that the performance gap between boys and girls had varied since 2012. In Key Stages 3 and 4, boys' performance had improved at a much faster rate than girls. However, in the Foundation Phase and at Key Stage 2, the performance of girls had improved at a faster rate than boys.

With regard to Recommendation (2) and the need to improve the rigour and level of challenge provided to schools about their performance and quality of leadership, Members were advised that very strong progress had been made in addressing this recommendation. Since the inspection, it was outlined that the Authority had worked well with headteachers, governors and the Central South Consortium to secure improvements. These had led to targeted and worthwhile improvements in leadership, provision and standards in many of the schools in the Authority.

The Committee noted that strong progress had been made in addressing Recommendation (3) around the use of the full powers available to the

Authority to improve schools that were underperforming. Estyn had recognised that the Directorate had used its powers well overall in order to improve schools that were underperforming. During the inspection, Estyn had evaluated minutes from School Progress Panels and inspectors had noted that these were effective and did add value around challenging performance. However, Estyn had reported that intervention at one primary school could have been earlier and Estyn considered that the Directorate should consider what aspects trigger formal intervention in primary schools.

In terms of Recommendation (4) which was around the need to make sure that planning for improvement was thorough and consistent throughout all services, Estyn had recognised that the Authority had made very good progress in addressing this recommendation. The highlight within this recommendation was the Directorate's plan which included a detailed review of the previous year's outcomes. Furthermore, Estyn had recognised an improvement around the planning of services within the Directorate which was carried out systematically, coherently and consistently. The use of evidence by the Directorate was good and this led to the Directorate undertaking actions that were well informed and based on factual evidence. In addition, it was noted that the Directorate measured performance well and that it was effective at monitoring school progress. Estyn had found that the Directorate was outward looking and they had commended the Authority's ambition to match the performance of similar Authorities within England.

There was also a reflective culture within the Directorate, and this was evident through well designed processes for monitoring progress around the implementation of actions and assessing initiatives. Estyn also reported that the Authority worked well with stakeholders, who effectively contributed to the development of service plans and so understand the future priorities of the Authority. This was evidenced through regular team meetings, ongoing reviews, impact evaluations and thorough formal reporting mechanisms.

In terms of Recommendation (5) around the need to ensure that robust systems were in place for evaluating the outcomes of initiatives to ensure that they demonstrated good value for money, it was noted that the Authority had made strong progress in addressing this recommendation. Since 2013, the Directorate had improved how it evaluated the outcomes of its capital programmes, its education services and learner support initiatives. Estyn had found that impact evaluation assessments were good and that the Directorate was effective at assessing the impact of any proposals. Evidence also showed that the Directorate was able to make informed judgements about which initiatives should be supported or continued and which of these may need to be changed, reduced or decommissioned.

With regard to Estyn's sixth recommendation which related to the need to strengthen arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the wellbeing of children and young people, the Committee heard that the Authority had made strong progress in addressing this recommendation.

Highlights around this included the implementation of the Wellbeing Strategy that was now well embedded and had been revised to provide direction for the next three years. In addition, the Authority's effective use of data and intelligence was recognised as was the development of school data packs. Estyn had also found that the Authority monitored attendance effectively and Estyn had looked at how well the Authority had used the 'Callio' initiative to manage poor attendance. Furthermore, the Committee was advised that the Authority has improved the work to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training and mention was made of how the Directorate had revised its safeguarding processes which now fell under the same monitoring arrangements.

A Committee Member commented that it would be useful for the Committee not to lose sight of the issues raised within the inspection and for the Committee to look again at this during the summer months. The Member then raised a number of queries. In reply to the Member's first query, around how the inspection report related to three secondary schools in the Vale that required improvement, the Committee was advised that this was something that the Directorate and the Scrutiny Committee should pick up as specific areas to drill down into.

The Member's second query related to improvements observed around governor training. Mr Bate responded by stating that Estyn had been able to engage with a number of governors and Estyn had wanted to hear their views on how well the Council worked with schools. The Committee noted that Estyn had heard a lot of positive aspects around the training provided to governors and they noted that the information held by the Directorate was much clearer and easier to understand. Overall, Mr Bate commented that Estyn had been happy with evidence it had seen. Mr. Kerslake further advised the Committee that it was fair to say that Estyn had been able to collate a range of evidence around governor support from their visits to schools and they were provided with a balanced view that showed that improvements had been undertaken to address the Estyn recommendations.

The Committee Member's third query related to the performance of children with English as a secondary language. In reply to this, Mr. Bate advised the Committee that this was not a specific area that the monitoring visit had focused upon. This would however be something that was considered under Estyn's first recommendation, which related to raising standards in schools. Further to this query, the Director of Learning and Skills advised the Committee that Members would have been previously provided with a report on the Directorate's progress against recommendation 1 which had included information about the attainment of learners for whom English is an additional language and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

In response to a Member's query regarding the gap in performance between boys and girls, Mr. Kerslake advised that it was important for the Directorate to analyse trends and patterns over a period of time as the performance of boys and girls could fluctuate between years and also within schools. This was important in order to assess the impact of any extra provisions and

resources that a school had allocated. It was also important to understand that it had been generally observed that in some cases, where it was expected boys would outperform girls, the opposite could occur during certain years and therefore schools needed to understand the patterns around performance. He confirmed that over time, the rate of progress for boys had improved and the gap had narrowed with girls, but it was worth looking back at previous year's performance trends, especially between the single sex and mixed education schools.

The Chairman commented that he was pleased with the inspection report and the outcomes of the Estyn inspection. He went on to query whether the use of Progress Panels was a good idea and whether the Panels should do more around the identification of best practice. In reply, Mr. Bate stated that from what they had observed the Panels appeared to be working well and the Panels were an important part in helping to raise the bar of school improvement. He went on to state that resources was also an important consideration and so it was important to ensure that the process was not 'diluted'. Mr. Kerslake added that the sharing of best practice may not necessarily require a 'Panel' and that as resources and the time of the schools was limited it would be important for the Scrutiny Committee to be selective and to focus on specific areas of improvement. He also commented that there was a lot of intelligence and data available and it was important for the Council to make use of it and to consider areas of improvement in more depth. As an example, he cited the effectiveness of school governing bodies as one area to possibly consider.

Further to these comments on the use of Panels and the identification and sharing of best practice, the Director of Learning and Skills indicated that a report would be presented once the process of school categorisation had been completed.

A Committee Member questioned whether the Estyn inspectors had identified any issues in how the Authority was working with Looked After Children. In response, Mr. Kerslake advised that in terms of the education outcomes for Looked After Children, they were not in a position to make any direct comments. One aspect that had been identified from working with other Local Authorities was the idea of providing work opportunities within the organisation for Looked After Children as would be the case for children and their actual parents. This could be something that the Council could consider. Further to this, the Chairman confirmed that the Committee had received update reports on Looked After Children in the past to which the Cabinet Members added that the Scrutiny Committee (Social Care and Health) would discuss this cohort of children in more detail.

As a final point, the Committee was advised that further monitoring of the Directorate's progress around implementing the Post Inspection Action Plan will continue as part of the main improvement planning process.

Having considered the report, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the Committee's thanks be forwarded to the representatives from Estyn.
- (2) T H A T the Committee welcomes Estyn judgement that the Learning and Skills Directorate had made sufficient progress which has resulted in the Authority no longer requiring monitoring.
- (3) T H A T Estyn's feedback letter and the comments of the Committee be referred to Cabinet in order to report the findings from the Estyn Monitoring visit.
- (4) T H A T the Committee's thanks and appreciation be forwarded to staff as a result of the good work and the improvements made in addressing the recommendations of Estyn.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To offer the Committee's thanks.
- (2) To highlight the work undertaken in respect of the Estyn inspection.
- (3) In order to update Cabinet of the Estyn inspection and the removal from Estyn monitoring.
- (4) To convey the Committee's thanks and appreciation to staff for their hard work and dedication."

Attached as Appendix – Report to Scrutiny Committee (Lifelong Learning):
11th January, 2016