

Scrutiny Investigation Report on Education Quality

Commissioned by the Cabinet Member – Councillor Siân Gwenllian

Investigation Members

Councillor Liz Saville Roberts (Chair, for the last part of the Investigation)
Councillor Dewi Owen (Chair and member for the first part of the Investigation)
Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd
Councillor Siôn Jones
Councillor Beth Lawton (for the last part of the Investigation)
Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn
Reverend Robert Townsend

Officers

Vera Jones (Lead Officer)
Arwel E Jones (Lead Officer for the last part of the Investigation)
Huw Rowlands (Support Officer)
Glynda O'Brien (Support Officer)

Gwynedd Council
Shirehall Street,
Caernarfon
Gwynedd
LL55 1SH

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1. Context

- 1.1 In the Council's Strategic Plan for 2012/13 it was noted that Education Quality was a key intervention area. The Plan noted the importance of giving every child and young person the opportunity to develop fully, and to ensure consistency in the quality of experiences and opportunities offered to them in our schools. This means **closing the gap** between the pupils themselves, between classes within the same school and between one school and the other and to generally raise standards.
- 1.2 It was noted that it was necessary to establish a firm evidence base for key intervention by identifying the size and extent of the 'gap' in Gwynedd. At the request of the Cabinet Member, the Services Scrutiny Committee agreed to support the work by investigating aspects of the field and identify examples of good practice in Wales and beyond.

2. Purpose of the Scrutiny Investigation

- 2.1 The Cabinet member gave a brief to the Scrutiny Investigation to consider the following issues:
- Why did **polarisation** occur in the **KS4** performance of schools?
 - Achievement standards in **Mathematics** and the impact of this on the TL2+ indicator
 - Why were the quality standards and **KS3** provision generally robust across all the authority's schools?
 - Foster a fuller understanding of the **performance of pupils receiving FSM** and the degree to which the achievement of this group of learners impacts on **KS4** performance
 - The impact of **leadership** on the performance of schools and the way leadership skills are nurtured and developed.

3. Main Activity of the Investigation

- 3.1 A work programme that sought to address the brief was agreed upon. The work was allocated into 4 sections and an outline of these 4 sections was given when updating the Services Scrutiny Committee on 11th April 2013. In summary, the action taken was as follows:
- 3.2 Part 1 – understanding and analysing the data. Investigation members undertook considerable work to understand the field under the leadership of experts in the field, and to become able to analyse data correctly. Following this work, 3 different categories of schools were identified, namely
- Schools where the performance is good
 - School where the performance has / is changing significantly
 - Schools where there is under-performance in the core subjects indicator

- 3.3 Second part – challenging at grass roots level. The second part of the investigation was to challenge and truly understand what is happening at grass roots level. In other words, question those who are affected and take the users / customers' perspective. In order to be able to achieve this element successfully, the Investigation members decided that it was necessary to consult with the following groups in order to identify good practice:
- Head teachers of Gwynedd Secondary Schools
 - School pupils
 - Parents of pupils (by meeting with parent governors)
- 3.4 Third part – independent experts in the field. To underpin the Investigation interviews were held with independent experts in the field of education – especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy. This included Head teachers from outside the county, Head of Welsh Government School Standards Unit and more recently, the new Chief Officer of the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service, GwE. They were asked for their views on how to improve the quality of education and ensure consistency, together with challenging them for evidence of having introduced and achieved an improvement in quality.
- 3.5 Fourth part – draw up and submit evidence based recommendations to the Cabinet Leader. The fourth part is submitted in this report, namely to submit recommendations to the Cabinet Member that are based on evidence gathering and challenging different individuals.

N.B. It was also of course timely for the Investigation's work to run parallel with the ESTYN Inspection on the Authority's work. The Investigation received messages and considered the initial conclusions of the Inspection in order to assess to what extent they interweaved with its recommendations.

4. Main Findings of the Investigation

- 4.1 The questions asked by the Cabinet Member have already been noted in 2.1 above. However, having looked at the data and receiving evidence, the Investigation's discussions expanded as members identified related issues which were in their view key in terms of educational quality.
- 4.2 Consequently, the Investigation's main findings are more extensive than the original brief and they are presented here for the Cabinet Member's attention. In terms of order, the following are submitted by noting the main findings with some suggestions on possible activities, notes referring to the sources of the evidence for that finding and the recommendation to the Cabinet Member.

- 4.3 The Investigation appreciates that any action will be a matter for the Cabinet Member, however, it is anxious for the Scrutiny Committee to receive a report back in due course from the Cabinet Member on her response to the recommendations. It is also fair to note, that the Investigation has not answered the specific question regarding free school meals as its findings and recommendations get to grips with the Education System in its entirety. Specifically, in terms of the Free School Meals Performance Tables, a focus on this may confuse the ambition and complicate the assessment of school standards and results.

A. Leadership in Schools

Findings -

Leadership within school has a direct and far-reaching impact on the quality of education within the school and further support is required to develop this and to further foster school leadership confidence

(NB Leadership in this context means the Head, Senior Management Team and Subject Leaders).

- Need to clearly outline the Authority's expectation from heads
- Need for School Leadership to establish clear expectations in terms of ambition, encourage staff and pupils, tracking progress (See C below) and early intervention where required
- Need for the NPQH to prepare new headteachers appropriately for practical work and the need to ensure additional training
- Need to skill leaders by developing mentoring arrangements and make wider use of strategic heads
- Need to organise specific support for heads and prospective heads
- Need to develop central/department leadership in order that responsibility for performance and standards are totally clear
- Need to enable heads to delegate key leadership responsibilities where appropriate
- Need to look creatively on time-table issues in order to make the best use of the academic year and stretch pupils
- Need to simplify the proficiency system, emphasising that it is about improvement and the opportunity to improve, and the procedure for dealing with teachers who cannot meet the requirements of the post needs to be facilitated
- Need to develop the ability to use proficiency arrangements earlier and critically skills of persuasion and influence before arriving at proficiency action
- The Authority requires further Human Resources support for the proficiency system
- Need to recognise the extreme pressures on a head teacher in a small school

Source of Evidence -

Interviews with Dr Brett Pugh, Mr Geraint Rees, Head teachers of County Secondary schools and GwE Chief Officer

Recommendation to the Cabinet Member -

Specific proposals should be developed to confirm the critical role of leadership in school and support work to foster confidence to achieve this role.

B. Mathematics**Findings**

The attainment standards for Mathematics is a matter that truly needs attention and has an impact on the attainment of Gwynedd pupils especially with indicator TL2+.

Numeracy and mathematical skills underpin progress across the whole curriculum and in terms of life and work skills and specific attention should be given to this.

- Need to identify and share county excellence and wider in order to increase expectations via a wider strategy
- Need to develop interest in numeracy skills across the ability range
- Need to teach numeracy and literacy across every subject in Primary
- Need to strengthen numeracy skills across all subjects in Primary and early Secondary before reaching Key Stage 4
- Need to recognise the impact of attainment in Mathematics on other subject also
- Need to encourage and develop alternative/creative methods to teach mathematics that is relevant to real life
- Need to offer additional lessons in the subject that are planned as part of a wider learning plan
- Need to normalise retaining children in school in the pre-examination period in order to prepare them better for examinations
- Need a robust managerial system to support the above
- Need to identify the extent parents pay for private lessons which mean that the true picture is not evident
- Give attention where this is required to offer support to teachers and assistants to strengthen their personal skills in the fields of Literacy and Numeracy

Source of Evidence

Data indicates the significant impact of attainment in Mathematics on TL2+ and the impact of attainment in mathematics on other subjects as well.

Interviews with Dr Brett Pugh, Mr Geraint Rees, Head teachers of County Secondary schools, Parent-governors and pupils.

Recommendation to the Cabinet Member

Specific proposals should be developed (powerhouse) to develop Mathematics in Primary and Secondary Schools in the county.

C. Understand Performance and Data**Findings -**

The picture in terms of identifying performance and responding to it is too inconsistent across the county

- Need to have a suitable procedure for the purpose of tracking individual pupil attainment at each school. It is not suggested that a rule is set regarding what system however it is expected that the system will enable:-
 - Identifying and tracking the attainments of the child
 - Clarity on responsibilities within the system
 - Tracking systems that highlight improvement pathways for pupils across the ability range
 - Setting targets via different methods
 - Acting on findings at classroom level
 - Understanding of the system amongst children and parents
- Need to give regular detailed attention to the standards of children's work in the classroom and in home work
- Need to empower the internal assessments of schools, especially in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 to ensure consistency and quality
- Need for collaboration between Primary and Secondary in order to facilitate transfer and continuation in developing achievement from one to the other

Source of Evidence -

Interviews with County Secondary Head teachers, Mr Geraint Rees and Huw Foster Evans, GwE Chief Officer

Recommendation to the Cabinet Member -

A clear expectation should be set in terms of the achievement tracking system, monitoring guidance and the use made of the information for each school in the county.

Ch. Raise and Convey Expectations**Findings -**

The Authority has to inspire and raise expectations of what is possible in terms of the achievement of the county's children

- Need for everyone (the Authority, Governors, Leadership and Staff and Parents and Pupils to shoulder the responsibility for the standard of education but with clarity about everyone's roles when working towards this
- Need to set a higher ambition for the current county target for TL2+ without having an impact on the ambition in other subjects
- Need to improve the understanding of parents and pupils in terms of what is done with expectations in the system and for individual pupils
- Need to retain the interest of groups of specific pupils in education and not exempt them from the system and give further attention to occupational subjects

Source of Evidence -

Interviews with Dr Brett Pugh, Mr Geraint Rees, Head teachers of County Secondary schools and Huw Foster Efnas, GwE Chief Officer

Recommendation to the Cabinet Member -

The expectations of the attainment of the county's children above the targets set for TL2+

D. Polarization in terms of Quality**Findings -**

Polarization within and between Schools throughout the county is an important matter to get to grips with

- Need to recognise that there is evidence of polarization between schools and between subjects
- Research required into robust improvement models in terms of the Authority's role and specifically regarding intervention where this is

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| <p>required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for school leadership to identify polarization within a school as a key matter to get to grips with in the school • Need to offer support to teachers to be able to get to grips with polarization within Schools and subjects • Need to widen horizons in order to learn from other areas, countries and initiatives |
| <p>Source of Evidence -</p> <p>Performance data of county schools</p> <p>Interviews with Parent-governors, Mr Geraint Rees, Head teachers of County Secondary schools and Huw Foster Evans, GwE Chief Officer</p> |
| <p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member -</p> <p>The Authority should develop a model of continuous improvement that builds on the achievements of the past</p> |

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| <p>Dd The Authority's Role</p> <p>Findings -</p> <p>There is a need to clearly define what is the Education Authority's role in terms of Education Quality and specifically establish a clear understanding of the link between the Authority and Schools in this field</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Authority needs to establish a clear role to inspire and support schools to improve • The Authority needs to set an expected standard in terms of education quality across the county • Need to establish a clear procedure to support and share good practice to attain the expected standard • Need for the Authority to undertake an audit of what is good in each school in terms of good practices • Need to review the terms of reference of head teacher meetings which offer an opportunity to share good practices • The Authority needs to look at the support offered to school governors soon (see point E below) • Need to give more evident attention to educational quality and attainment in the work of the Scrutiny Committee, as a matter of procedure • Need to increase the attention given by the Authority to Self-Evaluations and School Development Plans • Need to maximise the Human Resources and financial support available |
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| <p>to schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Authority needs to encourage and facilitate collaboration between Schools in order to enable improvement • Need to keep a careful eye on the Council's Service Level Agreement with GwE to ensure that it reflects the desire to improve rather than looking back critically on past performance |
| <p>Source of Evidence -</p> <p>Interviews with Head teachers of County Secondary Schools and Huw Foster Evans, Chief Officer GwE</p> |
| <p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member -</p> <p>A broad joint understanding should be highlighted and established on the Authority's role and specifically the relationship with Schools in terms of responsibility for quality.</p> |

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| <p>E. Role of Governors</p> |
| <p>Findings -</p> <p>There is significant pressure on governors in the county in terms of their responsibilities with quality and there is a need to improve the support given in order to achieve these responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to support and enable governors to achieve their 'critical friend' role effectively (governors on the whole and Authority representatives on the governing body specifically) • Need to define what is expected from a good governing body, to include – Skilled governors/receive comparative information on performance / independent views / lively system of sub-committees / good clerk • Need to share good practice from governing bodies that operate effectively • Need to improve the current training system for governors and consider new ways of engaging and training, considering, amongst other things, training governors of individual schools together • Need to make wider use of support resources for Governors such as joint meetings of chairs and vice-chairs, Governors Wales resources and enable access to other networks • Need to foster the confidence of governing bodies in their role, including empowering them to hold meetings without teachers/head teacher in attendance when appropriate • Need to ensure a clear understanding amongst governors of the Authority's role (see Dd above) |

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| <p>Source of Evidence -</p> <p>Interviews with Parent-governors, County Heads and Chief Officer of GwE</p> |
| <p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member -</p> <p>The type of support given to the role of governors should be looked at again in order to make it more suitable for purpose in the context of the quality programme</p> |

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| <p>F. Contact with Pupils</p> |
| <p>Findings -</p> <p>The Investigation has benefited greatly from listening to the voice of pupils who have offered an important perspective for the discussions. It is necessary to establish a procedure to ensure that the voice of pupils is to be heard clearly in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need assurance that the input of School councils is effective and gives an opportunity to offer extensive comments on education quality • Need to ensure that there are arrangements whereby Governors have the opportunity to listen to the voice of pupils • A regular procedure is required in the Authority in order to try and listen to the views of pupils |
| <p>Source of Evidence -</p> <p>Sessions with pupils in 6 schools</p> |
| <p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member -</p> <p>A regular procedure should be ensured to bring the voice of pupils on education quality to the attention of governors at their meetings and to the Authority's attention</p> |