



## REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

11 NOVEMBER 2020

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**Report by:** Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director

**Subject:** Schools in Estyn category

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### **1.0 Purpose of the Report**

**1.1** To update Joint Committee members on the current situation in relation to schools in Estyn Statutory Category and Estyn Review Category.

### **2.0 Background**

**2.1** The current situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic means that schools are facing an unprecedented range of challenges. These challenges are likely to be further amplified in schools which are in statutory category or Estyn Review.

**2.2** During the lockdown period, schools have naturally focused on the health and wellbeing of their pupils, staff and school community, along with promoting the continuity of learning. Estyn and GwE monitoring visits were suspended during this period with schools accessing support on operational issues and on planning and delivering effective distance and blended learning.

**2.3** Schools in Statutory Category have recently been informed by Estyn that they will re-start their re-engagement by undertaking a '*pastoral*' visit during the second half

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term. Pastoral visits will involve a professional discussion with school leaders but will not result in a formal, written report. The visit, along with any feedback received from schools and LAs, will help Estyn to decide when the time may be right to resume statutory, first-hand monitoring. Critical factors in any decision will be the capacity of the school to deliver onsite education to most pupils and the capacity of leaders to engage with a monitoring team. At this time, the current thinking is for monitoring visit to re-start in early spring term. However, the changing situation may mean a 'differentiated' form of engagement visit.

**2.4** For schools in Estyn Review, there are requirements on local authority/consortia to submit a progress report to Estyn. The decision to remove a school from follow-up could be undertaken as a desk-top exercise by Estyn or it could involve a further monitoring visit to the school. This process is usually undertaken late in the Autumn Term or early in the Spring Term. To date, there has been no communication about expectations for 2020/21.

### **3.0 Matters for consideration**

**3.1** As a region, we are apprehensive around the re-inspection of these schools and have communicated these concern with Estyn. Initial discussions have taken place with Estyn around a range of matters including:

- Are the identified recommendations at the time of the core inspection still relevant and pertinent to the situation of each school in category?
- What criteria and benchmarks will be applied when evaluating and forming judgements around standards at end of KS4/KS5, teaching, learning, assessment and progression, evaluation and leadership?
- How do we ensure acknowledgement and endorsement for schools which have demonstrated and evidenced robust progress against many of their recommendations up to the Covid lockdown of March 2020 and how do we measure the period between March-October 2020 when forming judgements, since schools were operating under a completely different set of rules and

regulations and where almost all of their pupils were accessing the majority of their education via distance learning?

- How confident are we that schools can robustly and effectively address the range of their post inspection recommendations given the significant factors forced upon them by the on-going Covid situation?
- How will expectations around PIAP planning and delivery be addressed if schools face a further local or national full or partial lockdown?
- How can we capture progress that has been made against recommendations and also in significant areas outside of any recommendations during this particularly challenging time of pandemic?

**3.2** We are concerned that if criteria and benchmarks for the areas identified above do not take into consideration the current challenging circumstances of the Covid period and do not fairly reflect Welsh Government expectations on schools regarding their 'Operational' and 'Teaching and Learning Guidance', many of the schools in category or follow-up will be unduly and unfairly punished as it will be extremely difficult for them to effectively demonstrate progress against many of the key areas of their recommendations.

**3.3** In this very difficult period, and to try and ensure the best interest, fairness, equity and the well-being of leaders, staff and pupils, we believe that Estyn should consider taking a decision to grant all schools in an inspection category an 'amnesty'. This amnesty would be with the provision that each establishment would have to undertake a full inspection in 18 months. Such a decision would also ensure that the verisimilitude of the Estyn inspection framework is not undermined or challenged. A comprehensive package of support for these schools would be agreed for the period leading up to their full inspection and which could be agreed and monitored by Estyn.

#### **4.0 Recommendations**

**4.1** The Joint Committee is asked to discuss and note the content of the report and to agree possible next steps.

**5.0 Financial Implications**

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

**6.0 Equalities Impact**

6.1 There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.

**7.0 Personnel Implications**

7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

**8.0 Consultation undertaken**

8.1 Consultation with GwE Management Board.

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**OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS**

**Monitoring Officer:**

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

**Statutory Finance Officer:**

Part 5.1 of the report above confirms that there are no additional financial commitments arising from this report, hence I trust that any additional support provided to schools in the context of Estyn visits will be prioritised from within GwE's existing resources.