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Collaborating · Learning · Succeeding

GwE Annual Report

2023-2024

Gwynedd

GwE ANNUAL REPORT

GWYNEDD 2023-24

Introduction

The Learning Service, via GwE's regional service, knows its schools well and provides firm and appropriate challenge together with effective support and intervention for them. There are robust procedures in place for setting a direction and holding the regional service to account. The specific role of the regional service in school improvement is explicit and clear to all stakeholders and they are held to account effectively by local scrutiny procedures.

Following a request from members in the last scrutiny meeting in January 2024, a much more succinct Annual Report is presented for 2023-24. The report notes progress against five key areas and the next steps along the improvement journey:

- Key Area 1 - Improve Leadership
- Key Area 2 - Improve Teaching and Learning
- Key Area 3 - Curriculum and Provision
- Key Area 4 - Learner Progression and Standards
- Key Area 5 - Support and Challenge for Schools Causing Concern

This is the last Annual Report that GwE will provide for the scrutiny committee. On 31 January 2024, Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language issued a written statement: [The next stage in the review of school improvement - the roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales](#). As a result, GwE and the other regional consortia will come to an end on 31 March, 2025.

Following the decision of Welsh Government to combine the main education grants under one heading, namely the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG), the grant is now paid directly to Local Authorities/schools, rather than to the regional consortia, with the requirements and risks associated with the grant now the responsibility of the individual Local Authority. This decision has had a significant impact on school improvement arrangements in north Wales from 1 April, 2024:

- The strategic role of GwE senior leaders has been quashed.
- GwE has changed from being a 'joint regional service' to a locally commissioned service.
- GwE is a client, providing a differentiated commission to the Local Authorities.
- GwE must adhere closely to the commission and the number of days allocated to each local authority for school improvement purposes.
- The Head of Education will provide the strategic direction for school improvement.

It should also be noted that GwE's Budget for 2024-25 reflects the decision of the Local Authorities to reduce their core contribution by 10%, therefore implementing a regional cut of £392k, as well as not to add inflation in full. Taking an inflation estimate into account on all GwE expenditure in 2024-25, and as education grants are not increased annually, this is a cut in real terms of an additional £345k to the core funding, giving a total of £737k. This is synonymous to a cut of 18% to the budget.

KEY AREA 1 - IMPROVE LEADERSHIP

The quality of senior leadership is generally robust, but a few challenges remain in some specific areas. In addition, ensuring succession in headteacher and senior leader posts in both the primary and secondary sectors has been and continues to be challenging. A rich array of professional learning has

been provided to develop leadership at every level; however, not all schools have taken advantage of this provision. Moreover, there have been arrangements in place whereby school leaders collaborate to support one another in primary clusters and secondary alliances. Inconsistency remains in the quality of implementation across the authority, and further work is to be done to ensure that alliances and clusters take more ownership of each other's improvement journey.

Due to the focus on leadership:

- the majority of schools are taking purposeful steps to further strengthen leadership with a specific focus on refining and improving improvement planning processes at every level. Nearly all Headteachers attended workshops on refining evaluation and improvement planning processes and received direct support from their link adviser.
- nearly all schools are prioritising guidance and support to develop the capacity of senior and middle leaders to lead and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning effectively.
- uptake on leadership development training and programmes has increased during the year - on a middle leader, senior leader and aspiring headteacher level. This year, 8 Gwynedd teachers gained the NPQH qualification.
- a number of schools have strengthened their systems for capturing the impact of improvement strategies on pupils' standards and progress following the guidance and practical support.
- a number of schools have further strengthened their internal accountability processes, and in the schools where underperformance has emerged they have ensured appropriate and timely interventions to address relevant issues.
- Support Plans are in place in nearly all schools, and the impact of support has been captured in good practice case studies to be shared with all secondary schools and primary clusters.
- an increasing number of schools have senior leaders who are trained peer reviewers and improvement facilitators and who are actively involved in peer review activities. The clusters that have engaged have seen the benefits of sharing good practice and collaborating for improvement purposes. In those schools that have not been a part of these plans, implementation is limited to the input of Headteachers, and only a few of them have undertaken peer review on a middle leader and teacher level.
- following workshops, all primary/secondary clusters have transition plans in place, and a number of them have started to implement them effectively.

KEY AREA 2 - IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching is generally robust across sectors and purposeful action is taken in many schools to further improve and make the quality of teaching consistent.

Due to the increasing focus on support and guidance to improve teaching:

- several schools have demonstrated improvements in specific aspects of pedagogy. This has been validated by the Link Advisers who participated in scrutiny activities and learning walks.
- the quality of teaching in the majority of schools is secure. The effective collaboration across clusters and alliances has started to decrease variation within and across schools.
- there have been specific workshops and direct guidance given to individual schools on developing numeracy, literacy and digital skills. A number of schools have appropriate literacy and numeracy interventions in place to boost and support pupils who are slipping. Support for developing the cross-curricular skills has resulted in improvements in the quality of planning, provision and standards in many schools.
- several schools are taking appropriate steps to strengthen pedagogy by attending training and sharing good practice.
- targeted subject-specific support for some schools has resulted in improving teaching and the depth and breadth of understanding.
- there are strong examples of schools taking effective action to support vulnerable learners.
- the pace and scale of improvement in terms of teaching needs more attention in a few schools.

KEY AREA 3 - CURRICULUM AND PROVISION

All schools are implementing and refining their approaches in line with the steps outlined in the 'Journey to 2022' (Curriculum for Wales) document. There is specific support in place for the few schools requiring further guidance.

As a result of effective collaboration and engagement:

- all primary schools and all secondary schools, in the context of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils, are meeting the statutory requirements of Curriculum for Wales delivery.
- all schools are implementing plans to respond to the essential components of the four purposes of the new curriculum.
- all schools are working to develop a balanced curriculum offer to meet the needs of their learners, including the more able.
- all schools are introducing and experimenting with new aspects of curriculum requirements. This has been triggered by a variety of professional development activities on both a local and county level.
- all schools are actively involved in cluster/alliance collaboration within and across sectors to deepen their understanding of the curriculum and share best practice.
- schools ensure equity for their learners, and ensure they have an inclusive learning environment to support those who are vulnerable.

KEY AREA 4 - LEARNER PROGRESSION AND STANDARDS

The increasing focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has resulted in maintaining and improving standards across the majority of schools. Improvement needs to gather more pace in a few schools.

- several schools are making more informed use of data and information about teaching, learning and assessment to evaluate standards and identify priorities for further improvement, but it is acknowledged that these processes need to be strengthened further in some schools to ensure more focus on pupil progress within evaluation procedures. Progress tracking spreadsheets have evolved in several schools to include an analysis of learners' holistic progress. A number of schools are also introducing purposeful intervention programmes which they monitor through tracking systems to tackle underachievement and variation. In some schools, these approaches need to be further strengthened and refined.
- many schools are currently working to refine ongoing assessment processes to include more learner input. Where processes have not developed as effectively, support is provided for those schools to refine their processes for tracking progress and capturing impact.
- most schools have prioritised collaboration in their clusters and alliances within their strategic plans. The focus of this collaboration has been on identifying progress in the skills and the areas of learning and experience, so as to ensure better planning to provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils.
- subject standards and standards in skills are robust overall across the majority of schools and robustly good in several schools. In a minority of schools, there is more intensive work taking place to improve provision in the skills. Work is also ongoing in several schools to target further improvements in provision and standards in skills with the most vulnerable groups of learners.
- nearly all secondary schools are developing a purposeful offer for KS4 pupils so that there is clear progression to further education, training or employment when they leave school.

- a number of primary schools have targeted improving Welsh oracy as a result of the long term and detrimental effect of the pandemic. For example, in the schools implementing Ein Llais Ni there is good progress to be seen in speaking and listening skills and in pupils' confidence to speak Welsh.

KEY AREA 5 - SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

There is a clear strategy for schools causing concern and all identified schools have a support plan which clearly notes the nature and intensity of the support provided by GwE and the Authority.

The Team of Supporting Improvement Advisers working across schools has wide-ranging experience and subject and sector-specific expertise. This ensures that an appropriate level of challenge and support is targeted in a timely manner. There are appropriate arrangements in place to report to the authority on the performance and progress of schools. Through good collaboration between the Learning Service and Regional School Improvement Service there are effective processes and actions in place to challenge and support schools and to identify those causing concern.

Where follow-up action has been identified by Estyn, progress was seen at an appropriate pace.

Up to the end of March 2024, there is one school in the Authority in Estyn statutory category. The school has a post-inspection improvement plan in place and there is timely progress to be seen against the recommendations.

IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2024-25

- Ensure better resilience and leadership capacity in some areas - on a senior leader and middle leader level.
- Continue to support leaders and teachers to plan effectively for progress in the development of the cross-curricular skills and the areas of learning and experience.
- Work with schools to refine assessment arrangements and plan the next steps in learning more effectively.
- Ensure improvements in the quality of teaching in specific schools.
- Continue to support secondary schools to respond to the requirements of the new GCSE specifications.
- Continue to promote and inspire effective collaboration and networking between schools, on all levels, to ensure that all schools are responding confidently to the requirements of the School Improvement Framework.