

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	18 July 2024
TITLE	Middle Tier Review
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	Ensure the input of the Scrutiny Committee to the proposed changes in the way the schools improvement service is provided in future.
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1. Why it needs scrutiny?

- 1.1 This item has been identified at the annual scrutiny workshop as an item that it is thought would be timely to bring before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in July 2024.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

- 2.1 This area was identified for scrutiny in light of a recent Welsh Government review of the roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales, which involves a fundamental and significant change in the delivery of an improvement service to schools across Wales.

3. Summary of the Key Matters

- 3.1 In light of the review, the Regional Schools Improvement Service, GwE will cease at the end of March 2025. As a result, all Education Authorities are required to establish an agreed system for supporting schools before then, with that system meeting the requirements of the School Improvement Framework.
- 3.2 Due to this fundamental change in the delivery of an improvement service to schools, the Authority has a duty of care towards GwE staff during an inevitable period of uncertainty for them.
- 3.3 The Welsh Government has not yet announced the details of a national offer.

4. Background / Context

Review of School Improvement

- 4.1 On 31 January 2024, Jeremy Miles MS, the former Minister for the Welsh Language and Education, published a written statement which detailed the next step in the *review of school improvement - roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales*: [Written Statement](#).
- 4.2 In the accompanying letter that was issued ([DJ's Letter](#)) by Professor Dylan Jones who was commissioned to undertake the above review, three clear messages that came from all parts of Wales are detailed in the review, namely that the direction that school leaders and the majority of LAs clearly want to see in future is:

- an opportunity to lead on school improvement matters through a greater focus on local collaboration and partnership working between school leaders and their Local Authority.
- partnerships between more than one authority with a move away from a wider regional model of support.
- stronger national leadership with clearer national priorities for schools and a simplification of the national funding mechanisms with as much resource as possible going directly to schools or supporting groups of schools to work together.

4.3 In essence, the three above elements lead to a change in the delivery of improvement support to schools, which leads to the end of the Regional Consortia model. Simply, the change forces us to examine the best way of supporting the work of improving schools on three levels:

1. Support work between schools on a local level
2. Support collaboration and networking between schools across local authorities and on a national level
3. Support the work of improving schools on a national level

4.4 On 26 February 2024, it was noted that the external review team (Professor Dylan Jones and ISOS) would move to a new role, supporting schools and local authorities to co-create a partnership in the context of work streams 1 and 2 above.

4.5 Since then, one meeting has been held with the review team and a further meeting with a government officer to discuss the School Improvement Framework, and the new Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle MS, has stated her wish to continue with the review along with proposed changes.

4.6 On 26 June 2024, *Draft guidelines - Enabling a Self-improvement System - collaborative model between school, LAs and Welsh Government* were received, (Appendix 1), which highlight Welsh Government policy expectations for a new collaborative method between schools in relation to self-evaluation and improvement.

4.7 Here is a summary of the model from the Welsh Government:

- As a starting point, schools should lead their own self-evaluation and improvement planning processes in an iterative way (rather than as a one-off event); the local authority and other schools should support this process.
- All schools will be part of a vertical collaborative improvement model (3-16 and beyond) and a horizontal collaborative improvement model (e.g. secondary to secondary). Further details are provided below. This will enable leaders and teachers to experience learning and leadership in other schools – supporting a shared understanding of expectations for learning and progress and enabling long-term detailed improvement priorities to be identified and discussed.
LAs, in partnership with school leaders, will facilitate and provide support to all collaborative partnerships, identifying and taking advantage of expertise and evidence, along with wider LA services, as they proceed together to address barriers to learning as quickly as possible.
- LAs are working with other LAs and the national school improvement capacity to ensure evidence-based improvement approaches throughout the system, enabling a more coordinated effort towards achieving our nation's mission.

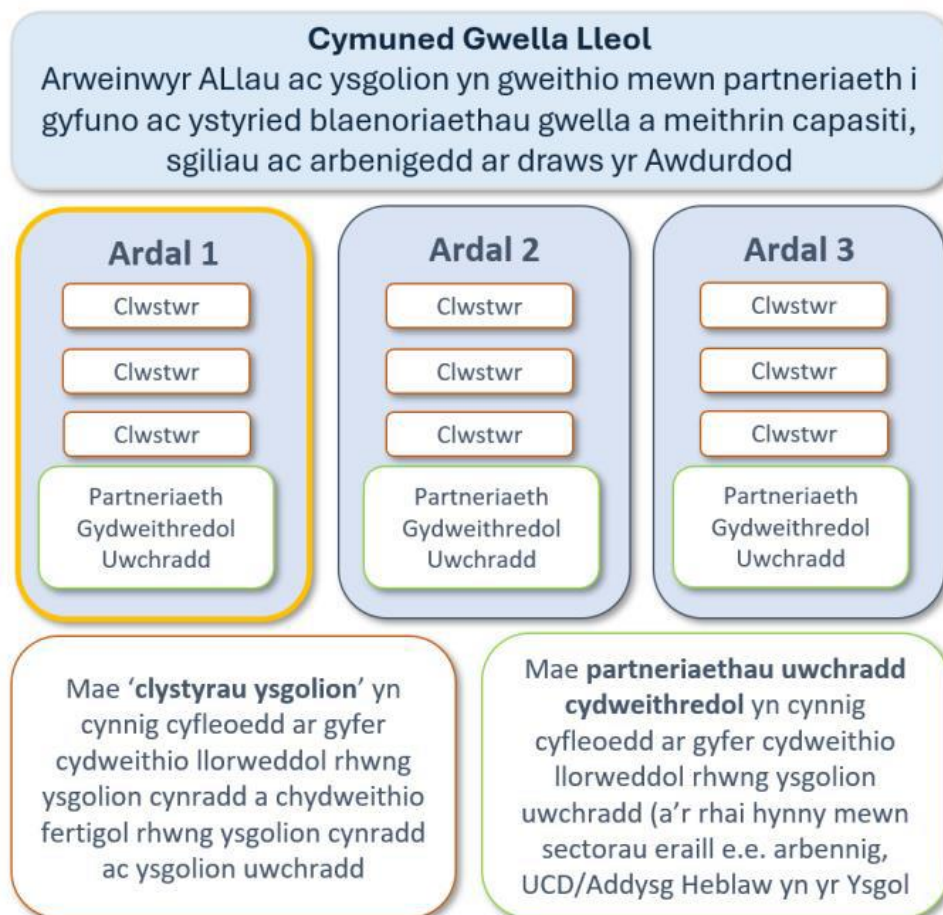
Role of the individual school

4.8 Schools are expected to focus on two key questions as a starting point for their improvement activities:

1. Are learners making progress in the ways described in the progress principles, supporting them to develop towards the four purposes?
2. Is the pace of learners' progress in line with teacher and curriculum expectations?

Collaborative Improvement

4.9 The Welsh Government states that collaborative improvement should be regarded as the most effective way of ensuring sustainable change within schools, across groups of schools, and across local authorities; this should focus on improving learning and outcomes for all learners. This approach will lead to improved teaching and learning, leadership, and fairness, inclusion and well-being by nurturing collaborative capacity building and mutual understanding within the local system.



4.10 It is worth noting that Gwynedd schools have already been collaborating in cluster form in the primary sector, and in alliance form in the secondary sector, over the last few years. However, it is recognised that this approach is not sufficiently mature at present to ensure the support, but more crucially the school-to-school challenge required in accordance with the Welsh Government's expectation.

4.11 Furthermore, due to the nature of the school system in Gwynedd, with 79 primary schools, 12 secondary schools, 2 all-through schools and 2 special schools, this collaborative model poses a greater challenge to us in terms of being able to provide appropriate support and challenge across

the system. The fact that we have so many small primary and secondary schools in terms of numbers creates additional challenges due to a lack of capacity to free up staff and leaders to fulfil this collaborative requirement, coupled with the diversity in the number of primary schools found in each catchment area that could pose a further barrier to the successful delivery of the vision. All this of course, alongside the current financial climate which means that schools and the Education Authority will have a lack of resources in the exact period that this new approach is expected to be established.

- 4.12 Additional context to this change of course is the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales, and the new GCSEs that are about to come into force, along with the new Inspection Framework which will come into force in September, which will see schools receiving Estyn visits every 3 years.
- 4.13 In the context of the expectation to collaborate across Local Authority boundaries on a local level, we anticipate that we will collaborate with Anglesey when developing these new arrangements, as we already have services provided jointly between both counties, such as the ALN&I service and the post-16 education consortium. However, it is premature for us to be able to detail exactly what this arrangement will entail at this stage, as we only received the draft guidelines from the Welsh Government at the end of June.
- 4.14 Also, due to this fundamental change in the delivery of the schools improvement service from March 2025 onwards, the Authority has a duty of care towards GwE staff during this inevitable period of uncertainty for them. Over the next period, discussions and employment commitments will need to be considered as we proceed to establish the school improvement support in the Authority in accordance with the Welsh Government's expectation. In this context, we will take appropriate action following guidance from Human Resources and TUPE requirements, and it would not be appropriate for us to elaborate further on this at present.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 We have initially shared information and engaged with our headteachers' strategic forums on the proposed amendments and have sought the opinion of headteachers informally on the best way of supporting the work of improving schools on three levels in accordance with Welsh Government aspirations.
- 5.2 It is premature to reach any conclusions in light of this initial engagement. However, it is recognised that our schools will need support and guidance to empower them to be able to challenge and support each other appropriately in accordance with the expectations of supporting work between schools on a local level, as well as the School Improvement Framework.
- 5.3 It is also recognised that the education system in Gwynedd may create additional challenges to achieve the aim of collaborating and networking between schools and across boundaries in light of leadership conditions in several of our schools, and so many schools that we have across the county to ensure effective collaboration.

6. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 6.1 Due to the fact that Welsh Government is leading on the change in light of commissioning the middle tier review we have made a request to the Government for information regarding how it has met the requirements of the Well-being Act in these initial stages of the proposed structural change to the middle tier. We accept that details on the local level of our response to the duty of the Well-being Act will be required as the next stages develop.

6.2 Have you **included** residents / service users? If not, why and how do you intend to consult with them?

Due to the fact that Welsh Government is leading on the change in light of commissioning the middle tier review, we have made a request to the Government for information regarding how it has met the requirements of the Well-being Act in these initial stages of the proposed structural change to the middle tier, including residents and service users.

On a local level, we have initially shared information and engaged in our headteachers' strategic forums on the proposed amendments and have sought the opinion of headteachers informally on the best way of supporting the work of improving schools on three levels in accordance with Welsh Government aspirations. It is currently premature to include residents and wider service users locally, as no clarity or further guidance has been received from the Welsh Government.

6.3 Have you considered **collaboration**?

The latest guidance from Welsh Government is the need to examine the best way of supporting the work of improving schools on three levels, namely:

1. Support work between schools on a local level
2. Support collaboration and networking between schools across local authorities and on a national level
3. Support the work of improving schools on a national level.

Therefore, the guidance is clear regarding the expectations to collaborate and we are currently in the process of considering the best way to meet this requirement.

6.4 What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems arising or worsening in the future?

Last year, the Welsh Government carried out a review of the middle tier which highlighted things that worked well in the current system along with areas for improvement. Based on the feedback gathered across Wales, the Minister for Education at the time, Jeremy Miles MS, decided to proceed to further examine what is the best way of supporting the work of improving schools, and on three levels, and also stated his vision to improve schools in Wales: ([Written Statement](#)). Therefore, the proposed changes respond to the problems highlighted with the intention of establishing more effective and efficient arrangements for the future.

6.5 How have you considered the **long-term** and what will people's needs be in years to come?

The School Improvement Framework clearly sets the expectations for the coming years; however, the Welsh Government has not yet announced the details of the national offer.

6.6 To ensure **integration**, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?

The regional collaborative arrangements between the six counties and the GwE regional consortia will cease at the end of March 2025, with Authorities expected to proceed to establish arrangements to support schools from 1 April 2025 onwards. Welsh Government is still eager to see authorities collaborating but on a more local level.

7. **Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-Economic Duty**

7.1 Due to the fact that Welsh Government is leading on the change in light of commissioning the middle tier review, we have made a request to the Government for information regarding how it

has considered the impact on equality characteristics, the Welsh language and the socio-economic duty.

Currently, it is considered premature for the Education Authority to assess the impact of the proposed change on equality characteristics, the Welsh language and the socio-economic duty, as we are following guidance received from the Welsh Government in relation to the proposed change. Despite this, we will consider the impact on equality characteristics, the Welsh language and the socio-economic duty when responding to the next steps on a local level.

8. Next Steps

8.1 On 26 June 2024, correspondence was received by the Welsh Government noting the next steps and the timetable as follows:

Date	Output	Leader
June	Distribution of draft guidelines - <i>Collaborative model between school, LAs and national government</i>	Welsh Government
July	Informal discussion with every LA based on the template that reinforces the guidelines. (Any observations on the guidelines themselves should be submitted by the end of July 2024).	Welsh Government and the partner team
September	Publish further details about national capacity functions. Guidelines and template updated based on feedback.*	Welsh Government
End of October	Submit the final plans of LAs based on the template.	LAs
End of 2024	A consultation on the amended School Improvement guidelines that will build on the results of this SIPP process.	Welsh Government

**Details noted in the guidelines about national capacity will affect LAs to some extent in terms of the scope and nature of national support and functions in specific fields.*

Appendices

Appendix 1 Draft guidelines - Enabling a Self-improvement System - collaborative model between school, LAs and Welsh Government