

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 20 th October 2022
Report Subject	Learning from the School Performance Monitoring Group
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG). The purpose of the SPMG is to provide support and challenge to schools which are underperforming. It also includes a focus on ensuring that the resources of the Local Authority and the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales (GwE) are being appropriately directed to schools to support them in making progress and improving outcomes for their learners.

The group provides elected members with the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of performance at individual school level in both the primary and secondary sector and actively work alongside officers in providing the necessary challenge and support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee receives the report on the work undertaken by the School Performance Monitoring Group and notes the transition from national categorisation of schools to the new school improvement framework.
2	The Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to confirm those members who would be available to represent the Committee at meetings of the School Performance Monitoring Group.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MONITORING GROUP
1.01	<p>The criteria for identifying schools requiring monitoring was previously based on two main factors – those schools which were categorised as being in an Amber or Red support category by the local authority & GwE, as part of the national categorisation model, and those in an Estyn follow up category i.e. Estyn Review or the statutory categories of Significant Improvement or Special Measures.</p> <p>The Welsh Government suspended school categorisation for the 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022 academic years, as part of its measures to reduce pressure on schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional consortia and local authorities continued to work in partnership with schools to help provide them with the support they need to improve and to successfully implement reforms.</p>
1.02	<p>Prior to the pandemic, Estyn announced that inspections of schools would cease from September 2020 to August 2021 as the system moved towards implementation of the new curriculum. Estyn planned to continue to carry out follow up work for schools in Estyn categories. As a result of the pandemic however, all inspection work was suspended from 16th March 2020. Follow up work with schools in categories began again during the autumn term of 2021 and pilot inspections for schools in summer term 2022.</p> <p>From September 2022, Estyn have begun to inspect their schools under their new framework with plans to increase the number of inspections from September 2024. Moving forward, there are plans for Estyn to inspect schools more frequently.</p>
1.03	<p>In the summer term of 2022, the Welsh Government published a new school improvement framework, ensuring that learner progression and well-being is at the heart of all efforts to deliver high standards and aspirations. This means that National Categorisation has finished and will be replaced by a robust self-evaluation system where good practice can be shared and failure is urgently addressed</p> <p>As a result of these changes, there has been a need to review how schools are identified as needing to be monitored by the School Performance Monitoring Group. This has been part of the national and regional discussions on evolving regional processes to support schools on their self-improvement journey. Engagement with schools should facilitate the early identification of schools that are in need of support, to prevent them becoming a school causing concern.</p>
1.04	<p>The Headteacher and Chair of Governors of the identified schools are usually invited to a minimum of two meetings per academic year – the first to establish the context for the school's current performance and strategies for improvement; the second, usually within two terms, to measure the impact of those strategies on pupil outcomes. Where the level of intervention required is high, meetings can be held on a termly basis. Headteachers are invited to share any documentation that exemplifies the</p>

	<p>work they are doing e.g. School Improvement Plans, data profiles, pupil tracking documents, samples of pupils' work. During the last two years, these meetings have been held online as a result of Covid.</p> <p>Wherever appropriate, outcomes of Estyn inspections or revisits are included in these discussions. The meetings provide the opportunity for the Headteacher and Chair of Governors to demonstrate their strength of leadership in tackling the issues faced by their school and outline progress in the implementation of the school's Post Inspection Action Plan.</p> <p>Officers are able to consider appropriate interventions and support needed by the school. Support is provided by Supporting Improvement Advisers (SIA) within GwE and by local authority services e.g., Welsh Language support, Integrated Youth Provision, Finance, Governance and Human Resources, as determined by the improvement priorities identified for each school.</p> <p>The GwE Flintshire Core Lead for primary or secondary schools and the Supporting Improvement Adviser attached to the school are invited to attend the meetings. Their reports and verbal contributions to the meeting on progress being made at the school provide a very useful source of evidence. At the end of each meeting action points are agreed and a summary report produced which is shared with SPMG members and the school.</p>
1.05	<p>It is the decision of the SPMG as to whether a school can be removed from the scrutiny of the panel because it has made sufficient progress, or whether it needs to remain because there are still outstanding performance issues to be addressed.</p>
1.06	<p>Since the last report to scrutiny in 2019, 3 primary schools and 3 secondary schools have been subject to monitoring by the SPMG. The challenges of the pandemic have meant necessary delays to the process as schools focused on firstly providing emergency childcare in the first period of lockdown and then subsequent periods of remote learning. At the end of the summer term 2022, there were 2 primary and 2 secondary schools under monitoring by the SPMG. The small number of schools reflects the very positive Estyn profile for schools in Flintshire.</p>
1.07	<p>The process recognises that sustainable school improvement takes time and that many of the challenges faced by schools are complex. The SPMG continues to identify common themes in relation to effective school improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The capacity of the leadership provided by the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team, through effective self-evaluation and targeted improvement planning. • The strength of the governing body in understanding the school's position, their role in monitoring the school's performance and their capacity to hold the school to account. • The effectiveness of pupil tracking systems to identify those pupils at risk of under-performing and use of appropriate intervention strategies delivered by well- trained staff.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong commitment by the leadership team to ensure all staff have access to high quality, ongoing professional development. • The degree to which the school has a model of distributive leadership e.g. using other senior and middle managers effectively to ensure the success of the improvement journey.
1.08	<p>Through the work of the SPMG, members and officers have reflected that the process continues to be effective in contributing to an improvement in primary and secondary school outcomes over time, particularly in schools where there are significant and long term challenges.</p> <p>When Estyn inspected the local authority in the summer of 2019, they recognised that the portfolio’s arrangements for identifying schools causing concern work well, and in most cases lead to effective actions.</p> <p>The inspection identified that <i>“Officers and elected members in Flintshire know their schools and settings well and can outline clearly the relative strengths and areas for improvement. They recognise specific issues facing individual schools causing concern and act in a timely way to put in place the most appropriate support in collaboration with GwE”</i>.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Officer and Elected Member time.
2.02	Resources provided by GwE as part of the Service Level Agreement.
2.03	Resources within the Education & Youth Portfolio to provide specific short term interventions to support an improvement priority.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>Poor performance places an individual school at risk in a number of ways e.g. it develops a poor reputation within the local community; it is more likely to have a poor Estyn inspection outcome; there is a potential for a drop in pupil numbers which then impacts on funding levels. These issues can all have a major outcome on the long term sustainability of a school.</p> <p>Having a number of schools performing badly with low pupil outcomes and poor Estyn judgements would also place the Council and GwE at risk as poor school performance is one of the main criteria used by Estyn and the Welsh Audit Office to make judgements about the quality of these organisations and their ability to effectively deliver core educational services.</p> <p>The SPMG has a proven track record of identifying schools at risk and providing the appropriate levels of challenge and support to enable the school to accelerate its own improvement journey. This has resulted in the Council having to make very limited use of formal powers of intervention.</p>

	The Education Portfolio has a detailed risk assessment which outlines key risks related to the delivery of education services and method statements which describe how these risks are managed. These are regularly reported to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview Scrutiny Committee.
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	None required.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Welsh Government statutory guidance for schools and local authorities: schools causing concern https://gov.wales/schools-causing-concern-statutory-guidance-schools-and-local-authorities

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Vicky Barlow, Senior Manager for School Improvement Telephone: 01352 704019 E-mail: vicky.barlow@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	SPMG – School Performance Monitoring Group established in the Education and Youth Portfolio comprising officers and elected members Estyn – Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector for Education & Training in Wales GwE – Regional School Improvement Service for North Wales