

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **THURSDAY, 23RD OCTOBER 2014**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (EDUCATION AND YOUTH)**

SUBJECT: **LEARNING FROM THE SCHOOL STANDARDS MONITORING GROUP (SSMG)**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To update on Schools Standards Monitoring for underperforming schools in both primary and secondary phases.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The School Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG) was established to ensure that schools which are under-performing are rigorously challenged by the Local Authority but are also appropriately supported in order to make progress and improve the outcomes for their learners. The group also provides elected members with the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of the level of school performance within the authority and actively work alongside officers in providing that challenge and support.

The membership of the group for the academic year 2013-14 was as follows:-

Cllr Chris Bithell	Lead Member for Lifelong Learning
Cllr Ian Roberts	Chair, LL Scrutiny Committee
Mr David Hytch	LL Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Dave Mackie	LL Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Nancy Matthews	LL Scrutiny Committee
Ian Budd	Chief Officer, Education & Youth
Claire Homard	Principal Primary Officer
Kevin Grandfield	Principal Secondary Officer
GwE System Leader	Depending on which school in SSMG

2.02 The criteria for monitoring schools remains two-fold – those with data trends showing a period of performance below the Free School Meal benchmarks for their family of schools and those in an Estyn follow up category. The Headteacher and Chair of Governors of the identified schools are invited to two meetings per year – one in the autumn term to establish the context for the school's current performance and strategies for improvement; the second, at the end of the summer term to exemplify the impact of those strategies on pupil outcomes.

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. Officers are also able to consider appropriate interventions and support needed by the school in order for them to work effectively towards their improvement targets. For the first time, the GwE officer for each school was invited to the summer review meeting to give their perspective on the school's progress. This was very successful and will now be a feature of all SSMG meetings.

- 2.03 At the end of the monitoring meetings a decision is made whether the school can be removed from monitoring because it has made sufficient progress or whether it needs to remain in the group because there are still outstanding performance issues.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 At the academic year 2013-14 there were seven primary schools subject to monitoring by the SSMG. This increased to nine mid year as a result of two schools being inspected and put in the categories of Estyn Monitoring and Special Measures. Three further schools were included in the group because of Estyn concerns and the remaining four were identified as needing monitoring as a result of data trends and other risk factors e.g. change of leadership arrangements. One secondary school was invited to meet a monitoring group.

- 3.02 As in the previous year, similar themes were identified as being common to effective school improvement:-

- The strength of the leadership provided by the Headteacher through effective self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- The strength of the Governing Body in understanding the school's position, their active involvement in monitoring the school's performance and their ability to robustly act as a critical friend to hold the school to account.
- The effectiveness of pupil tracking systems to quickly identify pupils at risk of under-performing.
- The use of appropriate intervention strategies delivered by well-trained staff.
- Rigorous target settings processes that set high aspirations for Individual performance, based on effective data analysis and accurate teacher assessment.
- Effective use of local authority services and external agencies to support individual learners.

During this round of monitoring, what also became apparent in the schools that were proving to be successful in their improvement journey was:-

- A strong commitment by the leadership to ensure all staff have access to high quality, ongoing professional development.

- An effective working relationship with the school's GwE System Leader where challenge was accepted and advice acted upon.
- The degree to which the Headteacher has a commitment to distributive leadership e.g. using other senior and middle managers effectively to ensure the success of the improvement journey.

- 3.03 The feedback from Headteachers and Governors involved in the process this year confirmed that while the process was challenging, they found it constructive to articulate their improvement journey to others. They also appreciated offers of support from Local Authority officers to try to help resolve particular issues. The review of actions from the autumn term meeting to the summer term meeting demonstrated that all schools had taken positive steps towards their improvement targets and could provide evidence of where interventions had had an impact on outcomes for learners.
- 3.04 The inclusion of the GwE System Leader in the monitoring meetings, where they were able to attend, was a positive development. The System Leader was able to provide another useful perspective on the school's improvement journey and outline the support they had provided. There was a clear correlation between the pace of change at the school and the strength of the relationship between the System Leader and the Headteacher. In the examples of the most constructive working partnerships, the Headteacher respected the professionalism of the System Leader, accepted their challenges and acted upon their advice. In turn, the System Leader was able to highlight the efforts being made by the Headteacher and staff to drive improvements, could reflect on the impact the changes were making and could provide examples of additional support they had provided to the school e.g. attending Governors' meetings, leading staff meetings etc.
- 3.05 As in the previous year, some Headteachers found the meetings useful to identify particular issues around premises or other service areas within the LA which had not been delivered as efficiently as they had hoped. One example raised was about the elongated process related to the closure of the Croft Nursery and the delay in receiving the ministerial decision, which had caused a lot of uncertainty in the area amongst parents and staff of the schools affected by the closure with the resulting impact that a huge amount of work to close the school and relocate provision had to be done in the last week of the summer term.
- 3.06 One Secondary School was invited to attend a monitoring meeting with group members. This school was represented at the meeting by the Acting Headteacher, Chair of Governors and appointed Challenge Adviser from GwE. The meeting focused on four key points, learner outcomes, deficit budget, the role of leadership teams in securing improvement and the role the Governors will play in this. The school, working with the GwE adviser, shared a comprehensive action plan

for moving forward with these issues. It is worth noting that the school has been included in the School Challenge Cymru cohort and is now receiving additional support from Welsh Government through this process.

3.07 Outcomes from the Primary SSMG by July 2014

School	GwE/LA Stage	Outcome
A	4	School continues to make good progress under the relatively new leadership team. Data improving steadily but still below expected levels. Governors input strengthened - more challenging and acting more as critical friend. However, capacity to improve still requires high levels of support from LA and GwE. Risk remains that Estyn visit would place school in a serious category of concern.
B	4	School placed in Special Measures after very poor Estyn outcome in January 2015. Headteacher absent since inspection due to serious health issues. Acting Head seconded from another local school and making a positive impact. First Estyn revisit in July was positive – noted progress being made in all areas. High levels of support from GwE and LA.
C	4	School classified as In Need of Significant Improvement by Estyn making rapid progress under strong leadership of HT and Govs. Improvement in data 2014, weak teaching issues being resolved. Leadership team strengthened for Sept 14. Revisit anticipated Spring Term 2015. Support from LA and GwE.
D	4	School classified as In Need of Significant Improvement by Estyn making steady progress in meeting recommendations and being monitored carefully to ensure all in place for anticipated revisit in

		Autumn term. Support from LA & GwE.
E	3	Amalgamation and move into new premises completed on schedule for September 14 but remains a school at risk whilst two schools embed into one new processes are embedded. Concerns about accuracy of teacher assessment have been addressed over the year but some issues related to quality of teaching remain. Support from LA & GwE.
F	3 (moving towards 2)	School in Estyn Monitoring made good progress towards meeting recommendations over the year. HT and Chair working effectively to drive improvements. Estyn reviewed school in September 2014 and recommended removal from Monitoring. SSMG to recommend removal from the list at next meeting.
Gi Gii	2 3	Two schools under single leadership arrangement since January 2015 – proving to be effective. School Gi in LA Monitoring for one minor quality indicator – made sufficient progress and has been removed from Estyn follow up in September 14. School Gii was inspected in July 2014 and judged to be in need of Estyn Monitoring which was a positive result based on the circumstances of the school. School Gi no longer needs to be part of SSMG. School Gii will remain in monitoring until judged by Estyn to be out of category (expected revisit Summer 2015). Leadership and teaching at Gii improved by a fixed term position of Assistant Headteacher. Headteacher providing very strong leadership on both sites and has clear vision for improvement. Support from LA and GwE.
H	3	School placed in Estyn Monitoring in January 2015 related to a couple of

		quality indicators. Brought into SSMG for first meeting June 2014. HT and Gvs responding positively to challenge and clear plan in place to address recommendations. Anticipated revisit Spring 2015. Support from LA and GwE.
1	2	School been on major improvement journey since being placed In Need of Significant Improvement in June 2012 and removed a year later. Stronger leadership provided by HT and Governors, data profile significantly improved over last two years, strong focus on improving learner outcomes and teachers' skills. Removed from SSMG

3.08 The SSMG will continue to monitor the schools highlighted above and draw in other schools identified at risk based on information received from GwE summer reports and inspection activity.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 That members receive the report on the work undertaken by the School Standards Monitoring Group and endorse it having a continued role working in the same way with targeted schools in 2014-15.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 None.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 N/A

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

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