

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 3 rd December 2015
Report Subject	Update from School Standards Monitoring Group
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an annual update to the Education and Youth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the School Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG), and is shared with Cabinet Members for information. The purpose of the SSMG is to challenge schools which are underperforming but also to ensure that 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 in order for them to make progress and improve outcomes for their learners.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That members receive the report on the work undertaken by the School Standards Monitoring Group.
2	That members endorse the School Standards Monitoring Group to continue to work in the same way with targeted schools in 2015-16.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE UPDATE FROM SCHOOL STANDARDS MONITORING GROUP																				
1.01	<p>Membership of the group for the academic year 2014-15 was as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="300 416 1366 869"> <tr> <td>Cllr Chris Bithell</td> <td>Lead Member for Education & Youth</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cllr Ian Roberts</td> <td>Chair, E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mr David Hytch</td> <td>E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cllr Dave Mackie</td> <td>E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cllr Nancy Matthews</td> <td>E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cllr Marion Bateman</td> <td>E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ian Budd</td> <td>Chief Officer, Education & Youth</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Claire Homard</td> <td>Principal School Improvement Officer - Primary</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kevin Grandfield</td> <td>Principal School Improvement Officer - Secondary</td> </tr> <tr> <td>GwE Challenge Adviser</td> <td>Depending on which school in SSMG</td> </tr> </table>	Cllr Chris Bithell	Lead Member for Education & Youth	Cllr Ian Roberts	Chair, E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Mr David Hytch	E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Cllr Dave Mackie	E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Cllr Nancy Matthews	E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Cllr Marion Bateman	E&Y Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Ian Budd	Chief Officer, Education & Youth	Claire Homard	Principal School Improvement Officer - Primary	Kevin Grandfield	Principal School Improvement Officer - Secondary	GwE Challenge Adviser	Depending on which school in SSMG
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1.02	<p>The criteria for monitoring schools is based on three key factors – those schools with data trends showing a period of performance below the Free School Meal benchmarks for their family of schools, those schools which are categorised as Amber or Red by the LA & GwE and those in an Estyn follow up category i.e. Estyn Monitoring, In Need of Significant Improvement or Special Measures.</p>																				
1.03	<p>The Headteacher and Chair of Governors of the identified schools are invited to a minimum of two meetings per year – the first is to establish the context for the school’s current performance and strategies for improvement; the second, usually within two terms, is to exemplify the impact of those strategies on pupil outcomes. Where the level of intervention required is high, meetings are held on a termly basis.</p>																				
1.04	<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. 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.</p>																				
1.05	<p>The GwE Challenge Adviser attached to the school is invited to attend the meeting. Their termly reports and verbal contributions to the meeting on progress being made at the school provide a useful source of evidence. They can also ensure that GwE resources are being appropriately directed to support the improvement plan e.g. additional support from Associate Partners for Literacy & Numeracy, leadership mentoring etc.</p>																				
1.06	<p>Action points are agreed at the end of each meeting and a summary report produced which is shared with SSMG members and the school.</p>																				

1.07	It is the decision of the SSMG Panel whether a school can be removed from the scrutiny of the SSMG because it has made sufficient progress or whether it needs to remain because there are still outstanding performance issues.
1.08	At the start of the academic year 2014-15, there were 8 primary schools and 1 secondary school subject to monitoring by the SSMG. This increased to 14 primary schools mid-year as a result of them performing less well than expected in their Estyn inspections and being placed in a follow-up category, or because the newly introduced Welsh Government categorisation model identified them as an 'Amber' school i.e. in need of targeted support. An additional secondary school was also added to the group.
1.09	By the end of the academic year 2014-15, 6 primary schools were judged to have made sufficient progress to be removed from the School Standards Monitoring Group. All of these schools had been revisited by Estyn and could demonstrate they had made good progress in relation to their recommendations and were removed from follow up.
1.10	<p>Through its discussions with a wide number of primary and secondary school leaders and Chairs of Governors, the SSMG continues to identify common themes in relation to effective school improvement:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. - An effective working relationship with the GwE Challenge Adviser where challenge was accepted and advice acted upon. - A strong commitment by the leadership to ensure all staff have access to high quality, ongoing professional development. - 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.
1.11	Feedback from Headteachers and Chairs of Governors identified that the first meeting with the group was the most stressful but by the end of the process they were able to confirm that while involvement in the SSMG had been challenging, it had been a very constructive, enabling them to reflect on their current performance, receive the support they required which, in turn, enabled them to improve. They very much appreciated the extra support provided by the LA and by GwE which assisted them to achieve their goals. One Headteacher was so supportive of this process and how it had helped to move her school forward she wrote a letter to the Chief Officer and was

	invited to present this to a Scrutiny meeting.
1.12	At the end of the academic year 2014-15 of the remaining schools under the scrutiny of SSMG, 4 remain because they are in Estyn follow up, 5 have Estyn revisits pending and whilst they are making steady progress they continue to be in need of targeted support to ensure a positive inspection outcome. 1 currently remains on the list while revised leadership arrangements become embedded but is likely to be removed in the autumn term.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Officer and Elected Member time
2.02	Resources funded by GwE as part of the Service Level Agreement
2.03	Resources within the Education & Youth Portfolio

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	None required.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	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.
4.02	Having a number of schools performing badly with low pupil outcomes and poor Estyn judgements, also places 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.
4.03	The key focus of the work undertaken by the SSMG is that schools are quickly identified, challenged but also supported if there are concerns about their performance which could adversely impact on outcomes for learners. The regular and effective communication between LA officers and the GwE Senior Challenge Adviser for the local Hwb mitigates against this risk.
4.04	The SSMG 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 only limited use of formal powers of intervention.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Schools Causing Concern Circular 004/2012</p> <p>http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140607-schools-causing-concern-guidance-en.pdf</p> <p>Contact Officer: Claire Homard Senior Manager School Improvement Systems</p> <p>Telephone: 01352 704019</p> <p>E-mail: claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>(1) School Standards Monitoring Group: established in the Education and Youth Portfolio comprising officers and elected members</p> <p>(2) Estyn: Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education & Training in Wales</p> <p>(3) GwE – Regional School Improvement Service for North Wales</p>