

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 8 September 2016
Report Subject	Learning from the School Performance 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 E&Y Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG). The purpose of the SPMG is to challenge schools which are underperforming but also to ensure 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 Performance Monitoring Group.
2	That members endorse the School Performance Monitoring Group to continue to work in the same way with targeted schools in 2016-17.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MONITORING GROUP																		
1.01	<p>Membership of the group for the academic year 2015-16 was as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="304 360 1369 741"> <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>Senior Manager – School Improvement</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	Senior Manager – School Improvement	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 as part of the national categorisation model 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. Headteachers are invited to bring any documentation that exemplifies the work they are doing eg School Improvement Plans, data profiles, pupil tracking documents, samples of pupils’ work.</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 and outline progress in the implementation of the Post Inspection Action Plan. 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. Support is now mostly provided by specialist curriculum officers within GwE but some support is still provided by Local Authority services eg Welsh Language Support, Foundation Phase, Finance, Governance and Human Resources.</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.</p>																		

1.06	Action points are agreed at the end of each meeting and a summary report produced which is shared with SPMG members and the school.
1.07	It is the decision of the SPMG Panel whether a school can be removed from the scrutiny of the SPMG because it has made sufficient progress or whether it needs to remain because there are still outstanding performance issues.
1.08	During the academic year 2015-16, there were 11 primary schools and 3 secondary schools subject to monitoring by the SPMG. Once the summer performance data has been analysed and the judgements from GwE on the school's 'Capacity to Improve' have been finalised in the early autumn term, it is anticipated that potentially 5 primary schools will be removed from the SPMG panel. Two further primary schools are expecting Estyn revisits in the autumn term and the outcome of these will have an impact on their potential removal from the monitoring list.
1.09	<p>Through its discussions with a wide number of primary and secondary school leaders and Chairs of Governors, the SPMG 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 targeted 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 setting processes that set high aspirations for individual performance, based on effective data analysis and accurate teacher assessment. - Effective use of the regional improvement service through the input of the Challenge Adviser, appropriate curriculum specialists within GwE and local authority services to improve the skills of staff to support individual learners. - An effective working relationship with the GwE Challenge Adviser where challenge is accepted and advice acted upon. - A strong commitment by the leadership team to ensure all staff have access to high quality, ongoing professional development. - The degree to which the Headteacher has a commitment to use a model of distributive leadership eg using other senior and middle managers effectively to ensure the success of the improvement journey. - The degree to which the whole governing body is aware of the school's position in terms of categorisation, preparation for any Estyn visit, the strategic plans produced to secure improvement and the progress in their implementation so that leaders and managers are held properly accountable.

1.10	Feedback from Headteachers and Chairs of Governors continues to confirm that while the process of involvement in SPMG had been challenging, it had also been 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.
1.11	Feedback from the panel members has confirmed that involvement in the group has enabled them to develop a greater understanding of the challenges facing schools. Panel members have also been invited by the Headteachers to visit their schools and have benefited from seeing the work of the school first hand.
1.12	Through the work of the panel this year, officers have reflected that the process has been successful in contributing to an improvement in primary school outcomes over time, particularly in schools where there are significant and long term challenges and that a greater emphasis now needs to be placed on secondary schools to ensure standards continue to improve and Estyn outcomes are positive.
1.13	Officers have also reflected that the letters sent to schools to inform them they are to be subject to monitoring by the SPMG need to be clearer about the implications of being scrutinised by the Local Authority in this manner and that there are mechanisms to ensure that such letters are consistently shared with staff and the governing body, so that all stakeholders are aware of the significant nature of the intervention.

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 SPMG 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 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 only limited use of formal powers of intervention.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - Schools Causing Concern Circular 004/2012

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p><i>Schools Causing Concern Circular 004/2012</i></p> <p>Contact Officer: Claire Homard, Senior Manager - School Improvement Telephone: 01352 704019 E-mail: claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

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