

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

19TH FEBRUARY 2014

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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FEEDBACK ON ESTYN'S INTERIM FOLLOW UP ON THE PREVIOUS INSPECTION ON THE QUALITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with the first feedback from Estyn in respect of their monitoring of the Council's progress in improving its Education Services for Children and Young People.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the letter from Estyn, received on 27th January 2014.
- 2.2 Agree to present this report to the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee at their next meeting.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Estyn inspected the Council in March 2012 and reported its findings in July 2012.
- 3.2 Estyn's conclusion on the quality of education services for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf was:

- **Overall Judgement – Adequate** (Strengths outweigh areas for improvement);
- **Capacity to Improve – Adequate.**

- 3.3 In addition Estyn made the following recommendations:

- R1 - raise standards in schools particularly in key stage 4;
- R2 - improve attendance rates in all schools;
- R3 - improve the evaluation and analyses of data across service areas and partnerships to drive improvements in outcomes for learners;
- R4 - use the full powers available to the authority to improve leadership and management in schools;
- R5 - reduce surplus places; and
- R6 - improve the rigour and the level of scrutiny and challenge across all services and partnerships.

- 3.4 In November 2013, Estyn revisited the Council and reviewed the progress made against Recommendations 4 & 5. Estyn's findings are set out in the letter appended to this report.
- 3.5 Over the course of the 2014 calendar year, Estyn will carryout further work to assess the Council's progress against the other four recommendations. No dates have been set for these visits. The Council will receive a letter within four weeks of the visit and will be required to provide the information to evidence progress against the recommendations.
- 3.6 The first letter from Estyn, in respect of their first visit, is positive and recognises that the Council has made a concerted effort to address the issues raised by Estyn. However, there is still considerable work to be completed to ensure that the Council, working with schools, continues to raise educational standards and remove surplus places across the County Borough.

Mr Keith Griffiths
Chief Executive
Rhonda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale
Tonypany
CF40 2XX

January 2014

Dear Mr Griffiths

Estyn Monitoring Visit 9 – 11 December 2013

Following Estyn's inspection of education services for children and young people in March 2012, the authority was identified as requiring follow-up through Estyn monitoring. A plan was subsequently agreed with your Estyn link inspectors, and the first monitoring visit took place from 9-11 December 2013. This letter records the outcomes of that visit.

Gerard Kerslake HMI led a team of two inspectors to review the progress made by the authority against two of the six recommendations arising from the previous inspection, to consider the current performance of the authority and to identify any further areas for improvement. The team held discussions with the cabinet member for education, scrutiny committee members, the chief executive, senior officers, headteachers and senior system leaders from the Central South Consortium. Inspectors also scrutinised local authority documentation, including evidence on the progress made on each of the Estyn's recommendations.

At the end of the monitoring visit, the team reported their findings to you as the Chief Executive, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning and the Service Director for Schools and Community.

Following Estyn's inspection in March 2012, the authority produced an appropriately detailed post inspection action plan (PIAP) with clear incremental steps to achieve improvement in its education services for children and young people. This PIAP was agreed by elected members, the chief executive and the director of education and lifelong learning, who all acknowledged the need for swift action in order to remove barriers to progress and improve planning and performance management.

Elected members and senior officers are committed to taking difficult decisions to improve provision and using resources effectively. They have taken useful steps to bring about improvements in the two recommendations monitored in this visit.

Outcome of the monitoring visit

Progress on recommendations 4 and 5 of the inspection report

Recommendation 4: Use the full powers available to the authority to improve leadership and management in schools;

Since the inspection in 2012, the local authority is making better use of the powers it has available for the improvement in leadership and management in its schools. It is continuing to strengthen and embed this across the local authority.

The local authority has developed an integrated approach to underpin its school improvement strategy, which includes a revised and improved Partnership Agreement, and revised human resource and performance management policies and procedures. This means the respective responsibilities of schools, the local authority and the Central South Consortium for school improvement, and the consequences of poor performance, are clearer.

The local authority has increased the use of its intervention powers, and focused this on performance improvement, rather than simply imposing sanctions. The local authority in partnership with the regional school improvement consortium, undertake regular performance reviews of its schools. School review meetings now make better use of the intelligence and data that the consortium has to evaluate how well a school manages pupil performance and standards; the quality of teaching and learning; finance; buildings; safeguarding pupils; and HR issues.

Where there is under-performance, the local authority now more robustly challenges its schools to improve. The local authority informs its challenge with a clear evidence base, which leads to an agreed incremental plan for improvement and appropriate targeted support. For example, this support may include financial assistance to secure mentoring and support for the headteacher, curriculum managers and teachers and learning support assistants.

Since the inspection in 2012, the local authority has used its powers of intervention to hold 29 primary schools and 10 secondary schools to account more rigorously. The use of powers has included formal meetings between the director and elected members with headteachers and chairs of governors. The authority has also issued formal warnings to headteachers and governing bodies where improvements have been too slow.

Following local authority notification to improve, most schools have responded well, and have demonstrated clear improvement against their agreed action plans. However, where there has been limited improvement the local authority, headteachers and governing bodies have appropriately escalated intervention to competency and capability procedures.

The local authority has made sound progress in establishing this approach to using its powers for intervention. However, there remain a few schools that do not support the approach.

Recommendation 5: Reduce surplus places

The authority has a suitable strategic approach to reorganisation, which includes their school organisation planning and governance delivery plan. This plan has clear links with the strategic business plan which includes an objective for the removal of surplus places.

The local authority has consulted effectively with key stakeholders in producing proposals for school reorganisation. The strategy has been well received by schools. The local authority has supported headteachers involved in school reorganisation process well. The local authority involves headteachers effectively in the planning process and takes good account of their views. Headteachers have a strong commitment to future reorganisation proposals.

Since the inspection in 2012, elected members have taken difficult decisions regarding school reorganisation. They demonstrate a commitment to the whole school reorganisation process. There is a clear political will and a strong financial commitment to implement the 21st century schools programme.

The authority also has firm plans in place to remove further surplus places in primary and in secondary schools. These plans include a comprehensive school modernisation strategy comprising of school closures, amalgamations and the creation of all-age schools. This strategy appropriately includes an investment objective to reduce surplus places.

Since the inspection in 2012, the local authority has reduced the number of primary schools with significant surplus capacity from 68 to 42 and has reduced the total number of surplus places in primary schools by 1864.

In secondary schools, surplus places have increased since the last inspection. However, it is projected that the closure of three secondary schools in August 2014 and a new school building, which is planned to open in April 2015, will reduce surplus places by 932.

Next steps

Your link inspectors will continue, through their normal role with the authority, to monitor overall progress and advise on the preparation for the next two monitoring visits scheduled for spring and summer 2014.

I am copying this letter to the Welsh Government and the Wales Audit Office for information.

Yours sincerely

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Clive Phillips'.

Clive Phillips
Assistant Director