

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**23<sup>RD</sup> JUNE, 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 second 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 12<sup>th</sup> May 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 March/April 2014, Estyn revisited the Council and reviewed the progress made against Recommendations 2 & 3, having reviewed recommendations 4 & 5 in November 2013. The findings from Estyn's first visit were presented to Cabinet in February 2014. Estyn's findings from the recent visit 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 two recommendations. No dates have been set for the next visit but we expect it to be before the summer holidays. 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 second letter from Estyn, in respect of their second 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 improve pupil attendance and effectively use data to raise educational standards across the County Borough.

Steve Merritt  
Chief Executive  
Rhonda Cynon Taf County Borough Council  
The Pavilions  
Cambrian Park  
Clydach Vale  
Tonypany  
CF40 2XX

12 May 2014

Dear Mr Merritt

### **Estyn Monitoring Visit 31 March - 2 April 2014**

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 for follow-up visits was agreed with your Estyn link inspectors. The first follow-up visit took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013, and the second monitoring visit took place from 31<sup>st</sup> March – 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014. This letter records the outcomes of the second 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 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, authority officers, headteachers, Careers Wales and the data and intelligence unit manager from the Central South Consortium. Inspectors also scrutinised relevant 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, the service director for schools and community and other authority officers.

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. Elected members, the chief executive, and the director of education and lifelong learning, 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 2 and 3 of the inspection report**

#### **Recommendation 2: Improve attendance rates in all schools**

Since the last inspection in 2012, attendance has improved in both primary and secondary schools. Between 2011 and 2013, attendance in primary schools improved at a higher rate than the Wales average. It improved by 1 percentage point from 92.4% in 2011 to 93.4% in 2013. When compared to similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks, attendance in 2013 is around average in primary schools.

Attendance in secondary schools improved at a similar rate to the Wales average between 2011 and 2013. It improved by 1.3 percentage points from 90.7% in 2011 to 92.0% in 2013. However, attendance by pupils who receive free school meals is below the average for Wales. The LA has successfully reduced the level of persistent absentees from 10.2% in 2011 to 6.9% in 2013 (Wales: 8.7% to 6.2%) When compared to similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks, attendance in secondary schools is below average with 37% (7) of schools in the bottom quarter and 58% (11) below average. Only 21% (4) of schools are in the top quarter and 42% (8) are above average overall.

The authority's unverified data for this current year indicates that attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools have continued to improve when compared with the same period last year.

The authority has taken robust steps to ensure that the all schools use attendance codes consistently and accurately. The authority is holding headteachers to account effectively through their internal audit processes, resulting in more accurate attendance data. However, the authority has not provided schools with a clear direction regarding the authorisation of term-time holidays and schools' approach to this issue is inconsistent.

The authority has produced a useful strategy and toolkit for improving attendance, which it has recently reviewed, and refined in consultation with headteachers and other stakeholders. Headteachers find the toolkit valuable and effective in outlining consistent procedures to help improve attendance. The authority has recently begun a consultation with its schools for a code of conduct for issuing fixed penalty notices for poor attendance.

At school level, various initiatives have been introduced to improve attendance. These include good and effective rewards and sanctions systems that are applied consistently. The authority has provided appropriate training to governors on attendance issues. They have linked this training to safeguarding and have received positive feedback from governors.

The authority has delivered suitable public campaigns to raise parental awareness of the importance of good attendance. The authority has successfully recruited partners to help raise the profile of high attendance. For example, local businesses make positive contributions by offering prizes for good attendance in schools.

Since the last inspection, attendance data provided by the authority to schools and the Central South Consortium has improved considerably. Schools are able to use this data well in consultation with the attendance and wellbeing service to focus on areas of poor attendance.

Schools in consultation with the authority and the consortium set appropriately challenging targets to improve attendance. These are based on making sure that all schools aim above the median for their free-school-meals benchmark group. If a school is already above the median then targets are set to move them up into the next quarter within their free-school-meals benchmark group.

The authority's education and lifelong learning scrutiny committee has established a scrutiny attendance-working group, to scrutinise school attendance. This group produced a report, which made 32 recommendations to help improve attendance. Nearly all of these recommendations have been addressed appropriately.

**Recommendation 3: Improve the evaluation and analyses of data across service areas and partnerships to drive improvements in outcomes for learners**

The authority is making good progress in responding to this recommendation.

In early 2013, the authority undertook a robust 'Data and Information Governance Review'. The outcomes of this review clearly identified areas of good practice, and important areas for improvement, which endorsed the findings in Estyn's report, and provided clear detail about the changes needed. The authority has responded well to the findings of their internal review.

The authority has put in place effective structures to support the ongoing improvements in data collection, analysis, and reporting. This includes an improvement strategy, a project management board, and an 'Information and Systems Team' to collect, analyse and share data.

Importantly, the authority has used its internal audit arrangements to analyse the quality of data collection at school level, and to hold schools to account for the accuracy of their record keeping. As a consequence, the authority has improved the consistency of its data and improved the quality of its data reports.

The authority's Data Review Visits (DRVs) help officers, systems leaders and school managers have more informed conversations about pupils and their performance. Governing bodies' use of data is also improving, with a better understanding of how to interpret data, and how to use it for improvement purposes.

Schools are gaining confidence in the improved data collection systems. They are increasingly using both the authority's data packs and their own analysis of local data to identify more robustly issues around teaching and learning, progress of pupils including those with additional learning needs, and pupil attendance. Primary

and secondary schools are sharing data more effectively and this is leading to better-targeted support for pupils as they transfer from key stage 2 to key stage 3.

Links between the authority's and Central South Consortium's data units are improving. The local authority shares its school data reports with systems leaders so they can use these to inform their annual performance reviews. The authority is also working in partnership with a neighbouring authority to develop common data collection systems, and they are sharing their 'on-going evaluations of this with the consortium.

The local authority now requires its schools to make better and more appropriate use of their pupil level data to target support before referring pupils to authority services, and ALN services in particular. Schools have to evidence what they have done before referrals are accepted. The Access and Inclusion service has improved how it uses data to better track ALN pupils, and to evaluate the use of the Additional Needs Fund (ANF). For example, as a result of improved data analysis, the service is better able to identify trends in how school manage behaviour and target is able to target its support and challenge more appropriately. As a consequence, the need for physical intervention and use of fixed term exclusions are dropping in those schools targeted.

The local authority is also using data more effectively to improve services and outcomes in its partnership based work. This has helped the partnership to decommission a large number of services, and to monitor better the impact of those services it now funds. The authority and its partners have put in place a vulnerability profile mechanism, which effectively highlights young people who need additional help to keep them engaged in education, training, and employment.

Elected members are more confident in the quality of the information provided by the education department. This has helped scrutiny hold schools and officers more effectively to account. However, elected members are not always clear enough about what the detail behind education services performance data actually means.

### **Next steps**

Your link inspectors will continue, through their normal role with the authority, to monitor overall progress and provide advice on the preparation for the final monitoring visit scheduled for summer 2014.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Phillips', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Clive Phillips**  
Assistant Director

cc: Welsh Government  
Wales Audit Office

