

Report for Joint Committee

The Central South Wales Challenge

February 2014

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Purpose of the report

1. This report is intended to provide an update on the Central South Wales Challenge. Professor Mel Ainscow will present this work at the Committee and be able to discuss the approach. Attached at Annex A is a brochure for this work for discussion.

Summary

2. In October the Joint Committee was keen that there was some systems leadership of improvement across the region, and asked Professor Mel Ainscow to work with the consortium, authorities and schools to develop and implement proposals which would bring about sustainable improvement across all schools.
3. Mel has worked with a group of schools nominated by Directors to develop a plan which has been called the 'Central South Wales Challenge'. This plan was presented to the Committee in December and the proposal was launched on the 28th January at a conference at which up to 380 heads from the region were present.
4. The conference went well and received some good and positive coverage. It was well received by most heads and partners attending. It was delivered alongside the Welsh Government national roll out of consortium working and so spelt out the way that this region will deliver the national model.
5. Whilst it is acknowledged both that there are risks of importing policies and practices elsewhere without context, also that Welsh schools are less autonomous and practiced at celebrating good practice and sharing it than English schools, there is a strong sense from schools that this model is an exciting future and a viable way to build system wide improvement. Concerns centre on the need for this work to draw in and adapt other initiatives rather than be one more amongst many, to be disciplined in their implementation and to have enough resources. With this in mind it is important that we work with the Schools Challenge Cymru team as they develop their thinking.
6. Looking ahead a Strategy group has been formed – all heads were asked if they wanted to take part in this – and they will lead the implementation of a two phase approach:
 - a. Pathfinders: Schools who are on the cusp of improvement working with other schools to improve rapidly;
 - b. School Improvement Groups: All schools working in groups, focusing on data and areas where practice can be developed which benefits all schools.
7. All SIGs will benefit from resources to grow practice, but also from external input to build and share understanding about how self improving systems work.

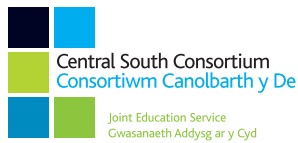
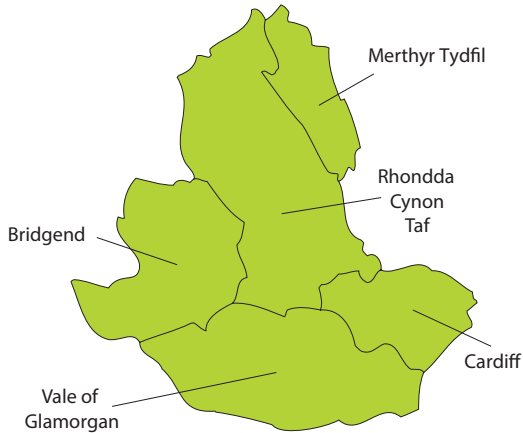
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WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

In January 2014, the five local authorities that constitute Central South Wales launched a major new strategy to raise standards across all schools in the region. These notes provide a brief explanation of what it involves.

PURPOSE

The aim of the Central South Wales Challenge is to stimulate the sharing of expertise amongst schools and joint efforts to innovate in order to:

- Improve the performance of every school;
- Increase the numbers of good and excellent schools;
- Reduce the gap between high and low performing groups of learners; and
- Improve outcomes for vulnerable groups of pupils.

KEY IDEAS

The Challenge strategy is based on experiences and research elsewhere that point to five key ideas:

1. *Education systems have untapped potential to improve themselves.* The starting point must be with contextual analysis in order to identify areas of concern and the human resources that can be used to support improvement efforts in relation to these issues.
2. *Networking is a means of sharing effective ways of working.* Pathways have to be created that cross the social boundaries that prevent the movement of ideas within the system.
3. *School partnerships are a powerful means of fostering improvements.* An essential ingredient is an engagement with data that can bring an element of mutual challenge to such collaborative processes.

Professor Mel Ainscow, CSW Challenge Adviser



from across the partner local authorities.

4. *Leadership has to come from within schools.* Individually and collectively, schools have to take responsibility for their own improvement.
5. *Local authorities and the Consortium have important roles in making sure this happens.* This requires new thinking and practices amongst the staff involved.

These ideas provide the rationale for the development of a self-improving school system.

THE STRATEGY

In order to move things forward a strategy group made up of 15 head teachers has been formed (put in the strategy diagram?). Their initial plan involves the following elements:

- All schools have been invited to join a School Improvement Group (SIGs). Each of these groups involves schools at different stages of development

- Each SIG has been asked to nominate one headteacher who will act as the Convenor. These representatives will take part in a workshop that will explore ways of making school networks effective in raising standards.
- Some 30 or so schools have been invited to take part in a Pathfinder Initiative, the purpose of which is to carry out collaborative action research in order to determine how partnerships between two schools can help to improve standards.
- The progress of these activities will be monitored by an Operational Group, made up of a group of senior staff from the partner local authorities and the Consortium.

GETTING INVOLVED

The aim, then, is for Central South Wales to develop as a self-improving school system. This means those within schools taking responsibility for raising standards within their own organisations. It also requires a strengthening of the partnerships between schools, such that they are able to support and challenge one another.

The success of the Challenge depends on the active involvement of schools. There is much to gain from taking part, since evidence from elsewhere shows that when schools help others, they help themselves!

Make sure you and your colleagues are not missing out.