



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**Report following the monitoring visit to the  
Central South Consortium  
Tŷ Dysgu  
Cefn Coed  
Nantgarw  
Treforest  
CF15 7QQ**

**Date of visit: September 2017**

**by**

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Training in Wales**

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## Introduction

In February 2016, Estyn inspected the school improvement services provided by the Central South Consortium (CSC). In September 2017, Estyn visited the CSC to review the progress made by the consortium in relation to the recommendations identified in the inspection.

In evaluating progress for each recommendation we considered the following:

- Has the consortium understood the reasons behind the recommendation?
- Has the consortium taken reasonable action to address the recommendation successfully, taking into account its starting point, the time between inspection and follow-up visit as well as the complexity of the issues to be addressed?
- Has the consortium been appropriately supported in addressing the recommendations by its partner local authorities?
- Has the consortium ensured that changes arising from its progress in addressing each recommendation have become embedded enough within its working practices to secure sustained improvement?

In coming to a view about the progress against the recommendations, the monitoring team took into account the trends in performance over the last five years as a context for the evaluation of its impact of its work in schools. However, it is important to note that outcomes cannot be attributed to solely to the work of the regional consortium as other partners in the system also play an important role.

The monitoring team considered a range of evidence including the consortium's business planning, evaluations, challenge advisers' reports and the views of headteachers.

Estyn does not plan to make any further follow-up visits to the CSC. Any remaining areas for improvement will be monitored informally by Estyn's regional link inspector and the relevant local authority link inspectors, and considered during future inspections of local government education services.

## Progress since the inspection

### **Recommendation 1: Ensure that school improvement services address the variability of performance across schools and local authorities, particularly at key stage 4.**

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the inspection, the consortium has worked well to help reduce the variability in performance across schools and local authorities in the region.

Senior leaders have reshaped the service and have systematically supported challenge advisers to develop their work. Challenge advisers have an open and honest dialogue with schools and have a more focused approach to supporting the individual needs of schools. The categorisation process continues to ensure that the schools in greatest need are supported appropriately. These actions, in part, have contributed to improved performance across the consortium.

The majority of secondary schools have continued to perform well for the level 2 measure that includes English or Welsh and mathematics and in all other measures at key stage 4. There continues to be an improvement in the outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals in all the indicators at key stage 4 and the gap in the performance between those eligible for free school meals and those who are not has reduced in nearly all measures also.

Overall, the variability in performance has reduced in the majority of measures at key stage 4. Most of the poorest performing secondary schools in the region have improved. However, a very few secondary schools continue to deliver poor outcomes for their pupils.

Overall inspection outcomes for schools have improved since the consortium's inspection, with fewer schools requiring follow-up. Standards were judged good or better in the majority of primary schools and just over half of secondary schools. Two secondary schools and two special schools were found to have excellent outcomes for pupils and excellent prospects for improvement. However, around a fifth of primary schools were placed in a follow up category, with a very few found to be in need of significant improvement or special measures. A minority of special schools and pupil referral units were placed in follow up.

### **Recommendation 2: Improve the accuracy of the evaluations of schools by challenge advisers in order to ensure a greater focus on improving teaching and leadership.**

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

The consortium has taken several actions to develop the quality of the service provided by challenge advisers to help schools improve. They have carried out more rigorous processes for recruiting challenge advisers and are implementing thorough

approaches to quality assure and hold challenge advisers to account for their performance.

Relevant professional development opportunities and strengthened management procedures, including careful monitoring of reports, have supported challenge advisers to improve their work. The consortium provides its challenge advisers with clear guidance and criteria, and useful exemplar materials, which have helped to improve the quality of written reports. Training to develop challenge advisers' skills in evaluating lessons has contributed notably to challenge advisers' ability to make accurate judgements about teaching. School leaders value greatly the opportunity to discuss and evaluate the quality of teaching with challenge advisers in their school. As a result, the reports written by challenge advisers provide a more accurate and evaluative appraisal of the schools' work.

The consortium is encouraging challenge advisers to reflect on the quality of their evaluations as well as providing useful one-to-one coaching to help them improve their practice. This is helping to improve specific aspects of challenge advisers' work that senior leaders have identified through analysing and quality assuring reports.

Nearly all challenge advisers' evaluations now include clear judgements about the quality of teaching and leadership. Most reports provide useful detail drawn from lesson observations and, in the best examples, challenge advisers make pertinent links between leadership, teaching and standards. All reports provide a data commentary. However, challenge advisers do not consistently refer to the progress of pupils with additional learning needs and, in a very few secondary school reports, the analysis of pupils' performance is not clear enough. In these instances, their understanding of teaching and leadership in schools is not as comprehensive as it needs to be.

The accuracy and usefulness of reports written by challenge advisers prior to a school's inspection have improved considerably. Last year, only a very few pre-inspection reports had weaknesses in their evaluations.

Recently, the consortium has reorganised the deployment of challenge advisers and has developed new approaches to cluster working. The new arrangements mean that schools and challenge advisers are better matched to meet the needs of the schools' context. As a result, the consortium can more easily facilitate networking opportunities and promote the sharing of good practice between schools.

**Recommendation 3: Strengthen the procedures for monitoring and evaluating the impact of school improvement work.**

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the consortium has undergone significant changes of personnel at all levels within the organisation, including the appointment of a new managing director in April 2017. This has resulted in a re-alignment of responsibilities. One senior leadership post remains unfilled.

The consortium has also undertaken a systematic evaluation of many components of its work, including the four aspects of its Central South Wales Challenge. The evaluation identified the increased engagement of schools in aspects of the Central South Wales Challenge and the range of developmental opportunities gained by school staff. For example, schools continue to engage with school improvement groups (SIGs) and benefit from working with other schools on priorities that are relevant to them. The evaluation also highlighted that the systematic reporting and collation of key information, such as changes to teaching practice and the impact on learners' outcomes, is too variable.

The consortium has identified the need to improve its quality assurance processes to make evaluations of its work more accessible and meaningful to a range of partners, including local authorities and schools.

The consortium has taken appropriate steps to ensure that all its staff have a better understanding of its work and to engage with schools more effectively to support further professional learning in schools.

The rationale for school leadership development is clear and the consortium recognises and understands the importance that high quality leadership has in improving school performance. The consortium's leadership development for headteachers is improving headteachers' ability to lead their schools effectively and nearly all are actively engaged in school improvement groups. This, in part, has led to a majority of schools improving their categorisation.

The consortium has recently revised the performance summary reports it provides each local authority. These now have a much sharper focus on schools causing concern. These useful reports profile the progress that schools are making in relation to pupil outcomes, teaching and leadership, including planning for improvement. However, a minority of reports are not evaluative enough and there is too much variation in the quality of the information provided. Directors of education in the constituent local authorities value the intelligence provided by the consortium.

In order to improve its understanding of pupils' and staff experiences of school life, the consortium has commissioned a longitudinal study on pupils attitudes based on the outcome of an annual survey. The consortium also surveys school staff to capture their views on school leadership and engagement in professional learning and the impact this has on practice. These surveys are providing valuable feedback that the consortium is beginning to take account of in its school improvement work.

Overall, the consortium has improved how it monitors and evaluates its work, although a few aspects of the consortium's approach is still at a developmental stage.

**Recommendation 4: Evaluate progress against the regional consortium's operational plans more effectively.**

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

The consortium has responded positively to this recommendation, and has taken timely action to address the shortcomings identified in the inspection.

The consortium has changed its approach to operational planning since the inspection. The current operational plan is more focused than the various plans that preceded it and aligns better with the three-year strategic plan. The plan is helpfully organised into key priorities that are supported by specific action plans. However, the consortium does not define well enough the objectives in its action plans, or the success criteria and milestones towards these.

The oversight for the delivery and impact of each action plan is led by a 'drive team' made up from a cross section of personnel from within the consortium including education specialist and support staff. This has helped widen the ownership of the consortium's core work and priorities, across the whole organisation.

Drive team members hold the responsible officer to account for the progress resulting from the action plan. In addition, senior leaders within the consortium, including the managing director, regularly review progress. This improved scrutiny has enabled the consortium to develop a deeper understanding of the work of the organisation and the progress being made against key priorities.

The way the drive teams undertake their work, and how they evaluate and report, is still developing. This means that, although drive teams have already had a positive impact on planning, monitoring and evaluation, their work and the quality of their evaluation and reports are inconsistent. The consortium has put in place coaching to help individuals and teams improve how they work. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this support.

The consortium has identified the need to improve how it uses evidence to analyse and support the conclusions it draws about the quality of its work, and its progress towards achieving the objectives within its action plans.

Currently, comments about progress made in action plan review reports are not precise enough to show how well the work of the consortium is progressing towards its objectives, and analysis does not probe deeply enough into the evidence to confirm whether the actions taken are having the necessary impact.

The consortium has taken steps to improve its assessment of the value for money of its work, which is led by a research and evaluation board. In partnership with a local higher education institution, the consortium has begun to pilot a model for measuring value for money using key seven measures. These include more than a simple analysis of resource input tied to educational outcomes; rather it looks in greater detail at seven key elements to help the assessment of value for money. These include 'economy, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, collaborative advantage,

added value and quality'. This work has the potential to increase the consortium's ability to assess the impact of its plans, but is in its early stages.

### **Recommendations**

In order to maintain and improve on this progress, the consortium should continue to sustain the level of progress it has already made, and continue to address those inspection recommendations where further progress is required