



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



A report on education services in

**City and County of Swansea
Civic Centre
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Swansea
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Date of inspection: June 2022

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh.

About City and County of Swansea

The City and County of Swansea has a total population of around 250,000. The local authority maintains 77 primary schools, including 10 that provide Welsh-medium education. In addition, there are 14 secondary schools, two of which are Welsh-medium. There are two special schools and one pupil referral unit. The interim chief executive took up his post in May 2022 and the Director of Education was appointed in February 2021. The council leader has been in his role since September 2014 and the main portfolio holder for education services took up this position in May 2021. The local authority's last inspection was in 2013. The City and County of Swansea is one of three local authorities that formed a new partnership, 'Partneriaeth', following the ending of the ERW consortium. In 2021-2022, the Council's net education budget was around £190,000,000. The delegated school budget per pupil in 2021-2022 was £5,236, which is slightly below the average in Wales. Inspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating outcomes and the quality of education services. They consider this information alongside information about the national population. Some of the most useful information about children and young people in Swansea is noted below:

- Over a three-year average, 22% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are eligible for free school meals, higher than the Wales average of 20%
- 11% of pupils aged 5 and over are fluent in Welsh, which is lower than the Wales average of 16%
- 16% of pupils aged 5 or over are from ethnic minorities, higher than the Wales average of 12%
- 24% of pupils have special educational needs (SEN), above the Wales average of 20% (please note this data is from January 2021, before changes to how SEN provision is allocated)
- 117 children per 10,000 were looked after by the local authority in 2021, being ranked 12th highest amongst the other local authorities

Summary

Swansea's education directorate has an ambitious aspiration for all its children and young people. Together with the chief executive, leader, cabinet member for education and elected members, education officers have a clear commitment to provide the best education possible for every child. Officers from within the education directorate work collaboratively and productively with other local authority services and external organisations on many levels.

The director and her officers maintain constructive and open relationships with headteachers and stakeholders. They promote and support a strong and effective culture of self-improvement amongst Swansea schools. There is effective collaboration at many levels, which means that schools have a particularly strong record of improvement over time. Inspection outcomes for Swansea schools were the strongest in Wales in the three years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Overall, the performance of pupils at the end of key stage 4 between 2017 and 2019 were above or well above standards in similar schools. The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals was consistently above national averages in the three years before the pandemic.

Learner well-being and welfare is a key priority for the local authority. Senior officers and mainstream schools have a strong commitment to supporting vulnerable pupils and those at risk of disengagement. There is a wide range of support and interventions for pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties to ensure that learners succeed and remain in education. This is a notable feature. In the school inspections between September 2017 and March 2020, Swansea's profile for well-being and attitudes to learning was extremely strong. In addition, the number of pupils progressing to Year 11 and remaining in their school until the end of the academic year is consistently higher than national averages. This is a particular strength.

The education directorate has a strong culture of self-reflection. Leaders conduct regular and transparent reviews of aspects of the service's work and produce swift and precise improvement plans. There are well-established monitoring and quality assurance processes in place. In recent years, the local authority has gradually increased its Welsh-medium education offer. There are aspiring plans within the local authority's recently published Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032 to further develop this aspect, but there is a need to ensure equal opportunities for all children to access Welsh-medium education across the county. The education directorate recognises the need to work with relevant partners to review and develop its post-16 provision and gather the views of stakeholders as part of the planning process.

Recommendations

- R1 Review post-16 provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners
- R2 Strengthen Welsh-medium provision across all ages and areas of the local authority

What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of the publication of the inspection report.

Estyn will invite the provider to prepare two case studies on its work in relation to its strong support for school improvement and the quality of support in mainstream schools for pupils at risk of disengagement. These case studies will be prepared for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Outcomes

We are unable to provide a full evaluation of outcomes. This is due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the suspension of inspections of schools and most other education providers since March 2020. It is also due to the lack of data about outcomes that can be compared over time as the pandemic caused changes to the way that qualifications were awarded and affected most other data that we consider when making evaluations, such as school attendance, school exclusions and post-16 learner destinations. Any evaluations that follow provide a context by reporting on outcomes before the pandemic or relate to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

Between September 2017 and March 2020, we inspected 26 primary schools, eight secondary schools and the local authority pupil referral unit. We judged that standards were excellent in three primary schools and good in 23 primary schools. Of the eight secondary schools, we judged standards to be excellent in two, good in five and adequate in one. We judged standards to be good in the pupil referral unit. These judgements for standards in primary and secondary schools and the pupil referral unit are the strongest of any local authority in Wales during the same period. The secondary school that was judged to have adequate standards was placed into the category of Estyn review and was later removed in December 2021. None of the 34 schools and pupil referral unit were placed in a statutory follow-up category.

A new school and pupil referral unit inspection framework was introduced in February 2022. We no longer provide summative judgments for individual inspection areas. Inspectors can still place a school into Estyn review if they judge that the school would benefit from a short period of time to improve a few aspects of their work. The two statutory categories of follow-up remain unchanged. This is where schools need significant improvement or require special measures. Where inspectors have identified particularly strong or effective practice, the school is invited to produce a written case study to share with other providers on Estyn's website. In the period from February 2022 to the end of the academic year, we inspected eight primary schools. None of these schools were placed in any form of follow up. In addition, we requested at least one case study of effective practice from five of these schools.

Overall standards at the end of key stage 4 in the three years before the pandemic were high. Outcomes for pupils in Swansea's secondary schools were strong and generally above or well above those in similar schools. Standards attained by pupils eligible for free school meals were consistently above national averages in the three years before the pandemic.

In the school inspections between September 2017 and March 2020, the proportion of schools that received a judgement of good or excellent for well-being and attitudes to learning was higher than the national average. Ten primary schools and four secondary schools received an excellent judgement for well-being and attitudes to learning. Only one school out of all 35 schools and the PRU received an adequate judgment for well-being, with all the other providers judged good for this inspection area. This is a notable feature.

Between 2017 and 2019, attendance in most Swansea secondary schools was above or well above national averages. Over time, rates of school exclusions are generally in line with national averages. The number of pupils progressing to Year 11 in their school and remaining in full time education until the end of the academic year is consistently higher than national averages. This is a particular strength.

A culture of listening and placing the child at the heart of every decision is key to the authority's engagement work with children and young people. The local authority has embedded effective strategies to improve children's and young people's mental and emotional health and well-being. The overall uptake of the authority's counselling service and the impact that this service has on learners' well-being is a notable strength. There is also a strong culture of multi-agency working within the education directorate. For example, the development of the family 'Early Help Hubs', with a clear focus on prevention and early intervention, has had a positive impact on children and young people's well-being.

Gathering feedback from children and young people has helped the local authority to strengthen its pupil voice activities and re-shape its youth forum. There are six different pupil forum groups, which provide diverse groups of pupils opportunities to participate responsibly in decision-making within the authority. For example, they play a key role in the recruitment of staff, including the appointment of the Director of Education.

Overall, school-aged children and young people have valuable opportunities to shape policies and practice in the local authority. They exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities by contributing their time to try and influence decisions and share views about issues affecting them. A social media video in Welsh and English was developed by young people to promote and encourage peers to register to vote for the recent local elections. This video was shared widely, including on national radio stations. Learners who participate in the Swansea's Children's Rights Network have determined five performance indicators to explain what 'making rights a reality' might look like and this forms part of the local authority's Human Rights City consultation.

Across the local authority, children and young people benefit from useful opportunities to develop healthy and safe attitudes and behaviour. Learners and parents participated in the engaging Swansea 'Summer of Fun' and 'Winter of Well-being' programmes, which helped children to improve their social skills and confidence, and strengthened family engagement. The local authority plans to repeat and expand these initiatives in 2022.

Education services

Under Inspection Area 2, Estyn sets local inspection questions that are relevant to each local authority. Local inspection questions focus on education services that relate to the local authority's current strategic priorities or result from information that Estyn has about education services in the local authority.

How well does the local authority support schools and providers to implement the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act ALNET Act 2018?

The local authority has made effective progress in revising its additional learning needs (ALN) strategy to include the Swansea ALN Transformation Programme. The programme includes beneficial support to schools and other providers to help meet the requirements of the ALNET (Wales) Act 2018. The Transformation Programme is overseen by the ALN Strategic Board which monitors progress robustly.

The local authority commissioned a peer review of its ALN strategy in January 2020. As a result of this review, the ALN transformation plan was amended and strengthened and the local authority has made good progress in delivering the actions identified within the plan. The authority's robust quality assurance arrangements have helped officers to identify clearly its strengths and areas for development. There is a strong commitment from the council leader and elected members to implement important strategic changes in order to support progress. For example, they approved the restructuring of the service and the realignment of responsibilities in order to increase capacity to support ALN.

As part of the Vulnerable Learners Service, the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team (ALNIT) provides a wide range of support to schools and providers. The team's key aim is to place pupils at the heart of all its decisions. Team members work productively in partnership with stakeholders such as the Swansea Parent Carer Forum to build capacity and help secure long-term improvements for pupils who have ALN. The appointment of the local authority early years additional learning needs coordinator (EYALNCo) has strengthened support for staff across childcare settings and this ensures a greater equity in provision for pupils. There are strong working relationships between the EYALNCo and the Early Years Programme Team and this has helped improve the quality of support for early years providers across the authority.

Partnership working with the local health board is appropriate. For example, there are regular planning discussions at a strategic and operational level with the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) to ensure that the health board offer is relevant to meet the needs of Swansea pupils.

There are clear roles and responsibilities within the ALNIT. These include designated coordinators (DESCo) and case workers who facilitate communication between schools and parents. Their work beneficially supports a person-centred approach. There is a keen focus on working in partnership with families jointly to agree the best provision for learners, but the authority recognises a need to develop this further. The local authority generally responds to disputes and appeals in a timely manner. There has been a reduction in tribunal appeals over time due to the introduction of the ALN caseworker team and the DESCo, who have supported families well.

The lead Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) for each cluster of schools plays an integral role in delivering the actions within the transformation plan. They share information, deliver training and identify next steps for support from officers and specialists. This helps to ensure that ongoing support from the local authority is tailored to the specific needs of clusters and individual schools. In addition, the

cluster lead ALNCos identify good practice to share within and across the other clusters and facilitate schooltoschool support where needed.

There is a comprehensive, well-established additional learning needs programme of professional learning for schools. For example, around 70 ALNCos completed a Level 7 accredited qualification in assessment and in interpretation of results (Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing). There are useful moderation meetings for school ALNCos to quality assure individual development plans (IDP) and cluster ALNCos also hold regular moderation meetings to ensure consistency in practice.

The ALNET Act requires all schools and settings to provide appropriate universal provision to meet the needs of all pupils. Officers articulate their expectations clearly to schools and provide purposeful training and support for staff. They have created useful resources for schools to support this work, such as the Early Years Toolkit, and the Inclusion Handbook. Effective joint working with school improvement advisers and ALNIT officers supports schools to understand their responsibility to provide suitable universal provision. The local authority has prioritised building capacity and service resilience through the development of key practitioner roles such as creating social communication champions in all schools.

The local authority recognises the need to streamline and improve the quality of information sharing between schools, parents and professionals. Together, school staff and officers have developed and introduced a beneficial digital platform tool, which supports the statutory assessment and review processes required at both the school and authority level. The system provides direct access to relevant individual development plan information for all schools, parents and other professionals.

The local authority is reviewing its specialist teaching facility provision as part of the overall ALN strategy. This review includes the consideration of the need to increase Welshmedium specialist support. The local authority is currently developing its support and provision for post-16 learners, including those in further education colleges.

How well does the local authority support schools to improve?

There is an open and productive culture of self-improvement amongst schools in Swansea, which is promoted and supported by the local authority. The authority trusts school leaders and there is a collaborative approach to supporting schools to improve, develop and innovate.

There is a very strong focus in Swansea on developing effective school leaders at all levels, with schools themselves being central to this approach complemented by external professional learning. In the three-year period prior to the pandemic, most schools inspected in Swansea were judged to have good or excellent leadership and management, a better profile than in any other local authority in Wales. In addition to using national leadership development programmes effectively, the local authority commissions and supports additional work to develop aspiring, new and experienced leaders at all levels. For example, the authority has supported a project that enables aspiring deputy headteachers to swap schools for a year and gain valuable experience in a school in a notably different context. The authority has a proactive

and effective approach to addressing historical challenges in recruiting senior leaders in Roman Catholic schools. Peer mentoring and coaching strategies are used effectively with new and experienced senior leaders in schools.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the local authority provided responsive and valuable support to schools, both through its education services and its wider corporate services, including through advice from health and safety officers.

The authority has a strong focus on developing teachers, and there are good examples of research-informed and inquiry-based professional learning across schools. Various school networks provide a rich source of support for practitioners to enable them to share innovative and effective practice. The profile of inspection outcomes for the quality of teaching was better in Swansea than in any other local authority in Wales in the three years prior to the pandemic. In response to feedback from headteachers about concerns with pupils' skills following the pandemic, the local authority seconded two successful practitioners from schools to provide additional support on literacy and numeracy this year. The local authority is currently monitoring the effectiveness of this additional support.

Since April 2022, schools in Swansea have received support to implement the Curriculum for Wales through the local authority's new regional partnership service 'Partneriaeth' with Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. This service replaced 'ERW', which was a partnership with a wider group of local authorities in south west Wales. ERW was not meeting the needs of Swansea's schools well enough, and the local authority has taken appropriate steps to ensure that Partneriaeth provides a more effective service to schools. There are early signs that Partneriaeth is providing support that is better matched to the needs of schools in Swansea.

Although there is some strong collaboration between schools for post-16 provision, the degree of collaboration involving other schools with sixth forms and other providers in the area has declined in recent years. As a result, the curriculum offer available to learners is more limited than it used to be. The authority has recently started work with schools and other providers on a new strategy, which aims to improve the offer for learners.

The local authority knows its schools well. Officers across services share useful information about the support needs of schools, and these are collated on a live system that senior leaders, all key service managers and school improvement advisers have access to. This information covers a wide range of areas for which schools may require support, such as legal, human resources, governance, finance, buildings, health and safety, safeguarding, additional learning needs, specific groups of learners, childcare and behaviour, as well as information from the authority's school improvement advisers.

Information about schools' issues and what form of support they require is discussed between service leads in meetings, with actions being agreed and recorded carefully, with an identified lead person and a clear timescale. These actions are monitored tightly and adjusted where necessary. Schools are challenged appropriately, and issues are usually resolved quickly.

Where a school causes concern because of the scale of an issue or the number of different issues at the same time, the local authority co-ordinates and monitors tailored, intensive support very well, working in close partnership with the school's leaders. As a result, the very few schools in Swansea that have caused concern in the last five years have made strong and rapid progress.

How well is the local authority supporting the Public Service Board wellbeing objective to ensure children have the best start in life?

The Swansea Public Services Board (PSB) Local Well-being Plan outlines a clear vision along with four appropriate objectives to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the city. The PSB joint committee provides a suitable governance structure to support the work of the local authority and a range of partners including the Swansea Bay University Health Board. This helps to ensure a more integrated approach to align services to meet the needs of the people of Swansea.

Objective one of the well-being plan focuses on ensuring that children have 'the best start in life to be the best they can be'. The work of the local authority aligns well with this objective, which includes ensuring that parents and families are provided with support to prepare them well for birth and early childhood, helping children to develop to their full potential and keeping them safe from harm. The integration and quality of the services across the local authority, along with their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), supports this objective well.

The local authority uses a wide range of expertise and services to co-ordinate the work of early years providers to help ensure good quality provision and support to children and their families. Officers use information and data effectively from a range of sources including the Childcare Sufficiency and Play Sufficiency assessments to identify need. This allows leaders to plan strategically to provide suitable support and intervention in areas across the city, for example by commissioning Flying Start provision and outreach support.

Most of the local authority's Flying Start settings are located in schools and many are managed directly by headteachers. This helps schools to develop strong links with children and their families from the outset. In these Flying Start settings, officers from the Children and Families Service and the Education Directorate work well with other professionals such as health visitors to provide a holistic approach to support children and families from an early age. For example, they evaluate the needs of families through the comprehensive Continuum of Need framework to support and empower families appropriately. Although at an early stage of development, the recent establishment of five Early Help Hubs across the city has helped to bring key services together more effectively to support children, young people and their families. However, the availability of early education settings and services through the medium of Welsh is limited.

The local authority's Early Years ALN Support and Inclusion officers support the work of leaders and practitioners well in a range of settings including Flying Start settings, private day-care providers and childminders. In addition, they work constructively alongside key professionals such as the Health Visiting Service and the Speech and Language Therapy Service from Swansea Bay University Health Board to provide

support for children and their families. This has enabled them to co-produce beneficial guidance and jointly deliver training on a range of topics, such as visual support training.

More recently, the team has adapted its programme to encourage the attendance of more childminders at these training events by providing time slots in the evening and on weekends to better suit their needs. They have also provided valuable support and training on the topics such as the new ALN Code and the assessment of children's early language skills. This direct support, along with the introduction of a dedicated telephone consultation service for early years practitioners and the Health Visiting and Therapies services, helps to develop childminders' understanding of ALN. It also helps them to assist families who wish to access support for their children.

The Early Years Programme Team provides useful support, advice and professional development for leaders and practitioners in a range of early years settings. They work alongside colleagues in Flying Start settings and other providers to improve the quality of the provision and ensure consistency across early years providers. For example, the Early Years Programme Team Teacher and other officers have worked in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David to introduce a quality assurance tool for early years provision. This helps leaders and practitioners to evaluate the impact of changes to their provision over time following support from the local authority and the university partners. In addition, the Early Years Programme Team has worked purposefully with leaders and practitioners to ensure the smooth transition for children between the different settings or when they commence school at the age of three years. This helps to promote better continuity in the learning and care for children, especially those recognised as being vulnerable or those with additional learning needs.

A notable feature of the local authority's work to meet objective one of the PSB Well-being Plan is the work of the Early Years Integration Transformation (Pathfinder Team), which was created in 2019. Swansea Council, along with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and Swansea Bay University Health Board, has formed a regional approach across Swansea Bay. This helps to integrate services to support the needs of children and families up until the age of seven years. The team also recognises the importance of evaluating the needs of communities continuously, especially as they recognise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families and children. The local authority's principal school improvement adviser forms part of the management group for this team. This helps to promote a close integration of services including health, education, childcare and play as well as family support. This is beginning to have a positive impact on practice within settings and other providers, which supports children's development well. For example, practitioners have benefited from physical literacy training to help develop their understanding and confidence in supporting children's early physical development and skills.

How effective is support for learners at risk of disengaging with education and provision for pupils in EOTAS?

The local authority has a clear commitment to 'getting it right for every child' and that every child matters. Senior officers are committed to working with schools to improve support for pupils at risk of disengagement, and to ensure that their education other than at school (EOTAS) provision meets the needs of these vulnerable learners

successfully. Officers have recently introduced a policy statement for EOTAS, which outlines the local authority's principles and aims for this provision.

The local authority recognises the benefits of providing support for pupils at risk of disengagement from education at the earliest possible stage in their education. Schools begin to use the Vulnerability Assessment Profile (VAP) to identify pupils at possible risk of disengagement from an early age. The local authority collects data from the VAP and uses it well to help provide personalised support for individual pupils most at risk.

There is strong multi-agency working across the authority to support vulnerable pupils and their families. This includes beneficial support from the Early Help Hubs and the Educational Welfare Service. Many pupils who access support from the behaviour support team demonstrate better engagement in school over time.

The local authority uses the managed moves process well to support pupils who might benefit from a change of school environment. The inclusion team oversees the process with most secondary schools engaging positively with the arrangements. This is a highly successful strategy, with most pupils who have had a move to another school either settling well in their new placements or reintegrating successfully into their original school.

The local authority's inclusion team works closely with schools to use beneficial pastoral support plans (PSP) for pupils at risk of exclusion. Officers provide schools with helpful advice on the use of reduced timetables as part of a plan when this would best benefit the pupil. They monitor how regularly schools review plans to ensure that they meet the ongoing needs of these pupils, and actions are effective in helping them to re-engage with full time education.

Staff in schools and the pupil referral unit (PRU) have access to a wide range of training opportunities to support their work with pupils at risk of disengagement. This includes a range of training from the local authority's behaviour support team, sessions led by educational psychologists and opportunities to gain formal qualifications, for example in trauma-informed practice.

The local authority devolves funding to all secondary schools to help them provide bespoke social and emotional support for their pupils. They provide a wide range of support and interventions to meet the needs of their pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The Cynnydd project is a highly successful initiative, working with pupils who are at risk of being not in education, employment or training (NEET). Work that schools have undertaken using funding from the project has had a significant impact on ensuring that the number of school leavers who are NEET has been consistently low over time. All secondary schools and the PRU benefit from learning support coaches, funded through this project, who help to remove barriers to young people achieving in school. For example, Cynnydd workers arranged for disengaged pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 to participate in a landscaping and horticultural course at a local college. As a result, many of these pupils gained the confidence to apply for college placements or move into employment.

The local authority has strong processes for keeping in touch with vulnerable school leavers, particularly over the immediate summer and autumn periods when they finish school. This includes working with a local college and training provider to enable targeted pupils to access summer schools to maintain continuity in attending education. This has also helped ensure that, each year, the authority knows the destination of all its school leavers. This is a particular strength.

In 2017, the local authority overhauled its EOTAS service. This included reducing considerably the capacity at the PRU in recognition of the increased devolution of funding and clarifying the responsibility of mainstream secondary schools to meet the needs of most pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs.

The process for schools to refer a child to the EOTAS panel is clear. The panel, with multi-agency representation including headteachers, representatives from the educational welfare service and the Early Help Hubs, considers each case and agrees a pathway for each pupil. This may include a full or parttime placement at the PRU or recommendations to help the child engage more successfully in a mainstream setting.

The local authority has recently invested significantly in a new building for their PRU. Maes Derw provides a modern purpose-built school environment for learners of all ages. Senior officers are undertaking a comprehensive review of its current PRU provision in order to introduce a more flexible model that aims to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils more effectively.

Staff in the local authority home tuition service support pupils well. Normally, these are pupils who are unable to attend their mainstream school, for example for medical reasons or if they have been excluded from school and are awaiting alternative provision. The support is mostly short-term, and many pupils reintegrate into mainstream education successfully.

Leadership and management

The leader of the council and the interim chief executive set out clearly their strong, shared aspiration for all children and young people in Swansea. Elected members, including the cabinet member and chair of the education scrutiny panel, promote purposefully the council-wide vision, 'committed to excellent education for all'. This ambitious pledge is underpinned by well-considered policies and action plans.

The director of education articulates and shares her vision for education highly effectively. Since taking up her role, she has set about delivering this vision with determination and drive. She has carried out a comprehensive review of the directorate's work and has restructured the education team to add capacity and to share leadership roles and responsibilities for education services equitably. There is strong distributed leadership, and leaders at all levels set high expectations for officers, schools, other providers and partners.

The education directorate's senior leadership team carry out their roles successfully. The three heads of service understand their areas of responsibility well. They plan the work of their teams successfully to meet local needs as well as national priorities. For example, the Vulnerable Learners Team recognises the need to review the

specialist teaching facilities across the city as part of the ALN transformation work. All three teams in the directorate work together on important areas where there are common objectives. For example the Planning and Resources Team leads on school organisation projects, supported by colleagues from other directorate teams. Through line management systems, leaders provide specific support and challenge, which is focused on officers' contribution to education priorities and their individual professional needs.

Senior leaders have participated fully in the formation of the newly established regional service, 'Partneriaeth'. They have ensured that the service is structured to meet the current needs and priorities of schools in the local authority and that it complements the effective work of the local authority achievement and partnership team.

The directorate has fostered highly positive and productive relationships with headteachers and other stakeholders. There is a tangible sense of shared ownership and accountability for the key priorities in education and this is a notable feature. The local authority has developed close working relationships with schools over time and these were sustained and further developed while restrictions were in place during the pandemic. During this period the support for schools from the education team was very well received.

Officers from the education directorate collaborate effectively with other local authority services and directorates and with external organisations, including the regional skills partnership and the Public Service Board. A key outcome of this joint working has been the development of the Swansea Skills Partnership, which aligns local authority priorities with regional aspirations. Through a shared commitment to the skills agenda, the partnership has agreed common goals and begun to drive forward work to equip children and young people with useful skills that match potential employment opportunities. For example, the authority has organised support and training in digital development from further and higher education partners for school staff. This has helped improve the blended learning offer for learners. The partnership has supported the development of the My Choice website, which is helpful for learners wishing to follow an academic pathway in a Swansea school. As yet, My Choice does not enable learners to consider the full range of post-16 opportunities that are on offer across the partnership. Planning to capture the views of learners as part of the planning for post-16 provision is at a very early stage.

There is a strong focus on reducing the impact of poverty across all council directorates. This priority is reflected in the work of all teams in the education directorate. Through their participation in the authority's poverty forum, officers in the education team have been able to consider how best to support schools. For example, officers share information about the use of credit unions or how to start a 'Big Bocs Bwyd' to help tackle food poverty, address food waste and learn about the benefits of growing and cooking food.

Over time, the local authority has gradually increased capacity for Welsh-medium education. Aspects of Swansea's recently published Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032 are aspirational and aim to address some of the authority's

challenges. However, Welsh-medium provision for early years and maintained schools is not equally accessible across the county at present.

Leaders know the strengths and areas for development of the education directorate well. Officers carry out their work in a culture of continuous reflection and improvement. This means that they identify aspects of the directorate's work that need improvement swiftly and put in plans to address these in a timely manner.

The authority's corporate plan demonstrates well its commitment to improving education. One of its six well-being priorities is to improve education and skills with the aim of ensuring that everyone in Swansea gains the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life. Officers are clear about the link between the plans that guide the directorate's work and the different purposes that these serve. For example, the Abertawe 2023 plan supports school leaders in understanding how the local authority and the directorate's ambitions for education relate at an operational level to schools. The corporate post-pandemic recovery plan has been helpful in ensuring that the directorate supports schools in important aspects of their work. This includes prioritising the well-being of pupils and staff, learner progression and the provision of high-quality teaching and an engaging curriculum, as they return to more usual ways of working following the COVID-19 pandemic. Service and team plans provide clear and realistic timelines for the work of officers across the directorate. The number of plans that the directorate currently produces does not detract from the effectiveness of the services it provides. Senior leaders recognise the benefits of streamlining the planning system in the near future to ensure clearer links from the corporate plan through to the delivery of services.

Monitoring and evaluation processes are embedded well both at corporate and directorate level and there is a consistent approach to these processes across the council. Performance management systems are strong, and officers use a good range of helpful performance indicators to measure the directorate's progress. Officers provide regular progress reports to both senior leaders and elected members. There are clear links between the identification of priorities for improvement and the plans put in place to address these.

The director of education and her team have reflected well on their work with schools during the pandemic period and have identified aspects of the impact of this work that they are keen to maintain and build upon. These include the improved monitoring processes for vulnerable pupils, the closer working relationship with the Child and Family services and the benefits of listening to a wide range of stakeholders.

Officers are developing their approaches to gathering a wider range of views about their work and future priorities. For example, the current review of specialist teaching facility provision takes account of the views of parents and carers, school leaders and teachers. Officers have focused successfully on improving opportunities for pupils to inform and influence the directorate's priorities. This has resulted in the development of a 'pupil voice manifesto' in individual secondary schools as a precursor to an authority-wide manifesto.

Over time, officers have been successful in bringing about improvements and sustaining these effectively. For example, improvements in the quality of leadership

in the education directorate, the identification and provision for schools needing additional support and the provision for pupils educated other than at school have resulted in good outcomes for pupils.

Elected members consider purposefully how best to deliver on their priorities through beneficial democratic structures, such as the Policy Development Committee. Such arrangements ensure that a wide, cross-party range of elected members engage positively with policy development at an early stage. This work helps to ensure that policies are well understood and jointly owned across relevant portfolios, for example those relating to the Swansea Skills Partnership.

The Education Scrutiny Panel considers a broad range of relevant activity. There is a strong focus on understanding how schools support and contribute to delivering the local authority's agenda on reducing the impact of poverty. There is also a renewed focus on employability skills linked to the regional skills partnership. The panel engages well with schools and, where appropriate, includes the views of pupils and school leaders when evaluating agenda items brought before them. Pertinent and sometimes sensitive matters, such as school reorganisation proposals, are considered appropriately in pre-decision scrutiny activity. In addition, the panel convenes helpful working groups to consider relevant areas, such as school procurement.

Leaders use the authority's performance management arrangements well to agree well-defined objectives with staff combined with suitable professional learning. Line managers track staff's progress against their targets regularly throughout the year to ensure that they are on track to deliver agreed outcomes. Leaders consider succession planning suitably and offer appropriate guidance and training to staff who wish to develop their leadership skills.

There is a comprehensive corporate programme of online mandatory training for staff, which includes important, contemporary issues such as safeguarding, domestic violence and cyber security. Line managers in the education directorate track the successful completion of various units closely and ensure that staff have a good understanding of the most important aspects. In line with the local authority's vision for increasing the use of the Welsh, officers are proposing the inclusion of mandatory training for staff who are not fluent in the language.

The local authority has fostered extensive links with other local authorities across Wales to discuss issues and keep abreast of developments in education. A notable example is the work carried out in partnership with Flintshire local authority to evaluate the quality of provision in Swansea local authority's ALN team.

School improvement advisers benefit from taking part in a wide range of professional learning activities including sessions on research-led practice, working with Swansea university on specific projects and sharing good practice. The local authority offers newly-appointed school improvement advisers a beneficial induction programme, which includes shadowing other experienced staff and training on how to write evaluatively. Leaders within this service gain valuable professional knowledge from national and international links. Examples include working with Tower Hamlets local authority to consider how best to deploy funds to support pupils in socially deprived

areas and visiting the Basque region of Spain to understand different approaches of promoting bilingualism in schools.

Safeguarding people is one of Swansea's six key priorities. The local authority ensures that keeping children and young people safe from harm permeates the work of all education officers. The quality of senior leaders' strategic oversight of safeguarding across education services is a notable feature.

The Corporate Safeguarding Steering Board oversees all safeguarding work at operational level. The group includes membership from a wide range of services within the local authority and relevant outside agencies. Meetings are regular and productive and there are clear and robust actions. The Board is reflective and regularly evaluates the impact of its work.

Education staff work collaboratively and productively with colleagues across a range of other services through strategic and operational groups. These groups plan and carry out work across schools and other providers, which is having a positive effect on the welfare and well-being of children and young people. For example, the work of the contextual safeguarding, missing, exploited, trafficked risk strategy group (C-MET) is effective in helping to safeguard children and young people at risk. Through the work of the strategic C-MET group, officers identify trends, plan interventions and carry out other beneficial work with schools. The C-MET operational team works in close collaboration with schools to support all identified learners at risk by facilitating access to services and support. They also provide dedicated youth workers to engage with learners at risk of exclusion, exploitation and disaffection.

There is strong collaboration between education services and the child and family services such as through the work of the children's service Early Help Hub. Within this service, the integrated safeguarding hub (ISH), which includes membership from education professionals and the police, provides helpful guidance and support to schools and the PRU. As part of this integrated way of working, the local authority designated officer for safeguarding and the education safeguarding officer analyse the quality and suitability of all safeguarding referrals on a weekly basis. They identify trends, strengths and shortcomings and take swift actions in order to address emerging issues.

Integrated working practices across services are well embedded and this is a strong feature of the local authority's work. Officers have produced a purposeful 'Continuum of Need' policy guidance document in order to simplify the child protection and safeguarding process for providers. The guidance ensures that schools and other providers have a clear understanding of the threshold for services and use of a common language to describe the personal circumstances of children and young people to determine where their needs could be best met. The guidance also sets out what matters to the child at each stage of the child protection or safeguarding process and clarifies expectations of all parties.

Communication with providers around safeguarding matters is a strong feature of the local authority's work. Officers produce comprehensive and helpful termly safeguarding newsletters for schools and other settings. There are purposeful training arrangements for staff at all the required levels and the local authority has robust record keeping arrangements for staff safeguarding training. The council

realises fully its duties under the Counter Terrorism & Security Act 2015. Through its co-ordinated, preventative approaches and its swift, solution-focused ways of working, the local authority successfully promotes a strong culture of safeguarding in all of its work.

The education directorate responds swiftly to national issues, findings from research and national reports. For example, leaders have recently created a purposeful action plan in response to Estyn's 2021 national report on the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, [We don't tell our teachers](#)'. The plan includes robust actions to respond to the recommendation for local authorities to improve the collection of data from schools and strengthen processes to gather first-hand information from providers on incidences of bullying and harassment according to type and trends in behaviour.

The authority has prioritised funding for education in recent years. This has included revenue funding for schools as a whole, funding for specific education budget pressures, and investment in schools' ICT infrastructure. The authority has also prioritised capital funding to deliver its 21st century schools programme, which includes a commitment to fund Band B of the programme without requiring a contribution from schools' budgets.

During the period of the pandemic the authority's education budget was underspent in 2020-2021 and also in 2021-2022, although the local authority had overspent in the previous three financial years. Most individual schools had surplus balances prior to the pandemic, with the overall amount of school balances at £7.73m at the end of 2019-2020. The authority reports that overall schools' balances had increased to £28.21m at the end of 2021-2022 and that all schools in Swansea ended 2021-2022 with a surplus balance. The council works with schools to help plan for the effective use of surplus balances. The Scheme for Schools Financing has been applied appropriately in respect of schools in deficit in previous years. This Scheme includes a requirement for requests from schools to set a deficit budget to be accompanied by a plan identifying how the deficit will be paid back.

The authority works well with schools through the Schools Budget Forum. The Forum considers key financial matters involving schools and meetings are well attended. The Forum considers relevant issues including the authority's annual budget setting, the ongoing reviews of the schools funding and additional learning needs funding formulas, as well as reviews of service level agreements (SLAs), between the authority and schools. The authority has a comprehensive range of service level agreements and overall there is a high level of take up of these by schools. Strong support from the local authority's finance officers is also valued by schools.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- consult the local authority on the local inspection questions to be used during the inspection, based on the authority's self-evaluation, strategic plans and relevant data held by Estyn
- analyse the outcomes from open questionnaires, including the views of learners, parents, school staff and governors, local authority staff, regional consortium staff, elected members and general public
- carry out a preliminary visit to the local authority to meet with a range of relevant partners to education services, such as learner representatives, headteachers and governors, and leaders from statutory and third sector agencies working with children and young people

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet with the leader of the council, elected members responsible for education services, elected members responsible for the scrutiny of education services, the chief executive, the director of education, other leaders and managers in education services, other relevant staff in the local authority, the managing director of the regional consortium for school improvement and other relevant staff from the regional consortium
- look closely at the local authority's self-evaluation processes
- consider the local authority's strategic and operational plans for improvement
- scrutinise a variety of documents, including information on learner outcomes, information on the performance of schools and other education settings, including information from the regional consortium for school improvement, minutes from a range of meetings, reports presented to council or scrutiny, information relating to the safeguarding of learners and any other information relevant to the local authority's education services held by Estyn

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection
- provide a draft copy of the report for the local authority to note any concerns with factual accuracy, and made amendments where necessary

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Publication date: 01/09/2022