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20 June 2014

Dear Mr Parry Jones

Estyn Monitoring Visit 10-12 June 2014

Following Estyn's inspection of education services for children and young people in May 2012, the authority was placed in special measures. A monitoring plan was agreed with your Estyn link inspectors, and the monitoring visits took place from 7-8 November 2013 and 5-6 February 2014. The third and final monitoring visit took place from 3 to 6 June 2014. This letter records the final outcomes of Estyn's post-inspection monitoring.

Iwan Roberts HMI led a team of three inspectors to evaluate the progress made against the last of the seven recommendations arising from the original inspection. The team also considered the authority's performance against its post-inspection action plan.

The team had discussions with the portfolio holder, the chief executive, senior officers, elected members, the chair of the Recovery Board, school headteachers, school governors, and representatives of partners. Inspectors also scrutinised documentation including evidence of the progress made against all of Estyn's recommendations.

At the end of the monitoring visit, the team reported to the leader of the council, the Director of Lifelong Learning, senior officers in the education service and the chair of the Recovery Board on their findings.

Anglesey County Council is judged to have made good progress in relation to the recommendations following the inspection in May 2012. As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is of the opinion that the local authority is no longer in special measures and there is no need for further follow-up activity.

Outcome of the monitoring visit

Since the inspection in May 2012, significant change and improvement have taken place over a comparatively short period, within the schools service and corporately.

At an early stage, the authority identified a number of obstacles to improvement, and responded appropriately to overcome them. Restructuring at head of service level has strengthened corporate capacity to lead transformation projects to ensure specific improvements. One of these projects is modernising schools. The transformation projects are managed at a higher level and this has enabled the authority to construct a robust political consensus in favour of the post-inspection improvement plan.

Soon after the 2012 inspection, the Director of Lifelong Learning started in post. The posts of head service- learning and senior standards and inclusion officer have been filled on a permanent basis. This strengthens the capacity of the schools service management team by ensuring a suitable range of expertise and experience. In addition the service benefits from the effective leadership provided by the Portfolio Holder. As a result, the relationship between the service and schools has transformed and schools now contribute considerably to the culture of continuous improvement which is rooted firmly within the authority.

Elected members have a clear understanding of the authority's responsibilities. They are involved increasingly with holding schools to account and the council's scrutiny arrangements have been refined.

There are effective arrangements for monitoring progress against improvement plans and officers and members work well with the Recovery Board which provides an external challenge.

Recommendation 1: Raise standards in all key stages and make sure that all learners who can do so achieve functional literacy by the end of key stage 2

The authority has largely addressed this recommendation.

The performance of Anglesey schools has improved since 2011 and it is now above the average for Wales in all key stages. In the Foundation Phase, and in key stages 2 and 3, the majority of schools are in the top 50%. In key stage 4, there are no schools in the bottom 25% for any of the five main indicators. However, the majority of schools are in the bottom 50% for two of these indicators.

Overall, the percentage of pupils in schools in Anglesey who achieve the higher National Curriculum levels is better than in similar schools.

Standards in reading, in Welsh and English, at the end of key stage 2 have improved in the last two years. However, performance in reading in Welsh continues to be lower than the average for schools in Wales.

In key stages 3 and 4, the difference between boys' and girls' performance at the core subject indicator is less than it is throughout Wales. In key stage 2, the difference is greater. However, the gap has decreased over the last two years. In the Foundation Phase and in key stage 3, performance in Welsh first language is higher than the average for the whole of Wales. In key stage 2, performance continues to be lower.

Following the 2012 inspection, the authority reviewed the partnership agreement with schools, and also adapted it further to reflect the partnership with GwE, the regional school improvement service. It outlines the role of the authority and the role of schools in relation to support, monitoring and challenge well. The plan outlines the appropriate expectation for schools to take responsibility for their own performance and to lead the discussion on improvement. The challenge from the authority's side, in addition to input from an external adviser, has led to a significant change in culture. Leaders of most schools in the county engage well with joint improvement activities and in partnerships. Although it is in its early stages, evidence suggests that co-operation between schools is giving rise to improvements in leadership skills, and in the quality of teaching, in an increasing number of cases.

Recommendation 2: Plan more effectively with the relevant professionals to improve schools' attendance rates

The authority has largely addressed this recommendation.

The authority has made very good progress in planning effectively with relevant professionals in order to improve schools' attendance rates.

The authority's procedures for monitoring and promoting learners' attendance are having a positive effect. Officers, school and relevant agencies have co-operated effectively in order to form a clear policy for promoting good attendance. Stakeholders are aware of the policy and comply with it appropriately. As a result, attendance rates have improved in the primary and secondary sectors since the core inspection.

Attendance rates in the secondary sector have risen by 2.3 percentage points over two years. In comparison with similar schools on the free school meals benchmarks, 80% of pupils were in the top 50% in 2013.

In the primary sector, there has been consistent progress over the last three years and the attendance average in this sector is consistently higher than the average for Wales.

The authority has developed appropriate procedures for analysing information about the attendance of specific groups of learners.

Recommendation 3: Establish robust business-planning, project-planning and risk-assessment processes to professionalise the operational delivery of education services.

The authority has largely addressed this recommendation.

Since the inspection, the education service has formalised and ensured consistency in its internal systems, including its business planning, project planning and risk assessment processes. This has led to establishing more robust foundations and specific structures that promote better consistency across the service. Senior officers, under the purposeful leadership of the director of lifelong learning, have ensured that colleagues across the service have contributed to developing these

processes. As a result, there is a strong sense of ownership and a clear commitment to the new systems from staff at all levels.

Planning now provides a clear direction for the work of the lifelong learning service and officers and colleagues value these processes. Systems pay appropriate attention to self-evaluation, impact assessment and risk assessment. The thread arising from corporate plans to departmental planning and then to personal plans is clear and staff at all levels understand better their individual contribution to realising the service's aims and objectives.

Their personal plans include targets and success criteria and they are monitored on a quarterly basis. In addition, officers hold regular meetings to challenge and discuss progress against targets. As a result, there are clear indications that the education service's priorities are making purposeful and timely progress.

The authority has a robust mechanism for identifying and recording risk. Significant risks are upgraded to corporate level and the register is reviewed regularly. This gives officers an opportunity to consider ways of reducing risks and to respond in a balanced and appropriate way when there is a risk of slippage.

The lifelong learning department develops robust project management methods, which are beginning to be rooted successfully. A number of staff have been trained appropriately in the area and a process of beginning and reporting on project programmes is clear. Risk assessments operate alongside all projects. As a result, firm steps have been taken to develop the authority's priorities.

Recommendation 4: Plan better efficiencies in the allocation of resources for the Lifelong Learning Service

The authority has largely addressed this recommendation.

The authority's efficiency in allocating resources to the lifelong learning service has improved since the core inspection and is now good.

Officers' accountability to elected members has increased considerably, and there are now a number of committees and boards that discuss funding matters effectively. As a result, elected members are better placed to challenge officers and ensure better management of the funding that is available.

The authority has an appropriate grasp of schools that overspend. Officers have reviewed and reinforced their guidance effectively to headteachers regarding managing finances, and have set clear expectations for them about the information that they need to include in their development plans in relation to any significant over-expenditure or under-expenditure. Officers scrutinise these on their regular visits to schools and is included on the agenda for discussion. In order to help schools that have a deficit, the authority has developed appropriate recovery plans. Through effective monitoring, the authority is able to identify at an early stage the schools that are likely to overspend and offer guidance to them on managing their finances better. The authority's officers work with a few schools in order to address over-expenditure.

The school has good control over the integration budget. Officers monitor expenditure regularly and plan ahead efficiently in order to provide appropriately for the needs of individuals within the budget that is available. By the end of the 2013/14 financial year, over-expenditure has been eradicated completely in the primary and secondary sector's integration budgets.

Appropriate attention is paid to the robustness of arrangements for monitoring and funding non-maintained settings. An Early Years Quality Group has been established and a system developed for categorising pre-school settings, based on the quality of standards and provision. As a result, officers know the settings better and address those that are underperforming, by providing advice and support for them to improve. Funding is withdrawn in the rare cases when the setting has not responded successfully to the advice and support provided.

Since it was established, the Anglesey and Gwynedd post-16 Consortium has made considerable strides in a short time. The action plan that was produced includes specific targets that have been timetabled suitably. An increasing range of options for vocational courses has been planned, giving good consideration to current requirements along with the likely nature of work on Anglesey in the future. There is very close co-operation between the five secondary schools and between the schools and the college, with the aim of ensuring the widest possible options in a cost-effective manner.

Recommendation 5: Secure more thoroughness and consistency in requirements for self-evaluation both operationally and strategically

The authority has largely addressed this recommendation.

Since the inspection, the authority's arrangements for self-evaluation in order to identify strengths and improvement needs have strengthened. Leaders and managers have developed and ensured consistency in self-evaluation arrangements across the authority's services. The service providers understand the self-evaluation arrangements and are included appropriately in them. This ensures that the staff have an increasing understanding of their individual contribution towards the education service's strategic aims.

The authority has provided a self-evaluation report for the visit that is evaluative, precise and identifies strengths and areas that need attention. Education officers hold regular meetings in order to track progress and challenge staff on developments in their areas of responsibility. There is now a common format for planning across the services, which facilitates the process of self-evaluation, impact assessments and risk assessments.

Education service officers know their services and their schools well. GwE officers, namely the regional school improvement service, submit a balanced evaluation of schools' performance to the authority. The process of setting targets has been refined by making more informed use of data, including giving appropriate attention to performance thresholds of families who are entitled to free school meals and lines of regression. The authority now monitors and evaluates performance and challenges school and individual subject departments much more effectively. The

authority uses the guidelines in the revised partnerships agreement to categorise schools in order to identify schools that need additional challenge or support to improve. The process is transparent and thorough. On the whole, pre-inspection reports on individual schools that are submitted to Estyn are balanced and a fair reflection of the schools in question.

Officers submit an accurate evaluation of performance across the authority to elected members. The authority has established a school standards monitoring group, which includes elected members to scrutinise in detail the performance of schools that are underperforming and hold them to account. Eight schools have already been brought before the group and further meetings have been arranged in the near future. Although it is at an early stage, the group's work has raised levels of accountability as well as providing valuable direct information to elected members about schools' performance across the County.

Comprehensive arrangements are in place to ensure effective accountability and scrutiny. The authority recognises that it needs to rationalise the system as the process matures. The authority provides useful guidelines and training to members of the scrutiny board and members are developing their understanding of their role.

At a corporate level, the Council's priorities are steered by project boards that demonstrate effective project management disciplines. As a result, there is timely and appropriate progress in achieving the operational aims of individual projects.

Recommendation 6: Take action to reduce surplus places

The authority has partly addressed this recommendation.

Good progress has been made in implementing Band A projects from the Welsh Government's Schools and Education Programme for the 21st century. A Strategic Outline Programme for the whole programme has been approved by the Welsh Government and the relevant capital has been secured. The authority has decided to close one primary school in August 2014 and build two new primary schools to replace six other schools by August 2016. These plans will eliminate nearly 150 places from the primary sector and reduce the percentage of surplus places within the sector from the current 16.7% to 13.4%. The timing of the individual projects ensures that the authority will have attained the Welsh Government's targets of a maximum of 15% of surplus places in the primary sector by January 2016.

The authority makes good use of internal resources and expertise to develop and manage projects. Where necessary, it works effectively with external partners. The beneficial co-operation with a specialist agency to complete the strategic outline case for one of the new schools has developed staff's skills and capacity for developing follow-up projects. Advantage has been taken of expertise within other authorities to develop building plans that meet the county's requirements and ensure value for money.

The authority is developing a comprehensive strategy for increasing schools' leadership and management capacity. The core elements include developing school to school support, promoting headteachers' leadership and management skills and

intervene when a primary headteacher's post becomes vacant. Beneficial work has been done to develop relevant models of managing clusters of primary schools.

Recommendation 7: Formalise and strengthen performance management systems and challenge the performance of schools and officers

The authority has largely addressed this recommendation.

The Partnership Agreement outlines the expectations of schools clearly and school leaders are aware of the requirements and implications that are involved with implementing it. This, and very effective use by the service of performance data, sets a firm basis for challenging schools and agreeing on targets. In addition, suitable arrangements are in place to challenge schools by co-operating on action plans following Estyn inspections.

Elected members' understanding of the strengths of the service and areas that need to be improved has developed well since the inspection in 2012. The quality of information that is provided for elected members is consistently good and, as a result, they are more robust in holding schools to account. The lifelong learning service has provided comprehensive training for elected members on challenging schools. This supports the work of the school standards monitoring group when scrutinising the performance of individual schools that are underachieving. As a result, the quality of the challenge to the leaders of these schools has been strengthened.

Restructuring within the lifelong learning service has expanded the service's capacity and strengthened lines of accountability. The department's business plans link effectively to individual senior officers' business plans. As a result, these have an increasing influence on officers' performance management processes, including setting meaningful and challenging personal targets.

Next steps

Your link inspectors will continue their work with the authority, and undertake their usual link role.

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

Yours sincerely



Clive Phillips
Assistant Director

cc: Welsh Government
Wales Audit Office