

Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Children and Young People Committee entitled Scrutiny of the Estyn Annual Report 2010/2011

July 2012

Driving up standards in education and training has been my priority since becoming Minister and I welcome this report as it helps keep the focus on those priorities.

The Estyn Annual Report was published in January 2012 and debated in plenary on 20 March 2012. In opening that debate I welcomed the contribution that Estyn's report made to the evidence base on education and training. This was their first annual report produced from findings from inspections carried out under the new Common Inspection Framework and, as such should help create a baseline from which to measure future progress.

I note too that the Committee plans to scrutinise this report on an annual basis. I welcome the Committee's interest and believe it will further help highlight our aim to drive up standards. Ultimately we all want children and young people in Wales to get the best start in life. That means ensuring that they are provided with robust opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills they need and deserve to succeed.

The recommendations contained in the Committee's report fit closely with our current policy direction and I am pleased to be able to accept them.

Work is already in hand on many of the recommendations. My priorities to drive up standards of literacy and numeracy and improve opportunities for our children and young people are well known. Last month, I launched the National Literacy Programme which includes national reading tests, and our National Numeracy Programme will be published in September 2012. I am also taking action to tackle the link between deprivation and attainment and introduced the pupil deprivation grant to help address the underperformance of pupils who suffer as a result of socio-economic deprivation.

Evidence shows that effective practitioners are the single most important factor in raising achievement in schools. We are introducing a suite of training and development measures for them and a comprehensive range of online guidance and training materials.

It has been said many times that Wales is a small country with much to commend it. I am keen to promote our own language and have introduced a Welsh Second Language Action Plan which should help increase opportunities for Welsh learners to use the language. I have also invested in Welsh language training for practitioners to improve linguistic skills and confidence to use the language.

There are also examples of world class practice in teaching and learning in Wales but we need to get better at sharing these and learning from them. The new Learning Wales website includes examples of excellent practice and our Schools Standards Unit is working closely with Estyn to include further examples. I am confident that by sharing best practice, working together and learning from each other we can make a difference. I welcome the Committee's contribution to this collective approach and set out below my detailed response to the individual recommendations.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that:

In developing annual reading assessments to provide consistency across Key Stages, the Welsh Government should include an element of external assessment or moderation.

Response: Accept in principle

Welsh Government accepts the principle that the new national reading tests must provide consistent, reliable data. However, we do not believe that external marking and moderation are necessary, or the most effective means, of achieving this objective. The National Reading Tests are being designed to minimise the burden and maximise the usefulness to teachers.

The reading test will consist of a statutory initial screening test, comprising short, closed response and multiple choice type questions removing scope for ambiguity in the marking process. Conversion of raw scores to age standardised scores will be automated and officials are considering options for collection of a small, random sample of papers for auditing. Administration and marking will be supported by clear concise guidance.

The statutory initial screening test will be supplemented by additional, optional assessment materials to support more diagnostic and formative assessment to ensure the tests give teachers the information they need to support learners to make good progress.

Financial Implications – None. Financial implications for the development and introduction of tests are being met from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

Local authorities should require schools to effectively share information about pupils' numeracy levels during the transition between Key Stages and ensure on-going support is provided if required.

Response : Accept

The Welsh Government expects local authorities and consortia to share data and information for the effective monitoring of pupil and school performance. This applies not just to numeracy but across all subject areas. Similarly this should apply across the whole school system, but particularly between key stages.

Best practice across Wales already includes sharing information effectively and this is backed up with support from the local authority for numeracy or other subjects. Since this is shown to have a positive impact on raising standards, the Welsh Government would expect this to be standard practice within the existing data, support and funding arrangements to local authorities and consortia.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that:

The new statutory National Literacy and Numeracy Framework should include guidance for teachers and school leaders on ensuring that the teaching of, and opportunities to practise, literacy and numeracy skills are embedded across the curriculum and throughout all Key Stages, and should facilitate the sharing of best practice on embedding literacy and numeracy.

Response : Accept

To ensure teachers are fully supported in implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), there will be a comprehensive range of online guidance and training materials available.

The framework is first and foremost a curriculum planning tool that supports all teachers throughout the key stages to embed literacy and numeracy in their teaching of the curriculum and to support all teachers to see themselves as having an important role in developing the literacy and numeracy skills of their learners. Training material will be developed to help schools use the LNF to plan.

Teachers will be able to use the LNF to monitor, assess, and report on individual learner performance; and identify learners who may benefit from intervention or who are working beyond age related expectations.

Classroom practice guidance will help all teachers to further develop effective pedagogy in relation to the LNF, for example by providing ideas and suggestions as to activities that could be undertaken in the classroom to help stimulate and develop relevant skills.

We will work with partners to identify outstanding teachers of literacy and numeracy, to be released from part of their teaching commitments on a regular basis, to model best practice, support Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and partner other teachers and schools with low expertise in literacy and numeracy.

In addition, we are considering the best way to deliver a training programme to schools.

Financial Implications – None, any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should work with local authorities, regional consortia and schools to ensure that sufficient opportunities are available for pupils attending English-medium schools to use Welsh outside of their formal Welsh lessons.

Response : Accept

The Minister for Education and Skills recently announced a Welsh second language Action Plan which will begin to address issues facing practitioners and learners in English-medium schools. The Action Plan includes specific projects aimed at increasing the opportunities for Welsh second language learners to use Welsh outside Welsh lessons in order to improve both their confidence and their skills. The

actions contained in the plan will be implemented in partnership with Local Authorities, consortia, schools and other established organisations as appropriate.

In addition, each local authority has been asked to consider how it establishes a baseline on current performance by pupils in Welsh second language as part of their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). They are also asked to outline how they will support schools to improve these standards. Feedback has been provided to each local authority on their WESPs and particular attention has been paid to the situation of Welsh Second Language in each local authority.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that:

the Welsh Government should work with local authorities, regional consortia and schools to continue to provide, and encourage teachers to take up, professional development opportunities to improve confidence in using and teaching Welsh.

Response: Accept

As noted in the Welsh-medium Education Strategy, the Welsh Government is committed to ensuring a planned Welsh-medium education workforce that provides sufficient numbers of practitioners with high-quality Welsh language skills. The Sabbaticals Scheme plays a central role in achieving this aim, and includes provision of Welsh-language training for practitioners at Entry, Foundation and Higher-levels at locations across Wales. A three-year programme of courses is currently being provided as a result of £6m funding from the Welsh Government. The aim is to improve practitioners' linguistic skills and confidence in using the language in the classroom and teaching through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.

Welsh-language training and support for practitioners is also provided by local authorities and regional consortia as part of a programme of activities funded by the Welsh in Education Grant, with over £5.4m being provided by the Welsh Government in 2012-13. Local authorities are responsible for establishing a programme of activities at local and regional level funded via the Grant to improve practitioners' Welsh-language skills as well as identifying suitable practitioners to attend Sabbaticals Scheme courses. The outcomes of these activities are expected to mirror those set out in local authorities' Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs).

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that:

Schools and local authorities should work in partnership to develop and share best practice on community and parental engagement, particularly with regard to supporting learners experiencing poverty or disadvantage, and evaluate the impact on standards and pupil outcomes.

Response : Accept.

Reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment is a Welsh Government priority. We have made it clear that we expect schools and local authorities to share best practice. To support this the Welsh Government, working in partnership with the WLGA and Estyn, are developing a wider range of best practice case studies – this will be shared on the Learning Wales portal.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that:

Estyn should actively facilitate the sharing of best practice on the improvement of attendance rates between local authorities and schools.

Response: Accept

In order to highlight current best practice in Wales officials propose to submit a bid to Estyn to undertake remit work on what schools are doing to improve attendance.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, in the allocation of the Education of Gypsy Children and Traveller Children grant, should take into account the particular needs of children at different Key Stages, and should weight its distribution accordingly.

Response: Accept

This has already been put into practice. One of the recommendations of the Estyn thematic report into Gypsy Traveller education, published in 2011, was that the Welsh Government should 'consider ways in which funding can be allocated so that it places greater emphasis on the needs of secondary age pupils'. A new weighting for children of secondary age was introduced into the funding formula for the grant in 2011-12 in advance of publication of the report. This means that these secondary school-aged pupils attract more grant per head than pupils of primary school age. This was repeated in the 2012-13 funding round. Secondary-aged children make up 39% of the 2,045 children claimed for under the grant.

Financial implications – None – the value of the grant remains the same (£1million in 2012-13) it is only the way in which it is distributed that is affected.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government's guidance on teacher performance management should encourage self-evaluation and peer evaluation as mechanisms for building teacher capacity and improving the consistency of standards within schools.

Response : Accept

These mechanisms have been included in the revised performance management guidance published on 10 May.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should work with Estyn to develop and deliver effective training for school governors, which focuses on leadership, challenge, support and data analysis and use.

Response : Accept

The Welsh Government has already begun work in this area. Governing bodies have an essential role in improving performance and a duty to promote high standards of educational achievement for all learners. Governors need to be knowledgeable to do their job effectively, to provide challenge and to support the headteacher. Training is a means to assist them and equip them with the necessary skills they need to do this. Whilst local authorities offer training to governors on a range of topics, free of charge, the Welsh Government is aware that the quality, level and content of the training and take up by governors varies across Wales. The Education (Wales) Measure 2011 allows Welsh Ministers to introduce regulations to make training mandatory for governors and set the content of that training. The Measure also addresses the points raised by the Enterprise and Learning Committee report in 2009 on the Role of School Governors recommending that consideration should be given to introducing compulsory training for governors.

Welsh Ministers have chosen topics for mandatory governor training which they believe will have the most impact on raising standards in governance. These are induction, understanding school performance data, and training for chairs of governors.

The induction training will focus on governors' roles and parameters of their responsibilities and how to be effective governors. The training on understanding school performance data will explain what performance data is available to governors. It will also train governors to understand and analyse the data that is available to them, suggest the types of questions governors should be asking about the data and indicate how the data can be used to make improvements. The training for chairs of governors will focus on leadership and working with and supporting headteachers, including the need to challenge headteachers to ensure high quality education is being delivered to improve outcomes for learners.

The Welsh Government is currently consulting governors and local authorities on the proposals to introduce regulations for mandatory training for governors, including the specific requirements and exemptions and the content of the mandatory training.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation it is proposed that the regulations will come into force in the Autumn 2012.

The Welsh Government will also produce training programmes based on the mandatory content which will be free for local authorities to use when delivering the training. This will help ensure that a consistent and cohesive approach to effective governor training is applied across Wales.

Financial Implications – None. The cost of revising training programmes is being met from within existing budgets.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association and Estyn should work together to develop and deliver training for education cabinet leads and chairs of education scrutiny committees, focusing on effective use of data and robust scrutiny.

Response : Accept

The Welsh Government supports this recommendation. Education cabinet leads and chairs of education scrutiny committees should have the tools and skills to be able to effectively evaluate and challenge the performance of schools within their local authority. The Welsh Government is currently developing local authority level All Wales Core Data Sets which will for the first time provide local authorities with ready made, standardised analyses of the performance of their schools at the local authority level. These have been developed in association with Estyn. The first phase of this development will be delivered by July 2012. The second phase, which will provide additional analyses, will be available by the end of the year. The Welsh Government is also making the school-level data that underpins the school and local authority level All Wales Core Data Sets available to local authorities for further interrogation. These resources will assist all leaders in education within a local authority to better evaluate performance and target improvement strategies.

Estyn has been working with Welsh Government regarding the organisation of training for cabinet members, education scrutiny chairs and scrutiny committees in individual local authorities in the effective use of data in monitoring school performance, and in conducting robust scrutiny of local arrangements. Estyn has discussed this training with the WLGA. Welsh Government is also launching a Scrutiny Development Fund aimed at developing capacity and capability for collaborative scrutiny so that they might effectively address initiatives such as the newly established consortia of joint education services aimed at supporting school improvement.

Financial Implications –None. Any additional costs will be met within Estyn's existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government and Estyn should ensure that the scrutiny of the regional consortia is sufficiently robust, and that new arrangements improve standards and pupil outcomes without introducing unnecessary complication.

Response : Accept.

Reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment is a Welsh Government priority. We have made it clear that we expect schools and local authorities to share best practice. To support this, the Welsh Government working in partnership with the WLGA and Estyn, are developing a wider range of best practice case studies – this will be shared on the Learning Wales portal.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that:

Estyn should consult on the requirement to inspect every school within six years of its previous inspection and on the notice period required before inspections, with a view to enabling unannounced inspections when appropriate.

Response : Accept in principle

Discussions have begun with Estyn on how best to amend regulations to make it difficult for schools to predict when inspections will take place. This includes amending the requirement that schools have to be inspected every six years and reducing the notice period for inspections from the current 20 days.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that:

Estyn should include, in the Wellbeing strand of its inspection framework and in its guidance to its inspectors, the need to consider whether schools have policies on their approaches to protection from range of environmental factors, including the sun.

Response : Accept

Estyn has confirmed that they are looking at how best to incorporate the need for sun protection into their inspection guidance.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing Estyn's budgets.