

**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales**  
**Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education**  
**Committee**

**CYPE(4)-21-15 - Papur | Paper 1**

**Ymateb gan : EAS (Gwasanaeth Cyflawni Addysg I Dde Ddwyrain Cymru)**

**Response from : EAS (Education Achievement Service for South East Wales)**

**Report on the EAS/SEWC response to the Welsh Audit Office / Estyn remit review of Consortia, published in June 2015**

**Steve Davies**

## **1. Background**

Estyn and the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) undertook fieldwork together in October 14 to January 15 to review the progress of the implementation of regional consortia working since 2012.

The WAO were looking particularly at the effectiveness of governance arrangements. Estyn were reporting on the progress being made by consortia to provide school improvement services. We were also keen to use the process to develop a framework through which consortia could be inspected. The framework is due in September 2015 and inspections of all four regional consortia will follow in the Spring/Summer of 2016.

## **2. EAS/SEWC response to the findings**

We found the report a fair reflection overall of our region's position at the time of the review. The recommendations were useful and we were glad that it was noted that all regions had already begun to respond well to the early feedback given to us. At the time of the visit there was insufficient data available to Estyn and the WAO to make judgement on the impact of the EAS on examination and test outcomes for the region. The outcomes data currently available from 2012 to 2015 show year on year improvements, above those for Wales as a whole, across all key stages.

## **3. History of the EAS/SEWC**

In September 2012 the five local authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen formed an Education Achievement Service (EAS) which is designed to raise education standards in South East Wales.

Standards in schools had got progressively worse and secondary school banding information revealed that South East Wales had the highest number of schools in the lower bands. This information highlights the underperformance in schools, and the need for a significant shift in the way that education services are structured to support improvement. It also showed where the greatest need is in the region and where the EAS would need to focus its resources.

The EAS has been created by the five local authorities to raise education standards. By working together as part of an integrated service to support and challenge schools effectively, enhance front line services and make the most of the available resources, progress will take place quickly and effectively.

The EAS was established as a not for profit limited company with the great majority of key staff transferring through TUPE arrangements. A limited number of external appointments were made in the summer term 2012. The governance structure of the EAS includes a Company Board, responsible for the efficient and effective delivery of the service and a Joint Executive Group (JEG), made up of LA Cabinet members and CEOs, who hold the service to account for the quality of business planning and delivery. In the autumn term 2012 and early 2013 three of the constituent LAs were placed in Special Measures by Estyn. Since that time the EAS has worked with those LA members and officers, along with Intervention Boards to increase the LA capacity for school improvement, associated services and corporate governance.

From the outset in 2012, the EAS has provided all of the services recommended by Robert Hill in his 2013 report. These include Challenge adviser, data, governor support, literacy, numeracy, welsh, foundation phase, digital learning, physical literacy and 14-19 services.

A major review of services in the summer term of 2013 resulted in a strengthening of the Challenge Adviser service through the appointment of a Principal Challenge Adviser to lead the work in each LA.

In 2012/13 the EAS core funding from the 5 LAs amounted to £4.4 million which was 12% less than that spent by these LAs on these services in 2011/12. In 2015 the core funding is £3.5m which is approximately 22% less than that which was spent in 2011/12. The performance figures below show the year on year improvements across all 5 LAs. Since September 2012 we have reduced staff from 135.1 to 101. A key focus of our work is delivering value for money and increased efficiency in our work in the region, of which the performance against costs are an important measure.

Independent annual surveys demonstrate that there are strong relationships between the EAS and schools within the SEWC region. Appendix 1 gives a number of examples of where schools express their satisfactions with the service. It also enables LAs and EAS to review schools understanding of their respective roles. This approach also provides valuable feedback on areas for improvement and these are also provided in Appendix 1.

#### **4. Progress against areas for improvement**

As the remit visit in region took place at the beginning of November 2014, the EAS engaged in setting out an improvement plan from that time, based on the oral feedback from Estyn and the WAO. This plan was agreed with SEWC Directors, constituent LAs and the EAS Board and was built into the 2015-2018 Business Plan. When the final report was published in May 2015 the EAS reviewed progress against those areas identified in the oral feedback and added specific actions to those areas which were not identified in the oral feedback. These plans were agreed through the EAS Governance structure.

#### **5. Key strategies and progress in addressing recommendations**

##### **5.1. Business planning and delivery.**

The 2015/16 EAS Business plan was strengthened significantly in the light of the recommendations. It is now a 3 year plan with SMART targets and costed programmes. The plan, which includes LA appendices for each LA have been agreed by each LA cabinet. Each service area has a detailed service plan. Every member of staff is subject to a Performance Review cycle which is linked strongly to the service plans. There is a robust cycle of self-evaluation and quality assurance, which is linked to JEG meetings, Board meetings and Welsh Government Challenge and Review events. The EAS Company Board now has a comprehensive Risk Policy which identifies responsibilities and reporting requirements at all levels of the organization.

The Remit report recognised the steps being taken by the EAS to record and demonstrate value for money. This model has been further strengthened to demonstrate the impact of investment of time and resource related to improvement strategies at school, LA and regional level.

## **5.2. Quality of governance and scrutiny.**

“The consortium using a company, EAS, is closer to a commissioned service to the extent that the company is a separate legal entity, albeit wholly owned by the local authorities, and the company board directors are not the cabinet members with responsibility for education.” *WAO Report*

“One consortium, EAS, with agreement from the Welsh Government, has recently decided not to have an advisory board as set out in the National Model. Instead, they will appoint some of the expected members of an advisory board as non-executive directors to the company board and recognise the ‘Joint Executive Group’ (consisting of directors of education and cabinet lead members) as the coordinating group for commissioning and monitoring EAS but sitting outside the EAS structure.” *WAO Report*

The above sections from the WAO report recognise the progress the region had made to securing robust and coherent governance and scrutiny structures. The EAS Board and JEG structures are further supplemented by a South East Wales Consortium (SEWC) group of LA directors and the EAS Managing director. This group meets on a bi weekly basis to enable the development and implementation of policy and the scrutiny of practice and outcomes. In addition. The EAS reports regularly to LA scrutiny meetings and an Audit Committee made up of the 5 LA Scrutiny representatives provide challenge and support to the EAS Board.

The legal agreements which underpin the relationship between the 5 LAs and the EAS have been revised to reflect the arrangements

The SEWC group of Directors have also established a common cycle of scrutiny agendas which focus on the performance of the EAS.

There is a designated Challenge Adviser working closely with Diocesan authorities. A cycle of meetings are held with Diocesan Directors and they are involved closely in consultations and the formulation of pre inspection reports for faith schools.

## **5.3. Consistency of Challenge Advisers work**

The role of the Challenge Adviser (CA) in the region has been significantly strengthened over the past two years. Much has been done to improve the rigour in the quality assurance of their work with schools through enhanced line management systems, guidance and Performance Development Reviews. Critical to this development has been the appointment of five Principal Challenge Advisers who have the key responsibility for linking with each of the five Local Authorities (LAs) and for ensuring that there is limited variance in the work of the CAs within and across the region. The development of the role of the CA has been recognised through the responses from headteachers in the annual survey where 90% agreed that their CA knows their school well and provides appropriate and effective challenge to improve.

Feedback from the survey does, however point to further development required in the areas of supporting development planning and tracking progress of pupils towards targets. The Challenge Adviser team are currently engaged in development programmes to strengthen these areas.

#### **5.4. Strengthening collaboration across regions**

There is now a timetabled programme of monthly meetings of Consortia managing Directors. These are planned to coincide with planned meetings with senior Welsh Government officials. These meetings enable joint planning against national and local requirements. They also enable the MDs to constructively challenge WG on the implementation of policy and offer alternative strategies where it is felt appropriate.

Independent of these arrangements, the consortia have also established a number of collaborative initiatives. The most significant of these has been the successful tender to Welsh Government to deliver the Securing Teacher Assessment Programme of External Verification. This 3 year programme, with a value in excess of £1 million was jointly constructed by the 4 Managing Directors and involves officers and headteachers working across consortia to deliver the outcomes required.

The EAS works very closely with Central South Consortia (CSC). This includes joint planning of major initiatives such as the development of the Welsh Baccalaureate, Digital Learning, support to Welsh medium schools and the Physical Literacy programme.

The regional consortia have also established a 2 day practice sharing event involving their Senior Management Teams. This involves good practice presentations, workshops and development planning for current and emerging programmes.

#### **5.5. Tackling the impact of deprivation on upon education outcomes**

A tackling poverty champion has been appointed and is leading major work in this area. A key development from April 2015 has been the implementation of a programme in each school which requires the school to set out how the resource from the pupil deprivation grant (PDG) is allocated and enables the monitoring of the impact of this investment on outcomes. Challenge Advisers work closely with headteachers to both monitor and evaluate the impact of these investments. This is being supplemented by a practice sharing project linking schools with strong evidence of success with schools who face significant challenges in this area.

#### **5.6. Improve the quality and range of support to school**

There has been a wide range of support available within the EAS from the outset in September 2012. For the first year the major focus was on English/Literacy, Mathematics/Numeracy, Welsh and Foundation Phase. During this period the service moved the balance of provision from school based staff attending training days to more school-based support, making more use of expertise available across schools in the region.

Since September 2014, this model has been extended further. We have extended the use of good practice in schools and established major networks of training opportunities in leadership at all levels and teaching across all phases and subject areas (including non-core subjects) and digital learning across the curriculum. This school to school model has been harnessed by schools and now a major lever in the region's school improvement strategy.

#### **5.7. Strengthen financial management arrangements**

Estyn and the WAO recognised the additional challenges of operating as a private company delivering services within the public sector. Historical arrangements for funding and monitoring grant allocations to schools and LA support services have required adaptations within the SEWC region. Following the remit visit we have increased staffing in our finance department, developed

key financial arrangements for grant allocation and expenditure and monitoring and evaluation and established strengthened review processes with our banker LA.

## **6. Issues Welsh Government should be taking up**

### **6.1. Clarity of responsibilities**

Welsh Government has involved the regions in a review of the National Model, led by Robert Hill. This has helped reinforce the importance of the legal responsibilities of each group to each other and to Welsh Government. There will continue to be a focus on this as the implementation of national policies is undertaken. This is particularly so in areas where the relationship between LA responsibilities are interrelated with school improvement accountabilities, for example looked after children and additional learning needs.

### **6.2. Business Planning**

Good progress was made in 2015/16 in clarifying Welsh Government's business planning requirements of regional consortia. This led to a more common approach and a stronger focus on the outcomes required from the services provided. There was also further clarification on the need to reflect the services provided to the region as a whole and those that were specific to individual LAs.

It is important these developments are built upon for the 2016/17 year with early opportunities to review the effectiveness of this year's model in advance of any refinements to expectations for next year.

Welsh Government can further facilitate cross consortia working in this area through supporting peer reviews and the sharing of best practice.

### **6.3. School funding**

The Welsh Government Department for Education needs to review how grant and revenue budgets are set, allocated and reviewed to ensure as much efficiency in the system as possible. The Minimum Funding Guarantee is welcome and needs to continue and be monitored across the country. In particular, a number of flexibilities in relation to the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) were announced last year which have yet to be realised in practice because of retained terms and conditions around predecessor grants. The Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) grant are both very significant levers, focused at the most vulnerable, whilst building sustainable capacity in the school system. They are crucial to ongoing levels of improvement, whilst continuing to focus on efficiency and value for money. Most immediately it would be helpful if work were done as early as possible this autumn to set grant budgets so that we can indicate funding levels to schools to plan for improvement work.

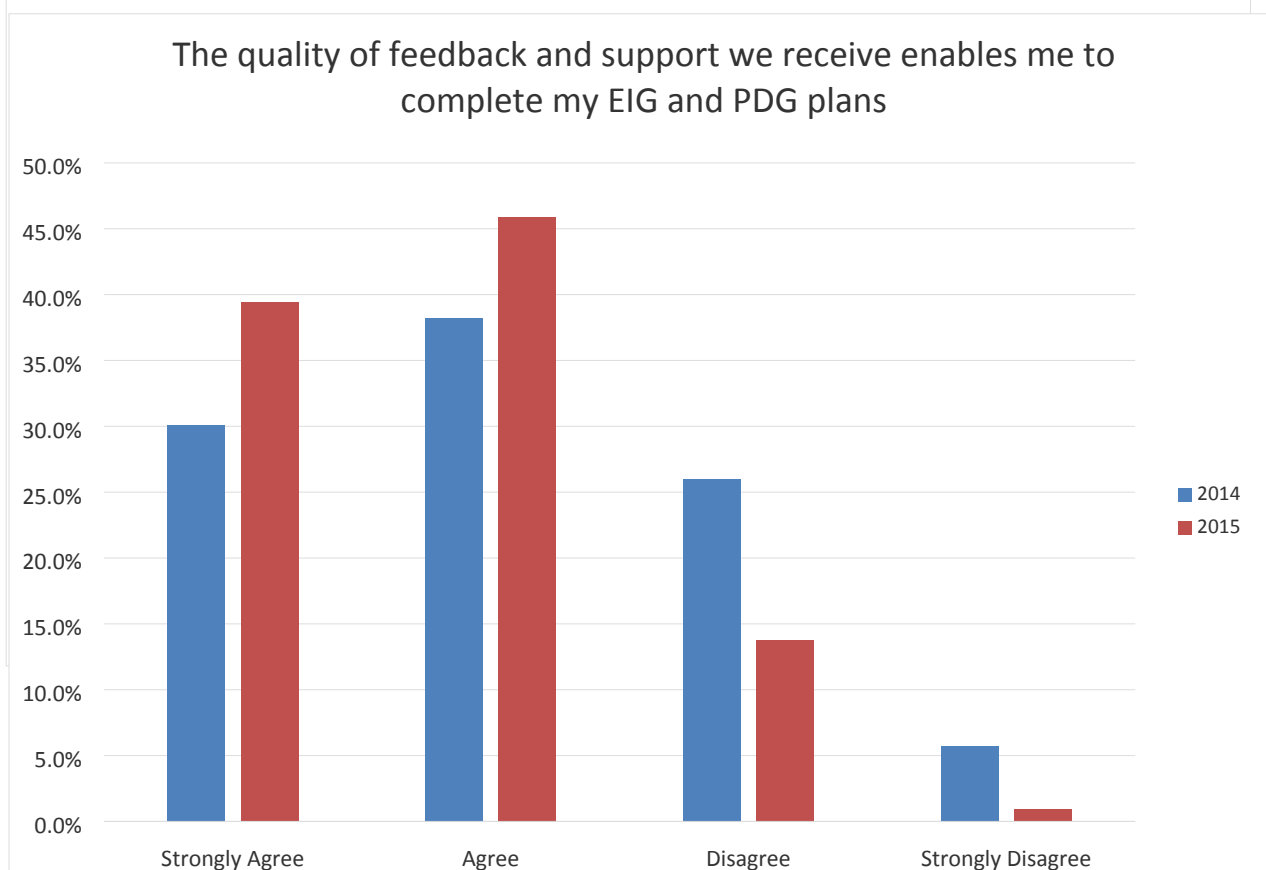
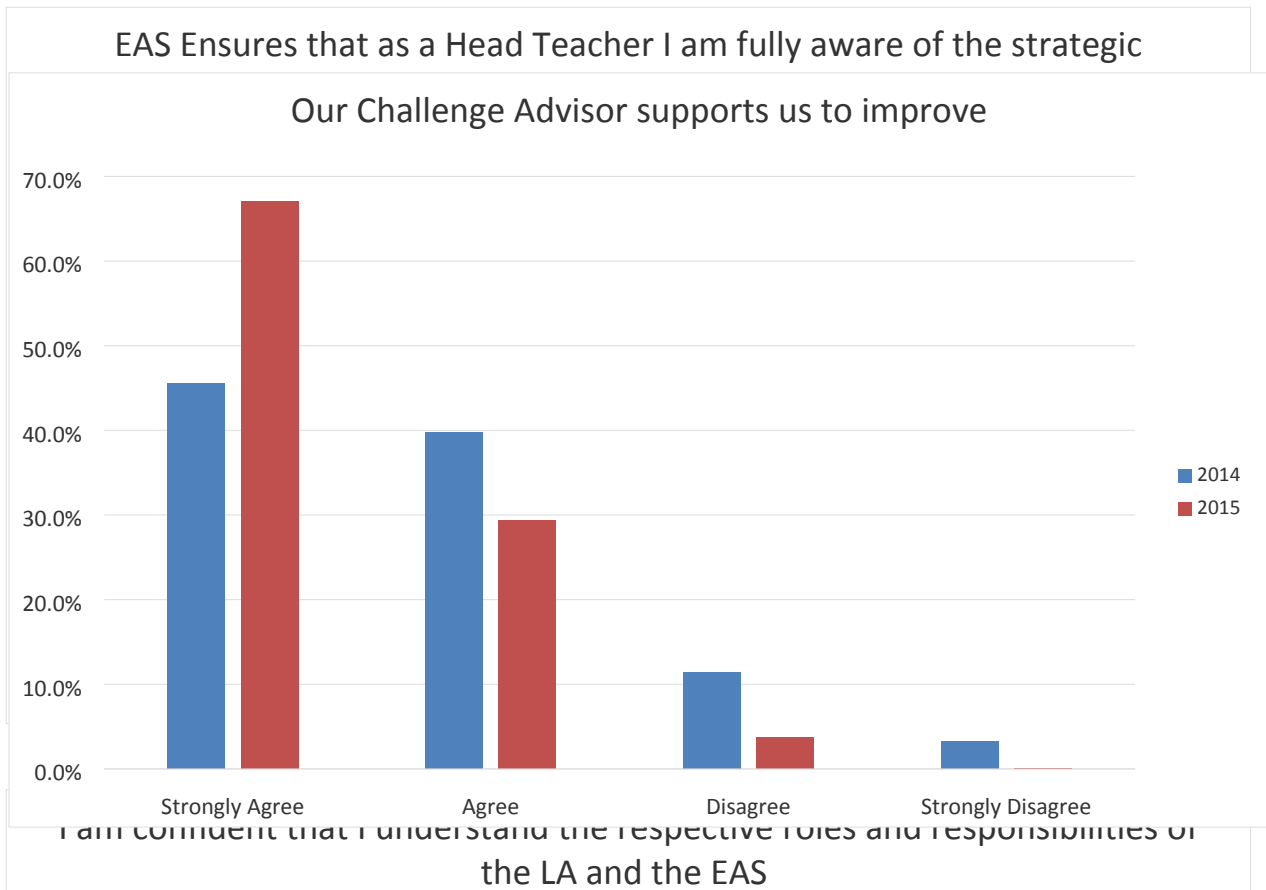
### **6.4. Carefully planned engagements of regional consortia in Policy Implementation**

Good progress was made in 2014/15 in involving regional school improvement services in the implementation strategies associated with the LNF and introduction of new GCSEs. This enabled coordinated planning and funding and sharing of practice across the region.

Implementing the recommendations of "Successful Futures" will be a major challenge for the education profession in Wales and regional consortia will need to play a major role. The establishment of a "Change Board" has been an important step in ensuring key stakeholders are effectively engaged, and is welcomed. One of the key responsibilities of this group will be to strive for successful innovation while ensuring the progress made in over the past 3 years by

consortia is built upon. The balance between Welsh Government and consortia leadership of policy implementation will need to be regularly checked for the Change Board.

## Independent Survey of SEWC schools on the performance of the EAS (2014 – 2015)



### Our Challenge Advisor has made significant impact on supporting the school's individual pupil tracking and target setting process

