



Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith
Education through Regional Working

Children, Young People and Education Committee

24th September 2015

**Cynghrair o 6 awdurdod lleol yw ERW a reolir gan gyd-bwyllgor cyfansoddiadol cyfreithiol.
Y nod yw gweithredu strategaeth a chynllun busnes rhanbarthol cytunedig a chefnogi gwelliant ysgolion.**

ERW is an alliance of 6 local authorities governed by a legally constituted joint committee.
Its aim is to implement the agreed regional strategy and business plan to support school improvement.



Context

Standards are good compared to other regions, with performance improving in a sustainable and consistent manner.

The overall performance is good for the following reasons:

- the overall school performance level has remained the same with a provisional regional performance for Level 2 +, at 60.2%;
- attendance continues to improve, and is better than other regions, with progress continuing in the secondary sector to 94.0% in 2015; there was an increase of 1.5 per pupil in the primary sector to 94.9%.

Although our performance, in general, was higher than the Welsh average for Level 2 +, the overall performance standards at one local authority remains lower than expected. There are areas of good and excellent practice in several schools, and low standards in other places. Although it is recognized that the performance at Level 2 + in ERW is better than in other regions, all local authorities and most schools have clear improvements to be made before reaching the highest point. Likewise, learners who are eligible to receive free school meals are more likely to perform well in ERW than in other regions, but we acknowledge that the impact of poverty on attainment must be reduced substantially. Even where schools benchmark well, and where pupils' overall performance is good, the performance of pupils eligible to receive free school meals is, more often than not, low. There is variation between schools and within schools, and specifically targeted interventions show specific improvements this year, and additional work is already in the pipeline for 2015-16.

	2015	2014	2013	2012
GWE		57.1	56.0	53.2
ERW	*60.2	58.0	55.6	54.8
CSC		54.1	49.4	47.8
EAS		52.2	49	46.4

Introduction

“ERW is an alliance of 6 local authorities governed by a legally constituted joint committee. Its aim is to implement the agreed regional strategy and business plan to support school improvement. “

The ERW Consortium was re-established following the release of the National Model for School Improvement (Welsh Government in February 2014). The National Model outlines the Welsh Government's vision of regional school improvement consortia. The Cabinet of each respective Local Authority within the Region has adopted the Legal Agreement in place for ERW's operation and governance.

The Consortium comprises of six Local Authorities: Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Powys, the County Borough of Neath Port Talbot and the City and County of Swansea. The purpose of ERW is to deliver a single consistent and integrated professional school improvement service for children and young people in a range of settings within the six Local Authorities.

ERW is governed by a legally constituted Joint Committee, with its membership made up of the six Local Authority Leaders.

ERW's vision is to ensure:

“a consistently high performing school network across the region, with every school a good school offering high standards of teaching under good leadership, resulting in all learners achieving their maximum potential”

In order to achieve this vision, we will build school capacity through support, challenge and intervention to become self-improving, resilient organisations which continually improve outcomes for learners.

ERW's mission is to:

“build school capacity through support, challenge and intervention to become self-improving, resilient organisations which continually improve outcomes for learners”

ERW's work will secure **effective performance in all schools** across the region by:

- **robustly and consistently challenging** the performance in schools and the outcomes achieved by **all** their learners
- deploying a differentiated system of **professional support to schools** in proportion to need that is identified through a nationally agreed assessment and categorisation framework
- supporting the deployment of national and regional strategies to develop the **literacy and numeracy and digital skills of learners** and to improve **outcomes for disadvantaged learners**
- facilitating and developing **effective school to school support** in order to improve performance and outcomes through the deployment of experienced and successful lead practitioners
- **managing and deploying well trained challenge advisers** across the region to challenge performance and signpost appropriate relevant support
- triggering **formal interventions in schools that fail to perform** to the required standard
- **building capacity and resilience within schools so that we will enable a self-improving system within the region**

Responding to recommendations

- ERW welcomed the very useful verbal feedback by both Estyn and the WAO following the review, which enabled us to respond quickly and systematically. There were no surprise areas, and our self-evaluation had identified every development area.
- As a result, we had several improvement steps in place, and therefore, due to an early and prompt response, we were able to prioritise, accelerating the improvement process where necessary. In addition to this, we could **use the feedback by Estyn and the WAO to refine and improve our work.**

- **We also acknowledge that our strengths are many**, such as in strategic planning, scrutiny and accountability in the medium term. As a result, we were able to report effectively within ERW's governance structure that we had addressed any deficiencies.
- Inspection, audit and review bodies (IAR) have **systematically monitored and reported on the recommendations** through our short-term governance arrangements. However, all action in response to recommendations has by now been incorporated into our business planning.
- **Embedding actions within improvement planning** is best practice in effective business planning and self-evaluation. We have covered all the important recommendations in these, and where needed, have identified them on the risk register.
- A process of **highlighting and transferring progress** has led to the development of confidence, securing evident improvements. ERW's procedure for governance and accountability has ensured that progress is evident and is identified. However, the process of monitoring progress against the review findings is challenging as the fieldwork was completed almost a year ago, and we have since made substantial progress in infrastructure and practice.
- **Reviewing the impact of improvement and the impact of our responses to recommendations** has led to a measurable impact on learner outcomes. Improvement in monitoring and evaluation has led to improved support and challenge for schools which provide value for money.

Principal recommendations

In prioritising the work, we focused on six priority areas as many recommendations are intertwined:

1. *Self-evaluation*

This is a difficult and sensitive aspect of work to deliver perfectly. We are confident that we know ourselves well and that the range of information gathered to inform our procedure for self-evaluation is correct. We are confident that our annual cycle is well-informed by external evaluation held by inspection, audit and review bodies; and our own intelligence, i.e. performance data, scrutiny, a risk management system, reporting and monitoring procedures. We are continually refining this information, and cannot make sweeping statements as the region is so diverse and so large geographically. The balance of operational and strategic information is fair. We are confident in our ability to self-evaluate to secure improvement and to remove any unnecessary waste. Responding to feedback from schools is one of our strengths, and has led to improved findings and services.

2. *Scrutiny and democratic accountability*

WAO feedback on our work here was very heartening and we have further strengthened our approach this year. Last year, we disaggregated performance data to each LA, whereas this year each LA will have a full regional picture. We have an established regional FWP for scrutiny. Tight safeguards are in place to secure ongoing local scrutiny of regional work. This year's FWP includes:
performance data and categorisation; ERW BP; Challenge Advisers and their performance and capacity.

All recommendations are collated and shared regionally. All chairs meet regionally to share and plan, using the most effective practice.

So, to conclude, our work involves 3 key tasks: an effective infrastructure for regional scrutiny; quality assurance of challenge and scrutiny activity; and ensuring that the regional service responds to scrutiny feedback and takes action accordingly.

3. *Risk management*
We acknowledged that this was an area for development, and therefore the NPT CBC Corporate Team has been leading on processes on ERW's behalf. Collating an effective and relevant risk register, and ensuring that it is updated and utilised across the 6 LAs has added value to our work and enabled us to share and mitigate risk by taking collaborative responsibility. The process of identifying financial and operational improvement in schools and strategic corporate risk for ERW and local authorities is complex. The previous reporting arrangements to JC and Exec were adequate, but the current arrangements for progress, based on best practice, are in place and are fully operational.
4. *Business planning*
ERW's BP is in place. There is a clear focus on outcomes with three priority areas and 16 workstreams. Building on last year's success to align workstreams and priorities has secured stakeholder support as they are able to 'imagine' tasks that they can 'own'. The region's 6 Chief Education Officers are working carefully to dovetail and align operational planning in each LA to ERW. ERW's plan could be described as a backbone to all the plans, informing and bringing together the necessary actions and priorities across the region. The key to every partnership plan is joint ownership of outcomes and success criteria. This is set out in the plan and identified clearly.
5. *Value for money*
ERW has guidelines in place to determine value for money. They are based on an overview of prudence, efficiency, added value, collaborative advantage and effectiveness. The guidance, monitoring and audit arrangements for the EIG are underway. Relationships between finance officers and even school bursars has been key to managing a very useful transition process to combine Welsh Government grants. The process of providing security between local authorities with regard to internal audits and for the Annual Governance Statement has been more effective this year as the structures and systems are fully established. ERW delegate rates for schools are high and reflect on the region's priority in supporting capacity and strength in schools.
6. *Effective use of data and intelligence*
Information on our tracking procedures for schools and pupils is key to informing our work on further improvement. This aspect will inform the value for money work and is an integral part of our work to build on digital learning capacity to aid school improvement strategies. This is an area of strength for the region, and our pupil information is good. This is reflected in the outcomes for pupils and groups of vulnerable pupils. We anticipate developing strength and capacity through more effective work in this area.
7. *Quality support to schools*
Schools are appropriately supported through ERW's Support School, and this fully reflects the national categorisation system. Schools are entitled to support, and this support is brokered according to need via a high standard comprehensive 'Support Menu'.

The standard of support to schools depends on our advisers. We have developed a strong temporary workforce of Challenge Advisers. A third are core employed local authority staff, a third are school leaders on secondment, and a third are advisory. Each one meets or exceeds the National Standards for Challenge Advisers and works within the ERW Code of Conduct. Ongoing development and professional learning are key, as expectations of advisers are high. We are currently targeting secondary advisers in particular with a series of master classes, and refining their work in order to reduce bureaucracy and to secure an affirmative impact on schools' own capacity to improve.

On a regional level, the work towards developing a self-improving schools system is proceeding. We are careful to manage expectations within a changing national climate, and to build a process of system transformation by enabling and supporting schools to become resilient, self-improving schools. However, we must also support underperforming schools, challenging effectively where required. This requires a system where a right to high standard support and challenge can co-exist within a self-improving system.

Supporting consortia and local authorities to overcome barriers to improvement

As a region, we have often discussed with Welsh Government officers and the Minister for Education and Skills the range of strategies and support requirements needed to secure further improvement throughout Wales. Change in current systems and developments towards a self-improving system is being accelerated within ERW and is welcomed. However, the following challenges can lead to unnecessary frustrations:

- **Communication:** It is a continuous struggle to maintain the current nature and the usefulness of communication methods. Collaboration must be on a national level in order to relay consistent and valid messages.
- **Expectations:** The process of responding to change is affirmative, but realistic expectations and the delivery of resources in a timely manner can help schools, local authorities and consortia to be better prepared.
- **Reliability:** The reliability of professional opinions are core to developing a self-improving system, and one which is confident in this respect. The opinions of teachers when assessing, Challenge Advisers when categorising and the opinions of Estyn inspectors must be correct and consistent.
- **Strategy:** Setting and retaining a consistent and clear national strategy is an important tool in leading the sector. Our plans to manage and create effective regional systems are completely dependent on clear strategic direction from Welsh Government.
- **Effective financial planning and fair funding:** Recent changes to the Education Improvement Grant are welcomed, but the accountability process must be understood. There must be a consistent and fair method of funding deprivation and supporting best practice.
- **Addressing difficult issues:** Leaders must understand the roles and responsibilities within the system.