



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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**Response to Estyn thematic review on
improving schools through
regional education consortia**

Digital ISBN 978 1 4734 3691 6
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WG24551

Report title:**Improving schools through regional education consortia****Report details**

The purpose of this survey is to report on the progress being made by regional education consortia in providing school improvement services.

Separately, the Auditor General for Wales asked Wales Audit Office to carry out a study on the Welsh Government's approach to improving schools through regional consortia. Wales Audit Office will report to the Public Accounts Committee at the National Assembly for Wales.

Estyn and Wales Audit Office carried out fieldwork visits to each regional consortium in partnership and evidence was shared between the two organisations.

These visits took place between November 2014 and January 2015. The survey also involved scrutiny of a wide range of evidence from schools, local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional consortia and the Welsh Government.

Summary of main findings.

Although the general improvements in standards of pupil attainment over the past three years cannot be solely attributed to the development of regional consortia, the published data reflects a gradual improvement across all four regions. Performance is consistently higher in GWE and ERW than CSC and EAS. School inspection outcomes are broadly similar across the four regions, although there is a higher proportion of schools causing concern in the EAS and ERW has a higher number of schools that require follow up after their inspection that have not made enough progress.

The consortia have been slow to fully implement the governance arrangements in line with the National Model for Regional Working and it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the arrangements, senior leadership and management of consortia. Business plans for 2014-15 focus on the most important areas for improvement, although all of the plans have weaknesses in them. While there are examples of robust scrutiny by elected members of how a regional consortium is working with individual schools, scrutiny committees do not hold their senior officers and representatives to account well enough.

Self evaluation reports are in the main overly positive, and identify strengths more accurately than shortcomings. Most of the regional consortia have

engaged effectively with LA officers, school leaders and trade unions in developing regional priorities and policies for school improvement, however, none of the consortia have engaged enough with diocesan authorities. Quality assurance arrangements for challenge advisers have been strengthened and there is consistency in the work of challenge advisers, although arrangements are not always implemented rigorously enough.

The EAS and CSC have more than twice as many schools involved in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme as the other regions and there is a lack of clarity around working relationships with schools and how consortia will evaluate their role in improvements. Consortia have not monitored closely enough how well schools are using the PDG and none of the regions have a coherent strategic approach to reducing the impact of deprivation on attainment.

There are suitable arrangements in place with LAs for sharing information for many service areas although none of the consortia have a developed system to collate, analyse and share information about the progress of pupils and schools. Consortia generally know how well many of their schools are performing through the work of challenge advisers, but challenge advisers are not always diagnostic enough in understanding why a school is performing well or not and are not always involved enough in moderating teacher assessment.

Overall, regional consortia are better at challenging schools about their current performance than supporting them to improve. However, the consortia are developing strategies to facilitate schools to support each other, although only CSC involves all schools in their strategy. Consortia provide appropriate information to LAs about schools causing concern. Once an LA issues a statutory warning notice to improve a school, the regional consortium usually works well with both the school and the LA to agree a suitable plan and monitor progress.

Recommendation 1-5

Regional consortia should:

R1 Improve performance management arrangements by:

- planning for the medium term to ensure a strategic approach to school improvement
- ensuring that plans contain actions that are specific and measurable, with appropriate targets, costings and milestones for delivery
- capturing, sharing and using data (from pupil level up) efficiently and effectively

- monitoring the progress of pupils and schools regularly
- taking a more robust approach to identifying and managing risks
- realistically self-evaluating their strengths and shortcomings
- tightly managing the individual performance of their staff

R2 Secure greater consistency in the quality of challenge advisers' evaluations of schools, particularly in relation to teaching and leadership

R3 Develop clearer strategies to address the impact of deprivation upon education outcomes and ensure that all actions are coherent in this purpose

R4 Improve the quality and range of support for schools and in particular:

- develop clearer strategies for maximising the potential of school-to-school support
- provide or broker better support for teaching and learning in non-core subject areas

R5 Involve diocesan authorities effectively in the strategic planning and evaluation of regional services

Welsh Government response

These recommendations are for consortia and we agree with their content.

We will discuss the report and its findings with the sector at the next ADEW Directors' meeting and hold further detailed discussions on the recommendations directly with key consortia personnel, (along with the ADEW lead director and the lead chief executive), in each consortium at the upcoming Summer review and Challenge events which are scheduled to take place during June and July 2015.

Via these discussions we will ensure that the consortia are addressing the recommendations made but also working consistently across Wales on the issues.

In addition, policy leads within DfES are also working with consortia to ensure that other issues raised in these recommendations are in the process of being addressed. For example, in respect of strategies to address deprivation each consortia has taken different approaches to supporting schools to tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The consortia have acknowledged the need to develop the skills of their staff and/or challenge advisers. To facilitate this Welsh Government granted each consortium £50k to build capacity towards the end of 2014-15.

Furthermore, the new approach to business planning (which requires the consortia to submit headline plans, including one on tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment), will encourage a more coherent approach to strategic planning and this year, in response to feedback that its headline plan lacked detail, GWE forwarded its draft tackling deprivation strategy. At least two of the consortia have recruited a Closing the Gap co-ordinator. The consortia are also now required to submit a Pupil Deprivation Grant Support Plan, which outlines how they will support schools to make effective use of the PDG, and what action they will take, including recovering monies, where it is clear that the grant is not being used for its intended purpose.

Through the New Deal for the Education Workforce, Welsh Government will work in close collaboration with the consortia on the development of a wide range of professional learning provision that will be delivered through a pioneer schools network. This approach will actively facilitate an increase in school to school collaboration.

Recommendation 6-7

Local authorities should:

R6 Support their regional consortium to develop medium-term business plans and ensure that all plans take account of the needs of their local schools

R7 Develop formal working arrangements between scrutiny committees in their consortium in order to scrutinise the work and impact of their regional consortium

Welsh Government response

These recommendations are for Local Authorities and we agree with their content.

As outlined above we will discuss the report with ADEW lead directors and ensure that the WG supports LAs and consortia in addressing these recommendations.

Recommendation 8-13

The Welsh Government should:

R8 Improve its strategy to develop senior leaders and managers for education at local authority and regional consortia level

R9 Work more collaboratively with consortia and local authorities to agree

short and medium-term business plans and reduce requests to change and add to plans mid-year

R10 Ensure that school categorisation is rigorously moderated across the consortia

R11 Develop an agreed understanding between teachers, schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Welsh Government about the purpose and use of attainment targets

R12 Engage more effectively with diocesan authorities in developing its strategy for school improvement

R13 Ensure that consortia, local authorities and diocesan authorities are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities for schools in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme

Welsh Government response

These recommendations are for the Welsh Government and we accept them all.

We will work with the consortia and their constituent local authorities to address these recommendations.

As mentioned we have moved this year to streamlining consortia business planning in to headline business plans covering a one year period which provides a focus on addressing and support key priorities. We are in the process of holding discussions with consortia lead chief executives, lead Directors and Managing Directors to move to a three year planning cycle, this will support the development of longer term targets and sustainability. We will also further develop the Education Improvement grant to support longer term planning.

We have worked with the consortia via the ADEW Quality Standards group to review and further develop the categorisation moderation and verification process. As a result, guidance will be updated and strengthened to ensure consistency across the regions. All Wales moderation will also be undertaken.

Following the development of the National Model WG officials have had some discussion with the diocesan bodies in respect of their engagement with the National Model. We will accelerate this work and ensure that there is clarity between ADEW, WG and the Diocesan authorities in regard to school improvement.

Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) builds on the National Model for Regional Working, and is an acceleration and concentration of the school improvement strategy. The programme formally rolled out in schools in September 2014 and Welsh Government worked closely with and through the regional consortia to establish roles and responsibilities. As the programme has developed, reporting routines have become more embedded. We will continue to work with stakeholders to improve and refine, where necessary.

The SCC programme established an Accelerated improvement Board (AIB) for each Pathways to Success school. The AIB brings together all key stakeholders to monitor progress, provide challenge, and hold the school and its leadership to account. The membership of this Board includes the headteacher, chair of governors, a representative of the local authority, a headteacher of a cluster primary and the SCC adviser. The AIB model has been widely welcomed and early indications are that it is an effective mechanism to drive improvement in the school. A number of local authorities and consortia have adopted this model for schools that are causing concern in their areas.

Publication details

The report will be published on or after **3rd June 2015** and may be accessed on Estyn's website www.estyn.gov.uk