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Chief Executive
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30 November 2015

Dear Dr Orders

Estyn Significant Improvement visit, 5th October 2015

Following the outcome of the Estyn monitoring visit of education services for children and young people in February 2014, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was of the opinion that the local authority was in need of significant improvement.

Estyn left the authority with six recommendations. A monitoring programme, as set out below, was agreed with the authority.

Formal monitoring programme

Spring 2015	Autumn 2015	Spring 2016
<p>R3 - Make sure that the arrangements for delivering school improvement services challenge and support all schools effectively, <i>in order to improve standards for learners in all key stages</i></p> <p>R5 - Improve performance management processes to ensure a consistent approach in delivering objectives</p> <p>R6 - Improve the scrutiny of local authority education services and partnership working</p>	<p>R2 - Reduce exclusions and reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training post-16</p> <p>R4 - Improve the effectiveness of joint planning across the range of partnership working</p>	<p>R1 - Raise standards, particularly at Key Stage 4</p> <p>Progress against all recommendations</p>

Huw Davies HMI led a team of four inspectors on the second monitoring visit. This visit focussed on the progress made in relation to recommendations two and four.

The inspection team held discussions with the leader of the council, elected members, the chief executive, senior officers, headteachers, partnership representatives and an external consultant commissioned by the Council.

The team scrutinised documentation including evidence on the progress made against each of the recommendations. They considered outcomes from Estyn inspections of schools in the authority. The team also liaised closely with the Wales Audit Office (WAO).

At the end of the visit, the team reported their findings to the leader of the council, cabinet member for education, chair of the scrutiny committee, chief executive, director for education and a representative from the Welsh Government.

Outcome of the monitoring visit

Recommendation Two: Reduce exclusions and reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training post-16

The local authority has taken strong and timely action to reduce the rate of exclusions from schools.

The rate of permanent exclusions in Cardiff has historically been low. This remains the case and compares favourably to other authorities in Wales. Overall, fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools continue to fall, but there are wide variations in the rate of short-term exclusions between secondary schools. Many primary schools have no or very few fixed-term exclusions. Where exclusions take place, they are generally due to the serious nature of a small number of incidents that have occurred in a very few primary schools.

The local authority closely monitors the overall levels of exclusions in its schools. Senior officers provide suitable challenge to schools where levels of exclusion are high. However, work to reduce exclusions for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or have special educational needs is hindered because the local authority does not analyse or use exclusion data rigorously enough.

The local authority provides appropriate, differentiated support based on an approach to reducing exclusion which has five steps. Officers have recently reviewed steps three and four this approach. Each secondary school receives a summary of their strengths and areas for development in relation to provision of school-based support (step 3), and alternatives to exclusion including complementary curriculum provision (step 4). A 'best at' document identified particular strengths in the schools. Headteachers find this useful in gaining a better understanding of what works well in other secondary schools in Cardiff. However, schools are generally unclear on the

availability of specialist provision (step 5) and how to access it. A formal review of steps 1, 2 and 5 has not taken place.

The majority of secondary schools have implemented the five-step model appropriately. However, a minority of schools do not implement this approach consistently and their exclusion rates remain high. Two of these schools were recently inspected by Estyn and placed in statutory follow-up categories. As a result, the local authority intervened and made important changes to governance and leadership. The local authority has also instigated changes of leadership at a federated secondary school where exclusions are high.

The role that senior leaders in education are playing in shaping, understanding and driving the reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is unclear. The local authority has no overarching single NEET strategy, which is coherent, prioritises work streams and avoids duplication with other plans.

The percentage of young people who are NEET in Cardiff continues to fall. Despite this, the authority continues to be one of the worst performing in Wales and the variation across schools is too great. In Cardiff schools in 2014, Year 11 NEETs ranged from 0.4% to 13%.

In order to improve destinations for looked-after children the authority has recently implemented a trainee programme. This aims to provide looked-after children with new skills and qualifications. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this scheme on the outcomes of looked-after children.

All secondary schools now use the vulnerability assessment profile and this has been extended to the pupil referral unit and special schools. The profile assists schools in identifying pupils that are at risk of becoming not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). However, a minority of headteachers are not clear of any overall strategy to reduce NEETs in the authority or their role in this.

Over 300 pupils identified as being at risk of becoming NEET were supported over the summer term and through the school holiday. Young people were able to access ongoing support and advice to help them to secure suitable education, employment and training placements. This approach is beginning to have a positive impact. Unverified data, provided by the authority, indicates that around 60% of these pupils have progressed to further education, training or employment.

All pupils that are educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS), now access taster courses with local providers and receive information and support in respect of next step opportunities. This has slightly improved the destinations for this group of learners. However, the overall percentage of pupils that are NEET from the authority's pupil referral unit and special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties has increased to 35%.

There is considerable variation in the proportion of year 12 and 13 pupils from schools that become NEET. In one school, one-fifth of pupils are NEET at the end of

year 13. The local authority has recently started to track pupils that leave school during year 12 and 13 and it recognises that this is an aspect of its work that it needs to develop.

The local authority has brought together a range of partners on its NEETs strategy group. This has promoted a better understanding of each other's work and has resulted in creative solutions. For example, Cardiff and the Vale College funded vocational courses at a local secondary school. Transition arrangements for learners leaving training providers have improved and these learners are guaranteed progression to further education.

Relevant information on school exclusion and NEETs data is provided to schools' challenge advisors from the Central South regional consortium. However, not all challenge advisors discuss concerns over exclusions or NEETs with schools. The local authority does not ensure that the regional consortium covers these aspects in its work.

Recommendation Four: Improve the effectiveness of joint planning across the range of partnership working

The Cardiff Partnership Board provides a strong focus on collaborative working across organisational boundaries. These multi-agency partnerships are designed to pool resources and align services more effectively to address the key challenges facing the city.

There is now a more strategic approach to building a culture of partnership working where partners are working more closely to improve wellbeing in order to address underachievement. Through its Education Development Board and the Vulnerable Children and Families Programme Board, the authority has implemented clear strategies to address well-understood priorities. These include strategies to improve the attendance, behaviour and attainment of young people in schools, although this monitoring letter notes that issues remain over the strategy for NEETs and aspects of behaviour. The recently reconfigured Vulnerable Children and Families Programme Board provides appropriate governance arrangements to support the delivery of partnership programmes such as Families First, Flying Start, Communities First and Integrated Family support. In particular, these programmes help ensure that children and young people get the support they need from their families.

The work of the six neighbourhood partnerships in Cardiff has enhanced the authority's ability to offer efficient and effective multi-agency services to deliver better outcomes. An important feature is the improved use of outcomes data to evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery, for example by measuring the improvements in school attendance. This approach is helping officers to rationalise and identify gaps in provision and to reduce duplication.

There are much improved links and working relationships between officers and schools which are based on a better understanding of respective roles, mutual expectations and accountabilities. The authority consults schools with increasing effectiveness. This shift in culture has resulted in better engagement between the

authority and its schools. Headteachers consider that they are well-informed, engage in constructive dialogue with officers and contribute more directly to identifying the authority's priorities. In particular, the School Budget Forum operates efficiently in a challenging financial climate to help determine budget allocations and influence the extent to which budgets are delegated to schools. There is a strong emphasis and shared commitment to develop the capacity of schools in Cardiff to lead and support their own improvement.

Working relations between the local authority and its regional consortium have been strengthened considerably. Elected members and officers play an active and constructive role in the governance of the consortium. This has helped to ensure that the school improvement service provided by the consortium is meeting the authority's needs more effectively, for example, there is positive engagement among schools in a range of networking arrangements, such as school improvement groups, to promote best practice and strengthen capacity within schools for self-improvement. Headteachers consider that there is now greater rigour in the extent to which schools are being held to account for the quality of their work. However, the authority has not ensured that all the challenge advisors from the regional consortium focus well enough on specific local authority priorities such as the level of exclusions and NEETs.

Through the Education Development Board, the authority is establishing closer partnerships with higher education and the business and enterprise community, for example to broaden educational and employment opportunities for post-16 students and enhance the capacities of governing bodies. While many of these developments are at an early stage, they have the potential to help provide discrete routes for young people to enter employment or training and improve school leadership.

A particularly valuable initiative of the Safe and Cohesive Community Board has been the partnership with Prevent¹. As a result, awareness raising training has been provided to nearly all primary schools and is currently being delivered to secondary schools. The 'getting on together' curriculum, which is in place in all secondary schools, challenges all forms of extremism and helps to improve community cohesion in the city. This work is helping to inform practice throughout the United Kingdom.

Overall, improvements in partnership working are contributing to better outcomes in schools. Over the period 2013-2015 there has been an improvement of around nine percentage points in the proportion of Cardiff pupils achieving the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics. During the same period, there have also been improvements in the proportion of pupils achieving the Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator and the core subject indicator at key stage 2. Although secondary attendance levels did not improve in 2014-2015, historical increases from previous years have been maintained. However, the authority has been less effective in

¹ Prevent is a Home Office strategy to prevent people becoming radicalised and drawn into terrorism. The [Prevent duty guidance](#) is issued under section 29 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. Since July 2015 specified authorities, including schools in England and Wales must have regard to this guidance when carrying out the duty.

working with partners to reduce exclusions and increase the proportion of young people who are engaged in education, employment or training.

Next steps

Your link inspectors will discuss with you the timing and preparation needed for the final visit. This will take place in spring term 2016 and inspectors will judge the progress made against all six recommendations. It is at this stage that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector will determine whether or not the local authority is still in need of significant improvement.

I should be grateful if you would confirm the details of the next Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee so that we can feedback the findings of this monitoring visit.

I am copying this letter to the Welsh Government and to the Auditor General for Wales for information.

Yours sincerely



Clive Phillips
Assistant Director

Cc: Welsh Government
Auditor General for Wales