



Draft Self-evaluation Report

Executive Summary

November 2015

Key Question 1: Outcomes

Positive Features

Performance in the Foundation Phase and at key stages 2 and 3 in the key indicators has improved over a three-year period at outcome 5+, level 4+ and level 5+. The greater rate of improvement in the last two years means that performance is close to or above Welsh averages in most indicators.

Performance against the level 2+ threshold has risen significantly over the last two years and is now above the Welsh average. The number of schools where fewer than 40% and less than 50% of pupils reach this threshold has reduced significantly.

More able pupils are achieving better outcomes and their achievement has risen at a faster rate at outcome 6 in the Foundation Phase, level 5 at key stage 2 and level 6+ at key stage 3. Performance is now close to or above Welsh averages in most respects.

Performance in Welsh second language in primary schools has improved significantly over the last three years.

The proportion of A*/ A grades at GCSE has been higher than Welsh averages over the last two years.

Performance has met or exceeded targets in the Foundation Phase and at key stages 2 and 3.

Schools' performance in 2015 compares much more favourably with that of similar schools at all phases/ key stages than was the case in 2013.

There has been a greater impetus in the rate of achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) than for those not eligible over the last three years and so the gaps have narrowed in the Foundation Phase and at key stages 2 and 3 at the expected outcome/ level. More eFSM pupils reached the level 2+ threshold in 2015 than in 2014.

The performance of minority ethnic pupils has improved significantly against the level 2+ threshold and is now in line with or ahead of that of White UK pupils across the region.

The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has fallen over the last three years, although the extent of the drop varies between authorities and is still too high especially in Cardiff.

There has been sustained improvement in rates of attendance over the last four years across the region and in each local authority. Performance is now above Welsh averages in both primary and secondary schools.

Areas For Improvement

The improvements in performance in the primary and secondary sectors started from a low baseline and are not yet at a point where pupils can compete as successfully as they should with their peers across the UK and internationally.

Although performance has improved at key stage 4 it is still below targets and the pace of improvement necessary to meet these more challenging targets has been evident in only the last two years.

Performance against the level 1 threshold has improved less than in other indicators and is the result of underachievement by boys and more vulnerable groups in particular.

Outcomes in literacy/ English are generally lower than in the other core subjects in the Foundation Phase and key stages 2 and 3. Boys' performance is weaker than that of girls, especially in writing skills and is weakest in Merthyr.

Although there is improvement in both English and mathematics at key stage 4, the gap in performance has widened. Girls' performance is weaker in mathematics than in their other subjects in all local authorities and especially in the Vale of Glamorgan. Boys' performance in both English and mathematics is weakest in Merthyr.

The outcomes achieved by eFSM pupils are still too low especially at the higher levels and grades and against the level 2+ threshold where the gap with the performance of nFSM pupil is still too wide. Together with pupils who have a special educational need, they are more likely to be absent or excluded from school.

Other groups vulnerable to underachievement – in particular looked after children and pupils with SEN -do not achieve well enough, especially in literacy and numeracy.

The performance of more able pupils at the higher grades at GCSE and A level is uneven across the region. It is not strong enough in Merthyr and RCT and expectations are not yet high enough in the Vale and in some aspects of performance in Bridgend and Cardiff.

There are undue variations in the performance of similar schools, especially concerning the performance of eFSM pupils and particularly in some aspects of performance in the Vale at key stage 2 and key stage 4 and more broadly in RCT.

The variations in performance are also evident in the lack of sustained improvement in some higher performing schools, the variations in outcomes in Schools Challenge Cymru schools, the fluctuations in performance year on year in Welsh first language in Welsh-medium schools at key stage 4.

Key Question 2: School Improvement Services

Positive Features

Schools have been provided with sound guidance to support school self-evaluation and improvement planning, including the new statutory requirements. The place of self-evaluation and planning at the centre of school improvement underpins how the national categorisation system is implemented across the region.

Assessment of the quality of leadership and teaching is now a more explicit part of challenge advisers' judgements about schools' capacity to improve.

The Framework for Challenge and Support provides clear expectations about key school improvement processes and encompasses suitably differentiated procedures for challenging and intervening in schools where there is underperformance. The operation of the Framework is supporting improvement at greater pace in a majority of these schools which is also reflected in the outcomes of categorisation.

The quality of the challenge and rigour of the monitoring procedures by challenge advisers in schools requiring red or amber support has improved. Quality assurance of challenge advisers' written reports, and of their work directly with schools, is also more robust.

The consortium's improvement targets are closely aligned to the aggregated targets for schools. There is a clear expectation in the dialogue between challenge advisers and schools that targets should reflect high expectations and outcomes that should compare well with those of similar schools.

Action to identify concerns about progress in schools causing concern and work to recommend to local authorities use of the full, range of statutory powers is now more robust and consistent across the region. Most schools make strong progress when identified for follow up after inspection and intervention has been successful in building the improvement capacity of a number schools to avoid either the need for follow up or to reduce its seriousness.

The CSWC Challenge has extended significantly the resources to build capacity in the system through school-to-school support with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy and closing the gap. The sources of support available for underperforming schools and for schools seeking to improve their practice and pursue excellence are now more extensive. Support for schools to implement the Welsh Government's national priorities is evaluated positively and is effective in most instances in building the capacity of the schools supported to improve their practice.

Provision to support the development of leadership and teaching is given a high priority. Programmes are configured to meet identified needs and are more strongly focused on school and classroom-based professional practice.

Areas for improvement

Although the number of schools requiring Estyn monitoring following inspection has reduced and there have been improvements in the proportion of schools judged to have good or better, standards, teaching and leadership, there are still too many schools requiring following follow up in the two statutory categories in some parts of the region such as Cardiff and RCT.

Despite the improvements in the quality of the work of challenge advisers and the greater confidence in the accuracy of judgements made, there are still some inconsistencies. The sharing of practice to improve skills and build capacity is not yet developed enough.

Schools and challenge advisers have access to a wide range of trend, comparative and benchmarking data to support self-evaluation and the review of performance. However, access to pupil level data and live, in-year data to strengthen challenge and support is not yet developed sufficiently.

Expectations and strategies to meet more demanding targets are not strong enough in a minority of schools.

In a minority of schools causing concern progress is too slow. In these cases, action is not always taken swiftly enough or there are multiple and complex challenges that inhibit the pace of improvement.

The evidence base about strengths and weaknesses to inform decision making about priorities to be addressed through the leadership and teaching programmes and the work of lead schools is not yet developed in sufficient depth.

Communication and collaboration with Schools Challenge Cymru advisers is stronger and support is provided more systematically. However, there are inconsistencies which compromise the region's ability, in tandem with the local authorities, to have a fully accurate view of progress and needs in every case.

Support for Welsh-medium schools is also planned now in more structured ways but is still at an early stage of development. Brokerage of support is becoming more effective but evaluation of the impact of the support in its various forms on outcomes is stronger in some areas than in others and literacy and numeracy continue to be the most frequently occurring areas for improvement from inspection.

Mechanisms to monitor the progress of schools requiring green or yellow support are in place. However, strategies that enable challenge advisers to retain a good knowledge of each school, while not compromising the school's responsibility for its own improvement, need to be more tightly structured.

Support for governors is improving through training programmes, more regular communication and bespoke support for governing bodies that are less effective. However, these developments are more recent, are not yet extensive enough and require more evidence of impact.

Key Question 3: Leadership

Positive Features

Leaders articulate well, and develop in partnership with schools, the ambition for a self-improving school system, a shared commitment to improving all pupils' outcomes and to reducing the impact of poverty on attainment that align closely with the national model for regional working.

Leaders have created a climate where schools increasingly accept their prime responsibility for raising standards and this has had impact in: the greater rate of improvement in outcomes primary and secondary schools; the pace of improvement in a majority of red and amber support schools; the improved outcomes in increasing numbers schools involved in collaborative working.

The ambition is supported effectively by a three-year vision in the service's business plan. There is a clear line of sight between vision, principles and action in the service's key documents.

The service's governance arrangements are sound, meet national requirements and make clear that the consortium is a joint partnership. Decision making is open and transparent.

Elected members provide good leadership through their commitment to high expectations for all learners in the region and strong support for the service's strategic direction.

The Joint Committee and advisory board are increasingly effective in influencing and questioning decision making and the effectiveness of the region's work in addressing priorities.

Self-evaluation provides a comprehensive and honest evaluation of strengths and weaknesses.

There is now a much closer link between the outcomes of self-evaluation and priorities in the business plan. Plans have clearer detail about targets, success criteria and the actions to be taken and are now a better tool for determining the extent to which improvement is occurring as planned.

The development of professional learning communities and partnership working between schools has been given a high priority and are prominent features of the school system in the region. There is increasing evidence of impact on improving outcomes and practice.

Partnerships and joint planning between the consortium, local authorities, headteachers and the Welsh Government are strong and are key factors in the rapid change that has occurred in the region over the last two years.

The deployment of resources is closely aligned to the business plan's priorities. Financial control procedures are systematic and effective.

Areas for improvement

The impact of leadership is not yet strong enough in a number of areas: the outcomes achieved by vulnerable groups; the number of schools requiring statutory follow up after inspection in some parts of the region; the variations in performance between similar schools.

Although the vision for a self-improving system is clear, the practical steps to implement this vision over the medium term are not yet developed in enough detail.

The role of the Joint Committee in evaluating performance and of actions to mitigate risk to improve the impact of business planning and assessment of value for money is improving but the degree of challenge provided needs to be more consistent.

The role of the advisory board in challenging and supporting the service with regard to the impact of policy and planning on outcomes and practice is not yet fully developed.

Although communication is improving, the relative roles and responsibilities of the consortium and local authorities are not yet fully understood by all key stakeholders.

Processes to improve assessment of the progress of plans in year and the action that needs to be taken in response are developing but they are not yet embedded strongly enough as part of performance management.

Systems to support individual performance management and quality assurance are now stronger. However, implementation is not yet as embedded as it needs to be to promote greater consistency.

There are variations in the depth of collaborative working between schools. Identification of a baseline and success criteria at the outset of partnership work to support evaluation and professional learning are now better established but require further development to achieve greater consistency.

Partnerships with pupils, governors, the diocesan authorities and local authorities' inclusion services are not yet developed to the extent needed.

Strategic planning of partnership working between the regional consortia to promote quality, consistency and efficiency is beginning to be established but is not yet as prominent a feature as it should be.

Leaders review and make changes to service provision to support the principles of the self-improving system, secure continuous improvement and value for money on a more systematic and regular basis than previously. However, work to evaluate evidence about the effectiveness of services against costs and monitoring of the impact of the deployment of grant require more rigour.