

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Evidence to the Enterprise and Learning Committee as part of its inquiry into the role of school governors in Wales, which has arisen as a result of issues scrutinised during the Committee's inquiry into the Implementation of the Teacher Workload Agreement.

1.1 Governors Wales promotes the effective governance of schools in Wales and provides personal support to individual governors, local governors associations, fora and other groupings.

1.2 Governors Wales is committed to the promotion and effective management of quality provision in schools in Wales.

Background

2.1 Governors Wales welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Enterprise and Learning Committee as part of its inquiry into the role of school governors in Wales, which has arisen as a result of issues scrutinised during the Committee's inquiry into the Implementation of the Teacher Workload Agreement. This will support the oral evidence to be given to the Committee on the 7th May 2009.

2.2 The observations from Governors Wales will focus mainly on the key issues identified during the scrutiny by the Committee, plus our own perspective on the Workload Agreement. We have not undertaken a specific survey or conducted research on this area unlike other organisations.

We will also link our comments to the specific 11 recommendations of the Committee arising from their report on the Implementation of the Teachers' Workload agreement dated 29th March 2009.

2.3 It would be true to say that despite, at times, some negative comments that sometimes emerge about the workload, it is generally agreed by the signatories to the Agreement and many others that the changes brought about by the agreement are helping to reduce teacher workload and one would hope, raise standards by freeing teachers to focus on teaching and learning. Overall there has been a positive impact. However it is clear that further research and evaluation is essential to ascertain whether the workforce reforms have had the desired effect on standards.

2.4 The findings of Estyn's evaluation of the extent and impact of remodelling on learning and in the school workforce (April 2009) states that "the Workload Agreement is having a very positive effect in schools. A half of schools have changed their initial arrangements as they develop better ways to meet the demands of the agreement."

However, there remain several issues of concern.

Work-Life Balance/Dedicated Headship Time:

Enterprise and Learning Committee Recommendations 5 and 9.

5. We recommend that evaluation and monitoring of work-life balance becomes an integral part of teacher appraisal.

9. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government works with Governors Wales and LEAs to produce up to date and relevant guidance to governing bodies on their statutory responsibilities, including managing the work-life balance of the head.

3.1 A key element of element of the agreement was to the drive to improve the work-life balance of all teachers. This is not easy in itself to measure. Feedback however, does seem to indicate that the measures to reduce the amount of clerical and administrative work carried out in addition to the statutory provision of time for planning, preparation and assessment have enabled teachers to generally feel some improvement in their work life balance. Although, this is not necessarily reflected in all cases.

3.2 There are concerns about the availability of dedicated headship time for leadership and management and the worklife balance of heads. We stress that more work is needed to be undertaken on this area.

3.3 There appears to be some evidence that these benefits do not seem to be shared by head teachers and senior managers within schools. In many cases, it has meant the opposite for school leaders. Estyn in their recent report (reference para 2.4) stated that "schools find it more difficult to implement the conditions of the agreement as they apply to leadership time and dedicated headship time. Although all schools are working towards implementing reasonable allocations of time for senior staff to carry out their leadership and management responsibilities, over a third currently report that they have not been able to do this fully. Dedicated headship time remains the aspect of the workload agreement that has been the most difficult to implement in practice. It has been fully implemented in only about a third of schools, while headteachers receive no dedicated headship time in about a quarter of primary schools. Overall, in primary schools, the position is worse than in secondary schools, often because the headteacher takes responsibility for a class."

3.4 The findings from Estyn also indicate that "in a large number of schools, changes associated with the national agreement represent one of the biggest initiatives these staff have had to manage. It is taking a significant amount of management time for senior teachers and headteachers to organise these changes efficiently and effectively."

3.5 Although, governing bodies have a specific statutory responsibility relating to head teachers' work/life balance and the provision of dedicated headship time as determined by The Education Act 2002 and the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions document, the management of the head teacher's work/life balance is a difficult area. Governing bodies may do what they can, to limit the burdens imposed on head teachers - they can try to persuade senior leaders not to take on excessive workloads and make available resources so that this is not necessary, but ultimately head teachers will determine their own workloads.

3.6 Governors Wales recognises that many governing bodies have taken steps to support head teachers in improving their work/life balance and are monitoring this carefully. In so doing, many governing bodies will have reviewed their own practices which could affect the head teacher's workload. Examples include:

flexible timing of governing body meetings;

scheduling meetings a year in advance;

reducing the number of written reports required where appropriate etc looking at ways of increasing administrative staff to support members of the School leadership team.

3.7 Governors Wales took part in a joint initiative with the teacher associations by sending a letter to Chairs of governing bodies (October 2007). This letter contained suggestions for governing bodies to consider, to support the head and senior school leaders in improving their work/life balance. This type of initiative could be repeated at an appropriate point to ensure that the matter continues as an area of concern for governing bodies.

3.8 Governors Wales believes, however, that more work is needed to be undertaken to address issues of workload and work/life balance with regard to head teachers and senior leaders. Specific guidance on this would be useful to raise greater awareness amongst governors. We are pleased to note recommendation 9 in this respect.

3.9 All work/life balance strategies for staff and school leaders need to be sustainable and permanent. Examples of good practice are where governing bodies seek the views of staff on their current work/life situation, encouraging suggestions through a survey or questionnaire, as to how it could be potentially improved. Governors have a duty of care to the staff at their school and must act if such evidence becomes evident. Additionally, examples of good practice including case studies etc., included in guidance would be beneficial for governing bodies.

Role Of Governors During Remodelling Process:

4.1 Based upon anecdotal evidence, in particular, discussions with governors and local governor associations/fora, it seems that most governors have been involved in the remodelling process from the beginning, during implementation and are subsequently involved in the monitoring process. Although, there is a resource pack for governors in Wales, produced in 2006 (Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: A National Agreement. A Resource Pack for Governors in Wales: DELLS Information Document No: 022-06), there is a general consensus that it would be useful for governing bodies to access additional information, particularly in the reviewing and monitoring of the agreement.

Impact On Standards:

Enterprise and Learning Committee Recommendations 1 and 2.

1. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government commissions independent research and surveys schools to strengthen the evidence base on the impact of the implementation of the teacher workload agreement on raising standards of pupil achievement.

2. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government undertakes a holistic impact assessment of its current policy initiatives to assist it to maintain a strategic overview and to evaluate the need for further financial or other intervention to support staff.

5.1 The effect of the agreement on improving standards is still an unknown quantity in many respects other than the work already undertaken by Estyn. We still feel that further consideration is required on this area, particularly linked to the School effectiveness framework as the pilot phase progresses.

5.2 We realise however, that the impact on standards is the most difficult area to assess with so many other variables influencing the outcomes. We may never be able to accurately measure the affect of the Workload Agreement on results.

Support Staff:

Enterprise and Learning Committee Recommendation 4, 8 and 10.

4. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government explores the advantages of employing school managers in larger secondary schools, to support the head and the senior management team and more broadly considers measures to reduce the hours worked by all teachers.

8. We recommend that as part of its commitment to develop a national structure for classroom assistants, the Welsh Assembly Government introduces measures to ensure consistent pay and conditions and the provision of training and development of classroom assistants and other support staff by hypothecated funding.

10. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government undertakes an immediate survey to ascertain the level of support and guidance being provided by local education authorities in implementing the teacher workload agreement, and that the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, reports her findings to the Assembly.

6.1 The important role of support staff within schools is crucial to the effectiveness and success of the agreement. Governors Wales believes that improved pay and conditions structures for support staff are needed as a result. Sufficient funding for training is also required. The new negotiating body set up for school support staff is a welcome move but it is understood that this will only cover staff in England at the present time. The Welsh Assembly Government however, has set up a working group to look at these issues and this is welcomed.

Furthermore, with budgets stretched and many schools in redundancy situations, there is concern around how extra support will be funded.

6.2 The issue of support in general provided by LEAs is also crucial, in some cases the LEA could offer or broker the support envisaged by the Committee. This may best serve the case for smaller schools, who may not be in a position to employ a school manager on a full-time basis. Many schools are working in cluster groups and sharing facilities and staff/teacher expertise. There are a number of examples of video conferencing being used to good effect.

Compliance Issues:

7.1 Governors Wales feels that a note of caution should be voiced regarding the proposed changes to ensure compliance with the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions document. Whilst it is appropriate to ensure that statutory requirements are in place, it must be recognised that budget constraints and lack of resources are significant factors which could undoubtedly impact on compliance issues.

7.2 Governors Wales would hope that with support and working in partnership with all key partners that any issues surrounding 'non-compliance' could be resolved initially before the issuing of any compliance notice. Training and greater awareness raising is also needed to ensure that statutory obligations are being met, if there is evidence that some governing bodies are unaware of their duties in this regard.

Local Social Partnerships:

Enterprise and Learning Committee Recommendation 11.

11. We recommend that the LSPs be reconfigured to include a proactive role for school governors. We also recommend that where the Minister has evidence of best practice in the operation of LSPs in driving forward the implementation of the agreement, that it be disseminated throughout Wales

8.1 It appears that in the main governors do not have an active involvement in local social partnerships - this is based on anecdotal evidence. There are some examples however, where governors are invited to attend LSP meetings. Governors Wales feels that the input of governor involvement needs to be developed in this respect and is pleased to note the recommendation in the recent report from the National Assembly for Wales.

8.2 Furthermore, it might be worth developing the role of the school fora to look at the workload agreement and its impact and other issues affecting Governing Bodies - this would improve the mechanism that governors already have to express their views and ensure that budgetary considerations are more closely aligned to impact on schools and standards of achievement

Resources/Funding:

Enterprise and Learning Committee Recommendation 3.

3. In light of this evidence, we recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government undertakes an urgent inquiry into current cover arrangements and in particular:

- The problems experienced by small schools and Welsh-medium schools;
- The implications of implementing PPA on the workloads of head teachers;
- The use of relief teachers;
- The capacity of the school estate to support PPA.

The Government should seek to report its interim findings by the end of the summer term, and based on its findings, consider additional funding to support the implementation of 'rarely cover'.

9.1 Governors Wales feels that the potential lack of funding and resources available will raise complications for governors for the long term sustainability of the agreement, particularly as the 'rarely cover' requirement comes into effect from September 2009.

9.2 There is some anecdotal evidence that in some cases head teachers have only been able to fully implement PPA time for teachers by themselves undertaking class cover. Even if this has only happened rarely, it underlines the critical need for full funding to maintain the agreement.

Support And Training For Governors

Enterprise and Learning Committee Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government, in consultation with Governors Wales, issues guidance to governing bodies on the role of the Chair of Governors, and surveys the current use of mentoring to support and develop head teachers.

10.1 The role of Chair of Governors is crucial. Governors Wales welcomes the above recommendation to produce updated guidance for use across Wales. More particularly, the role is too important for it to be left to chance as to whether Chairs have the skills to function effectively. Consideration needs to be given to the introduction of an element of compulsory training. Whilst it is appreciated that there are sometimes difficulties in getting people to come forward as Chairs, it is essential that the role receives a higher profile with Governors Wales, Local Governor Associations and LEAs working closely together to develop Chairs, then this will help to overcome any recruitment problems.

10.2 Similarly, there must be compulsory training for governors, at least at the induction level. Obviously, the mechanics of introducing training as a requirement would need careful thought.

Conclusion

11.1 Governors Wales recognises the many positive aspects to the school workforce that have already been brought about through the remodelling agenda, however, Governors Wales stresses the importance of further guidance and support materials, as well as additional financial resources for all parties to exercise their statutory functions effectively, in order to have even more of an impact on raising standards and tackling workload in schools in Wales.

11.2 Governors Wales welcomes the recent review undertaken by the National Assembly for Wales' Enterprise and Learning Committee. The recommendations in the report and the opportunity to contribute further are equally welcomed.