

CYPE(4)-10-14 – Paper to Note – Paper 7

Questions on local authorities and regional consortia:

1. **The impact of poor performing local authorities on school standards and pupil outcomes;**

The migration of school improvement services from 22 local authorities to four regional consortia was completed by September 2013. However, the arrangements for governance and delivery in the four regional consortia have varied too much, as pointed out in the Hill report, and acted upon by the Minister for Education and Skills.

As a result the Welsh Government reviewed the first iteration of regional consortia and developed a national model for delivery of school improvement services. The regional consortia have to submit their business plans to the Minister for Education and Skills for his approval by the end of March 2014.

There remain issues of structural complexity and failures of capacity, capability and scrutiny in relation to the delivery of the range of education services for children and young people in a significant proportion of local authorities. Presently 15 local authorities are in follow-up, with six in special measures and one in need of significant improvement.

School improvement services remain a duty of each local authority but are delivered through the regional consortia school improvement services. Therefore the responsibility for school improvement and its impact on schools is now a shared responsibility.

Although Estyn has completed its core inspections of the 22 local authorities in this cycle, we are engaged in follow-up visits to 15 authorities. In both the core inspection and follow-up visits, the judgment about the performance of a local authority in Estyn inspections and in follow-up activity is based upon the performance of the authority's schools and the outcomes for pupils. The number of schools being placed into follow-up as a result of Estyn inspections and the number of schools coming out of follow up are a key indicator of the effectiveness of the local authority and its regional consortia.

In many of the authorities inspected or monitored recently, too many schools have gone into significant improvement or special measures following an Estyn inspection. In a few of these schools, officers were not aware of the issues that led to the school being placed in follow-up. Weaker authorities do not managed the quality of officer's work well enough to ensure that they provide a consistent and robust challenge to schools. In addition, too many local authorities have not make the best use of the regional school improvement service because they retained or commissioned additional officers or consultants whose work is not planned in partnership with the regional service. The result has been that schools have received often conflicting advice from their local authority officers and from officers of the regional consortium. As a result, schools are not clear about what it is they need to improve, and a minority do not improve quickly enough.

Local authorities that have less effective senior leadership and scrutiny arrangements do not challenge robustly enough the work of school improvement officers nor hold them to account sufficiently. This has a direct impact upon quality of challenge and support provided to schools by these improvement officers.

2. Whether the restated powers for local authorities to intervene in schools causing concern (in the *School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013*) will encourage more local authorities to exercise those powers;

We have commented in previous Annual Reports that the majority of local authorities have not used their powers well enough to intervene in schools causing concern, either by issuing warning notices or changing the arrangements for governing bodies. We welcome the clarity that the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 brings in relation to the powers of local authorities. In particular Section 2 of the Act clearly states the grounds for intervention and the escalating range of intervention powers at an authority's disposal. In recent Estyn inspections and follow-up visits we have seen greater use of warning notices and interim executive boards (IEB) by more local authorities.

3. The level of effective challenge and support given by consortia to schools;

In three of the authorities out of the eight inspected between 2012-2013, there was evidence that the regional consortia had begun to have an impact in improving the consistency of the challenge brought to schools, in improving the use of performance data to identify underperforming schools and in more rigorously categorising schools according to risk. However, in the other five authorities inspected, the regional consortia were yet to have an impact on provision for school improvement.

However, as explained in an earlier answer, we have completed the current cycle of core inspections for local authority education services in readiness for a short cycle of inspections of the regional consortia.

In autumn 2014 we will undertake a Ministerial remit reviewing the progress of regional consortia and we will publish the report on that review in March 2015. Estyn is working jointly with Wales Audit Office (WAO) on this remit. We will inspect the work and impact of individual regional consortia between September 2015 and December 2016.

4. Whether regional working will help improve standards in local authorities;

Please refer to the answer for question 1. The first set of verified performance data for schools and authorities served by the regional consortia will not be available until November 2014. Improvements in data on 2012-2013 outcomes could not be attributed directly to the impact of the regional consortia especially in the case of the North Wales consortia which only started operations in September 2013. The impact of regional consortia on standards in schools and their local authority will be a key performance indicator in reaching a judgement about performance in Estyn inspections of regional consortia from September 2015 and in the next cycle of local authority education service inspections after that.

5. The impact of local authorities retaining statutory responsibility for schools and school improvement on regional working;

Although school improvement remains a statutory duty of each local authority, under the collaborative arrangements of joint committees, the responsibility for the quality of a school improvement service and its impact on schools should now be a shared responsibility. It is for each local authority through its representation on joint committees of the regional consortia and its own scrutiny arrangements to ensure that its learners receive the highest quality service possible for its regional consortium. How well this operates in practice will

be tested in our review and in the subsequent inspections of regional consortia school improvement services.

6. Whether there are concerns that regional working could have negative impacts on some services still being delivered by the local authority, for example, a lack of collaboration between ALN services and school improvement services;

This is an area that we will examine as part of our review of regional consortia. We have some very partial evidence from Estyn follow-up visits that some regional consortia are collaborating effectively with one or two authorities to integrate the work of school improvement officers with local authority ALN staff but we do not have evidence of the impact of this upon pupil outcomes at this time.

7. The rate of progress in providing school improvement services.

Please refer to the answer to question 3 as this is same issue. The reconfigured regional consortia school improvement services start operating on 1st April 2014, once their business plans have been approved by the Minister for Education and Skills.

The Committee has already received evidence from Estyn in relation to Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households. However, some of the issues identified in the Annual Report were not covered in her evidence in November 2013, so would you be able to provide a note on the following questions on poverty and disadvantage:

1. The importance of whole school planning;

Whole-school planning is crucial to tackling the effects of poverty. In our 2012 report 'Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools' we identified ten strategies that effective schools employed and noted whole-school planning as a top priority (the report is available on our website at <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/download/publication/259977.9/effective-practice-in-tackling-poverty-and-disadvantage-in-schools-november-2012/>) In particular, we found:

“that schools that raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners understand well the needs of these learners and the potential barriers to their progress in learning. We found that many headteachers believed that tackling disadvantage was implicit in their planning. However, schools that successfully raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners take a strategic and systematic approach to tackling the issues of poverty and disadvantage. This approach includes an explicit plan, with focused and quantifiable targets for achievement, and detailed operational proposals.

Successful schools emphasise raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners in their strategic planning. There is a consistent reference in school policy documents to tackling poverty and disadvantage. They have specific and measurable targets to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners. In this way, these schools have a structured, cohesive and focused approach to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

Effective schools in challenging circumstances use a range of strategies that particularly suit their individual context. They introduce processes that are targeted at the particular needs of the disadvantaged learners in their schools. The strength of

their planning is that the strategies are interrelated and provide a holistic, whole-school approach to tackling the key issues that affect disadvantaged learners.”

2. Training for staff in alleviating the effects of poverty on learners;

Taking a whole-school approach to tackling the impact of poverty requires that all school staff understand the school’s approach. The report quoted above also says:

“Many headteachers identify lack of staff commitment to raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners as a key barrier to overcome in tackling issues of poverty and disadvantage. These headteachers have found that staff training and development are needed to tackle this issue. Most successful schools invest significantly in developing the skills of leaders, teachers, support staff and governors to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners. These schools understand well the specific needs of their learners and identify professional development opportunities that meet the particular needs of learners in their schools.

In terms of teaching, a focus on improving differentiation has had the most impact in schools that are effective in tackling poverty and disadvantage. Successful schools use their data-tracking systems to identify the specific needs of their disadvantaged learners and ensure that all staff can access information about individual learners. In many successful schools, teachers regularly re-examine teaching approaches, such as lesson-planning, to meet the needs of their disadvantaged learners.

Many of the successful schools have a strong culture of sharing good practice, both within and outside the school. These schools provide plenty of opportunities for teachers to observe one another and to share approaches to planning across the school. They have spent time on developing whole-school approaches in such areas as approaches to teaching literacy skills, promoting emotional wellbeing and raising boys’ achievement. They have also identified training opportunities for staff to develop specialist skills such as those in play therapy or anger management.

Nearly all the successful schools use performance management processes to improve the standards and wellbeing of their disadvantaged learners. In these schools, all staff have specific and measurable improvement targets that are related to the school target of raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners. This makes all staff accountable for raising the achievement of disadvantaged learners and helps these schools to evaluate their progress.”

3. Leadership development opportunities.

“Of the five secondary schools with excellent performance inspected this year, three have about a quarter or more of their pupils entitled to free schools meals and these pupils perform well. This is because the schools concerned take a whole-school, strategic approach to tackling disadvantage.

A common feature of these schools is strong leadership. Strong headteachers lead a structured, coherent and focused approach to closing the poverty gap by developing the expertise of staff, strengthening community links and engaging parental support.”

Foreword Annual Report 2011-2012

“The multiple strands of a team approach to disadvantage should go beyond the school to include its local authority and regional consortia as well as relevant external organisations, specialist services and agencies, such as youth, health and social services. Establishing mutual understanding and aligning initiatives so they all pull in the same direction are key elements of this process.

High-level leadership skills are required for setting up these networks of agencies, enabling them to collaborate, and getting co-operation to achieve common goals. Currently, there are not enough leadership development opportunities available for headteachers and other senior school leaders to help them develop these leadership skills. Leaders lack a one-stop-shop of leadership expertise that they can call on for guidance and informal advice, sourcing of training courses, and the matching of partners for coaching and mentoring.”

Foreword Annual Report 2012-2013

The above quotes show that leadership is an important factor in reducing the effect of poverty. The last paragraph suggests that there have been insufficient leadership development opportunities. There are advantages to setting up a ‘one-stop shop’ for leadership development opportunities such as a national college of leadership.