

APPENDIX 5

SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

NOTES

26 MARCH 2013

Scrutiny Investigation into Education Quality – Presentation by Mr Geraint Rees, Acting Head of Michaelston College and Glyn Derw High School Federation, Ely, Cardiff.

Present

Councillors:- Alwyn Gruffydd, Beth Lawton, Liz Saville Roberts and Dyfrig Siencyn.

Officers: Huw Rowlands (Assistant Performance Improvement Officer) and Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Apology: Reverend Robert Townsend

Mr Geraint Rees was welcomed to the meeting by Cllr. Liz Saville Roberts and she thanked him for agreeing to give a presentation to the Scrutiny Investigation.

He gave an outline of his career background and noted that he had been a learning practitioner for 27 years in various contexts in Kenya, in a prison, schools and further education colleges. He was the initial head of Ysgol Plasmawr, Cardiff for 10 years and since 2011 was Head of the Ely Secondary Federation (Michaelston College and Glyn Derw High School, Ely, Cardiff).

He was seconded to the County as a senior officer in the Education Department for 3 years and to the Assembly Government to work on drafting the Welsh Language Education Strategy for six months.

In terms of the population, approximately 35,000 lived on the Council estate in Ely which was a very deprived community with social problems and many children suffered bereavements regularly.

It was resolved to bring Michaelston College and Glyn Derw School together because of the deterioration in the education standards of both schools. The challenge for Geraint Rees as a Head was to raise the standards in schools where the free school meals indicator was 49% and 37%. In terms of Key Stage 4 results, in the 1990s approximately 10-15% of the pupils managed to attain level 2. Throughout the 2000's 30-35% was adhered to with approximately 15-20% attaining level 2 including English and Mathematics. 20-25% disappeared from education, training and employment. School attendance throughout the year was approximately 80% during the same period.

Going through a process of closing the above two schools four years ago and unifying them as a federal college, and school was a total transformation and both Management Teams left the schools, however, there were no changes in the staff. There were approximately 700 pupils in one school with a little less than 600 in the other. 75 teachers, 25 assistants and 9 administrators were employed in the above

schools. The distance between the school was approximately 2½ miles which meant ten minutes by car.

In this case, Mr Geraint Rees was of the opinion that polarization occurred as the social order polarized society especially in populated areas (the rich in one community and the poor in another) and schools then profited or suffered due to this. He was of the view that people were too willing to accept low expectations and believed that that was the norm. ESTYN had also been too ready to accept the situation. It was too easy to accept and use deprivation as an excuse for failure.

Why were the quality standards and Key Stage 3 provision generally robust across all the authority's schools? The Head explained that staff had to understand KS3 levels and had to be encouraged to mark according to the correct standards and to try and find a baseline.

It was explained how the problem had been tackled in Ely with both schools, following an ESTYN inspection, categorised as "one with significant shortcomings" and the other as "being monitored". The aim in the first year, namely 2011/2012, was to improve attendance to 86% and improve the results of KS4 by specifying very clear targets and the need to increase results from 35% to over 50% for level 2. In addition, it was required to go from 19% to 30% in level 2 including English and Mathematics.

The actions taken to raise standards were outlined:

- Change expectations
- Tracking, tutoring, targeting, create competition
- Challenge, support and training for staff
- Use every possible support as every partner counts – TAF, Youth Service, local companies
- Collaborate with local services such as doctors, dentists to ensure appointments outside school hours to increase attendance.

In terms of expectations, it was explained to staff that the results for Level 2 had to be increased urgently and they were given targets to reach 50% by the summer, 60% by the following summer and 70% in the third year. 62% was attained in one turn with 32% achieving level 2+ including English and Mathematics. As a result the majority of the staff had also increased their pride. Both schools had responded to the expectations differently and an element of competition was created between them which assisted to raise standards.

In response to a query regarding how staff were inspired to change expectations, the Head explained that setting targets created a feeling that they were worth aiming towards. There was no excuse that poverty meant failure.

In the context of attendance, there was an improvement of 93% by now and the attendance score for every pupil was posted in a public place on notice boards. If a pupil was under 86%, then the Welfare Officer would deal with the matter. There was a focus, and hard work was undertaken with pupils between 90-94% in order to move them up to 95%. The children were awarded by, for example, holding and attending the school's annual Prom, going on trips etc.

Practices in the schools were changed with evening learning and study weekends at the Urdd Centre.

It was noted that it was important that every pupil counted and there should be intervention and there was value in the tracking system in order to:

- Know where we are
- To know every child
- Target every child – who should be targeted and who is borderline
- Target every group of children

In addition, Year 11 pupils were tracked every fortnight and staff encouraged to do this by buying cakes for them on a Friday afternoon. The Head outlined the tracking system where every subject had a different meaning with the colours – green on target, orange not as good and red not good at all. 25 pupils is the highest number of pupils taught by each teacher.

The Head was certain that the tracking system had changed the situation in the schools and he was of the view that it had created a good working relationship between teachers and pupils. Photographs of the pupils were shown on the notice board in the school's main entrance to show their attainment and in the opinion of the Head this encouraged them to work harder towards their targets.

Therefore, the tracking system raised a desire to learn amongst the pupils. A letter was sent to the parents of those pupils who were on red giving suggestions for change and often these pupils did change,

A C Grade was the highest grade ever to be achieved in both schools and the head was of the opinion that they had to move to get A-C grades and get pupils to apply for Universities.

The Head was of the view that there was potential for leaders within the Federation Management Team of both schools and there should be more turnover in order that schools can make a difference to poor children. The Management Team had the ability to proceed and improve and maintain the school if Mr Geraint Rees had to move on to another project.

The Next Steps

He expanded on the next steps for the schools, namely:

(i) Key Stage 3

Amend the curriculum in Year 7 to include:

Literacy – English, Geography, History and Religious Education
Numeracy – Science, Mathematics, ITC
and Social Skills – Technology, Music, Drama, Art, Welsh and French

and the above occurs for all in Year 7, half the year in Year 8 and then consideration in Year 9.

(ii) Development of Training

By:

- Support and challenge
- Promoting good practice

- Monday afternoons – the children were sent home an hour earlier on Monday afternoons during the summer term in order to hold 2½ hours of training to raise standards for all of the staff in a local hotel. An internal training plan is created for the school and an external person is used if there is no internal person available. The Head felt that there was no need to buy training in from a Consortium as the needs of each school were unique and he had good persons internally to provide training.

(iii) Staffing Structures

Change the roles of teaching assistants to lead in the following 3 categories:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Behaviour or other specialism

In terms of monitoring staff, lessons were observed (10-15 classes a day for approximately an hour and a half) and they had to be clear what improvements were required by each member of staff.

Where will the above schools be in 2014?

The Head trusted that the following would be seen:

- Level 2 -70%
- Level 2 and English and Mathematics – 40%
- Attendance - 94%.
- Pupils sent to University – target 20 (3-4 per annum 2010-2012)
- NEET down from 20% TO 10%.

To conclude, in response to general questions the following points were highlighted:

- That support from parents was limited. Approximately 15 parents used to attend the Parents Evening and by now approximately 40 attend each time
- A dialogue was held with the community in the local shops
- That exclusions had decreased from 950 to approximately 700 and it was hoped that the number would be 400
- It was expected that every Head would be aware of the Assembly Government's frameworks and if the Heads did not tackle this now it was anticipated that the staff would not have the resources to achieve the requirements
- Need to ensure that there was freedom to move the curriculum forward,
- The day to day problems had to be identified and three subjects prioritised (literacy, numeracy and social skills) with staff committed to literacy
- Collaboration between schools was a good idea. « Schools can even be twinned across local authorities e.g. Powys and Ceredigion.

How we can work together to improve standards

- (i) By undertaking a full audit of every school and good practice and get individuals to model this
- (ii) Hold training for staff

Reference and further research:

The Teacher in Education, Mel Ainscow – Manchester University (developed a model for the organisation of 8 schools)

Leading Aspect model – a scheme presenting what you do really well (identifying good practice). Individual comes in to see, approve in an on-line catalogue, once registered 4 days training per annum will be offered). An authority can create a Leading Aspect itself and it would be a way of promoting good practice in Welsh in terms of language.

Research by Professor John Hattie, Auckland University – create a league of things that work with a chart summarising everything.