

Estyn Recommendations: Executive Summary October 2017

Context

Since the core inspection, there has been a significant re-structuring of both senior and middle leadership, governance and the administrative support at GwE. The Managing Director has been in post in an interim role since November and full-time since May 2017.

In October 2016, the Management Committee commissioned an in-depth review of the school improvement services and its administrative functions. The comprehensive review included discussions with schools, hubs, local authority officers, chief executives and groups of challenge advisors. The review concluded that the current structure were not fit for purpose and made a series of recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. All recommendations were fully accepted by the Management Board and the Joint Committee.

The service has taken extensive steps and at great pace to restructure its leadership and administrative team. This has led to greater consistency across the service and clarity in relation to accountability.

In a very short period of time, the service has successfully:

- Established a clear vision for the service
- Set aspirational objectives for 2020 where the region will be the best performing in Wales
- Dismantled the historic hub based approach and consequently embedded the culture of regional working across in the North
- Established a new leadership tier within the service with three senior leads identified for primary, secondary and for overseeing cross sector developments with Successful Futures (Curriculum for Wales).
- Significantly strengthened the regional secondary model to include six secondary lead officers that link with each one of the six local authorities
- Adopted a distributed leadership model where portfolio leads are accountable for driving improvements in key areas.
- Appointed a regional quality and data unit lead officer

In evaluating the progress GwE has made in addressing each recommendation the following has been taken into consideration:

- has the consortium understood the reasons behind the recommendation?
- has the consortium taken reasonable action to address the recommendation successfully, taking into account its starting point, the time between inspection and follow-up visit and the complexity of the issues to be addressed?
- has the consortium been appropriately supported in addressing the recommendations by its partner local authorities?
- has the consortium ensured that changes arising from its progress in addressing each recommendation have become embedded
- the time between inspection and follow-up visit
- the pace of improvement following the in-depth review;

- the impact of the introduction of new syllabuses in core subjects on key stage 4 results locally, regionally and nationally in 2017

Case studies that demonstrate the impact of GwE modified approach to school improvement on national, regional, local and individual schools are available.

R1: Ensure that the school improvement service uses data, target setting and tracking procedures more effectively to challenge and support schools in order to improve performance of all learners across schools and local authorities, particularly at key stage 4

Using Data

Following the core inspection, GwE has implemented robust and effective processes to ensure that key performance data is analysed more forensically and diagnostically on a regional, local and individual school level. A comprehensive programme of training and support was implemented to support challenge advisors in the new way of working. As a result, leaders and individual challenge advisors routinely use data to:

- analyse performance across the region;
- accurately identify key areas for improvement;
- evaluate the impact of specific intervention programmes on pupil level pupil attainment;
- monitor and track progress on regional, individual LA, school level for groups of pupils; and
- challenge and support school leaders with their improvement journey

Robust data analysis has also led to more effective targeting of resources such as the tiered approach adopted in all core subjects at KS4 for 2017-18.

Senior Leaders now use data effectively to ensure regional and local areas for improvement are identified quickly and addressed robustly through detailed business planning. Data and information is also scrutinised more robustly to monitor progress against agreed actions. Quality of planning at all levels for 2017-18 underline the step-change. As a result, the quality of information shared with the Management Committee has improved significantly enabling members to scrutinise and challenge the service significantly.

Target setting

Challenging three year targets have been agreed at a regional, local, school and pupil level. School targets and projections are routinely and robustly challenged. The Local Authorities targets are all based on the following:

- Collating targets from individual schools
- Using the FSM rank of each authority to predict expected performance
- Using local knowledge and understanding

Regional targets are determined by calculating the pupil numbers required to reach the agreed LA targets and aggregating to generate a regional value. The targets have been agreed and shared with all relevant stakeholders. Key stage 4 targets will be reviewed following early analysis of 2017 results.

Within the revised secondary model all schools have a comprehensive Support Programme which defines how GwE targets support and resources to ensure the necessary improvements in priority areas. Undertaking a targeted programme of review visits during 2016-17 has ensured that we more effectively and robustly identify areas and aspects for improvement in many risk schools. The quality and sharpness of the support plans, in addition to the deployment of significant resources to address the necessary improvements, clearly demonstrate that effective steps have been taken to improve the use of data and information across the region.

Tracking

GwE is leading developments on a comprehensive management information system which will provide GwE with detailed information and analysis of individual school performance. This also includes tracking 'live-data' at secondary school level. The new system will ensure that dialogue with leaders and stakeholders is sharper.

This not only facilitates more effective communication and but also allows us to agree more timely and sharper intervention programmes with schools and to more effectively and rapidly target resources to priority areas. The new information system will also serve as host to a 'best-practice' virtual school which will model GwE expectations at all levels of school life.

GwE have established an effective partnership with Bangor University on the "Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact" (CIEREI) Project to evaluate the impact of aspects of its work. Evaluative data and analysis allows the organisation to better judge value for money and inform future developments. The revised *secondary challenge and support programme*, as well as targeted elements of the professional learning leadership programmes, are currently being evaluated.

As a result of improved analysis of data, sharper target setting and accurate tracking there has been a positive impact on key performance data. Performance has improved in the Foundation Phase Indicator at a faster rate than for Wales as a whole. However, in 2017 the performance in four of the local authorities still needs improving and there are detailed plans in place to address identified inconsistencies.

Performance in the core subject indicator at key stage 2 and 3 has improved well over the past three years. In 2017, performance in these indicators has ensured that GwE is the highest performing consortia in these key indicators with 5 of the 6 local authorities performing better than that of similar authorities, based on free-school-meal eligibility.

At key stage 4, performance in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics has improved over the past three years and more importantly the gap between GwE and the two higher performing Consortia's has closed significantly.

GwE analysis of schools due to be inspected matches Estyn judgements better than any other region over a three year period.

Progress:

R2: Improve the quality of evaluation in the delivery of school improvement services.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning processes at all levels is now embedded in delivering school improvement services. These processes include:

- robust accountability framework;
- detailed evaluation of data;
- detailed business planning at all levels that feed the level one plan;
- detailed local authority business plan that accurately reflects local issues; and
- the annual report.

Following the core inspection, a robust accountability framework which ensures that each service area has a named nominated designated lead officer. Each nominated lead officer is responsible for developing a detailed business plan for their service area which includes clear dates for completion, training implications and success criteria which is measurable. Agreed priorities in the business plans are based firmly on the findings of the self-evaluation processes. These plans are reviewed quarterly and the findings are reported to the senior leaders and management board. Progress is reported appropriately and senior leaders challenge any slippage in expected progress. The regular reviews of the business plans at all levels enable senior leaders to evaluate the progress towards achieving the priorities identified in the high level plans accurately. This ensures that the business plans remain flexible to incorporate new priorities during the monitoring period if required. Each local Authority has a detailed business plan that is agreed between the head of service and the lead secondary challenge advisor. Each plan accurately identifies the key issues within the local authority and includes a bespoke improvement plan to address the specific challenges. Progress towards achieving the agreed outcomes at a local authority level is regularly reviewed in meetings between the lead challenge advisor and the head of service. Ongoing issues are escalated to senior leaders within GwE in a timely manner.

The evaluation processes now in place are cyclical and ongoing. As a result, leaders at GwE accurately identify areas of good performance and areas that require development or pose an element of risk in improving the educational experiences and outcomes for learners. The accountability framework and the detailed monitoring processes are fundamental building blocks in GwE's commitment to sustained improvement. The system contributes significantly to the effective management and development of individuals and teams to achieve high levels of personal and organisational performance.

The Annual Report is a clear and comprehensive document that provides a thorough and accurate evaluation of the service's current performance across the region. Leaders make improved use of a comprehensive range of performance data, which they analyse robustly, to compare the performance of the six local authorities with similar authorities based on free-school-meal eligibility, the performance of the region with that of others across Wales and the pace of improvement in achieving agreed targets. There is a clear link between the findings of the Annual Report and the priorities identified in the service's business plans, which are identified according to risk and impact.

GwE is working closely with Bangor University on the "Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact" (CIEREI) Project to establish more effective systems to evaluate the impact of its work over a longer period of time. Evaluative data and analysis will help further inform GwE's ability to judge value for money and inform future developments.

Recent work undertaken to develop a school dashboard provides GwE with current and ongoing data. This facilitates a higher level of communication, support and challenge between key stakeholders and allows GwE to more effectively and timely monitor the impact of its work and the progress of schools against their agreed priorities. The dashboard allows more effective use of data and analytics to evaluate the quality of delivery and its impact on the performance of all learners and schools across the region. It also allows the school improvement service to more effectively target its resources to meet its priorities and rapidly adapt and redirect resources when things are not working.

Progress:

R3: Improve the rigour of the arrangements for identifying and managing risk.

Following the core inspection, GwE carried out a thorough review of its procedures and arrangements to manage risk. It has introduced thorough and comprehensive arrangements to accurately identify and manage risks at a local, regional and national level. The risk register is a live document that is regularly updated to identify risks that are increasing or those which no longer deemed a high level risk. The risk register is reviewed monthly at the senior leadership team meeting, quarterly by the management committee and by the joint committee

The new business planning and monitoring arrangements ensure that progress is reviewed and risk rated accordingly. The overarching monitoring arrangements by lead challenge advisors and senior leaders ensure that risks at all levels are appropriately managed and interventions agreed in a timely and appropriate manner. These arrangements are monitored closely by the management board and joint committee. Effective management of the region's risk enables GwE to support the organisation's objectives, make effective use of resources and deliver outcomes as intended.

Progress:

R4: Ensure that business and operational plans contain clear success criteria and that progress against these is monitored effectively.

GwE's planning and performance management model articulates clearly the Vision, values, priorities and objectives of the service. The high level strategy plan links into more detailed team plans, with specific measurable improvement targets and clear success criteria in order to measure progress within the region accurately. GwE have set challenging and measurable objectives by 2020 to improve standards, curriculum and assessment, leadership, wellbeing and teaching which are incorporated into the business plans at all levels. The fully costed plans contain clear success criteria and milestones for reaching these objectives. All the GwE team's plans follow the same pattern and their performance is monitored effectively and in detail. There are clear lines of accountability between all levels of planning across GwE.

The clear and robust accountability framework is an important strength in GwE. Detailed plans at several levels deal with all aspects of the GwE's work. All the plans have nominated designated officers and each of them clearly input to the business plan. There are detailed self-evaluation arrangements that are based on this framework. Challenge Adviser review their plans each quarter and evaluate progress and impact. These reviews steer the evaluation of the business plan that systematically feeds into the quarterly service evaluation so that there is a clear trail of team evaluation in the corporate review. Then, new priorities from the service review are rapidly incorporated in team plans.

Staff at all levels fully understand their responsibility for continuous improvement and accountability. Sharing plans and evaluations in a clear manner brings cohesion to teams and drives the strong collaboration that has led to provision of better services and an improvement in school standards and leadership

Self-evaluation is strongly incorporated in GwE. There is a strong focus on accountability and continuous review and a constant emphasis on achieving progress in accordance with priorities. This focus on evaluation and review is leading to significant improvement.

This culture has stemmed from successful practice within GwE. Challenge Advisors must justify underperformance and identify possible risk areas including overspend. There are clearly defined lines of accountability.

Progress:

R5: Clarify the strategic role of the regional networks and their accountability to the Joint Committee.

Following the core inspection, the management committee commissioned an in-depth review of the school improvement service which included the role of the regional networks. The management board and the Joint committee endorsed the findings of the review.

As a result, the historic regional networks have either been abolished or included under the strategic management of GwE. Their accountability to the joint committee is clear.

Each area has a nominated lead person, a detailed business plan and measureable success criteria. The lead person is responsible for monitoring

progress and reporting on a quarterly basis to senior managers. Matters that require attention are referred to Regional Quality Board for further consideration.

Progress:

R6: Develop an appropriate framework to assess value for money; ensure that the business plan is accompanied by a medium-term financial plan and that work-streams are fully costed.

The consortium generally has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation about financial arrangements are effective with both core funding and grant expenditure kept under regular review by GwE staff, the host local authority and the joint committee.

A sound financial analysis supports the delivery of the revised three-year business plan. A medium-term financial plan and workforce plan are aligned to the business plan. By increasingly effective use of data to identify our key priorities, the link between the business planning process and financial planning decisions is being strengthened because the work streams that underpin the business plan identify clearly the resources to be used.

Detailed work has been undertaken to align grant allocations with our priorities. Challenge advisers now challenge schools on their use of grant funding with a clear set of criteria to assess the use of this funding and this has reduced the inconsistencies between schools about identifying the impact of the use of grant funding on pupil outcomes.

A formal framework has been developed to assess the wider value for money that GwE provides. There is now a consistent view across all stakeholders of how the value for money of GwE's activities can be measured within the business plan structure and objectives.

We now regularly evaluate and review our services and initiatives during their implementation phase to identify areas for improvement and value for money.

The Organisational Health Index (OHI) Solution provides detailed findings for how GwE is performing on the nine elements of health, related to performance.

This provides a thorough picture of how healthy the organisation is, and allows the results to be benchmarked against others. It also allows GwE to diagnose the organisation's current strengths and development needs, and help understand where action to sustain the current levels or improve over time are needed.

GwE is working with OECD to pilot the development of the Consortia as a learning organisation. The learning from this work will be shared with other

regions and internationally as we strive to further develop a vibrant and healthy organisation.
Progress: