

To: Julie Fallon

Chair of GwE Joint Committee

From: Prospect Members

xx/03/2024

Dear Julie,

As you know, the statement issued by Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, on the 31st of January 2024, refers to new arrangements that are to be implemented in relation to school improvement. This statement was released into the public domain alongside the letter to the Minister from Professor Dylan Jones to *“share these messages transparently with the sector”*.

The Minister announced the next phase of the review which essentially requires exploration of how school to school collaboration and cross LA working may occur in a move away from the current wider regional model.

This is a far-reaching statement, the importance of which cannot be underestimated. The language and assertions made within Prof Dylan Jones letter are strong, making direct reference to *“concerns about quality of support”*. This represents a direct evaluation of the performance of our workforce in GwE, and it is not one that we accept, or that we believe should have been placed in the public domain in this way.

Whilst members recognise that education and school improvement is necessarily an evolving process, indeed many of us have been through various cycles of change, we do not believe this to be an example of positive change management by the Minister. We question both the motivations and methodology of the ‘Middle Tier’ review and the subsequent communication of its findings.

We believe in fact, that the statement from the Minister has left the system in disarray. Having had their work publicly judged, our members are left unsure about their future, made even worse given the current information vacuum. However, we greatly value and acknowledge the fact that you have demonstrated support for GwE as Chair of the Joint Committee.

Our members within the regional consortia are particularly frustrated and disappointed that there has been no formal consultation with stakeholders about the recommendations. We do note however, that Phase 2 of the review should involve consultation with regional consortia, and we would welcome your continued support in ensuring that our opinions, expertise, and knowledge are heard in full.

We would like to bring your attention to the following areas and ask that these influence your own knowledge base, your discussions and subsequent decision making:

1) The Review Process and Next Steps

- As members we question whether the original Terms of Reference of the review have been adhered to particularly related to the methodology and veracity of evidence gathered.
- Furthermore, given the fact that the timelines of the review were changed mid-stream, we question how the time-contracted Phase 1 of the review process can have resulted in such far-reaching and publicly released recommendations.

- As members and school improvement experts, we ourselves are seeking to understand the true and complete implications of the recommendations and we encourage you to do the same. A surface interpretation of the recommendations without expert support will likely lead to a series of actions which are not in keeping with school improvement or potentially, will threaten the progress of our learners.
- We believe the information vacuum that all stakeholders find themselves in, including schools, Local Authorities, Elected Members, Chief Executives, alike, to be unacceptable. Not only is there a significant wellbeing and morale issue for the GwE workforce but also for Headteachers who find themselves potentially facing significant changes with regards to support and school improvement.
- The publication of a set of recommendations without a clear roadmap outlining how to fulfil them is unacceptable. We ask you to consider most carefully the full consequences of any decision making without being in receipt of the full context and details. Whilst the workforce is in favour of co-construction and collaboration as part of an evolution of support, the current lack of information points to potential chaos, disruption, and an interruption of support at a most critical time of education in Wales.
- In summary, we ask you to consider how confident we can be that proposed arrangements will provide better support for schools.

2) *Cost/benefit and other impact assessment matters*

- Clearly it will be necessary to undertake a full cost/benefit analysis. We ask stakeholders to consider how much this significant change in policy will cost in difficult budgetary times both in terms of transitioning towards any new arrangements and then operating within new arrangements. In addition to school improvement support we would ask that you also consider the financial cost to release school staff to address the proposed recommendation relating to school to school collaboration.
- We would also ask you to evaluate the extra workload on schools and Headteachers in particular, to implement any activities requiring collaboration, joint working, or school to school improvement. We would also draw your attention to formal roles and responsibilities of school leaders and how these would be impacted under any new arrangements; there is potential for an even greater weight of responsibility and/or accountability to sit with a Headteacher if they are to be formally endorsing, verifying, or providing support to another school's improvement.
- A further impact assessment should be undertaken to assess the potential impact of these changes on areas such as the Welsh Language and Equality.

3) *Statutory responsibilities of Local Authorities*

- Having a complete understanding of how the statutory responsibilities of the Local Authorities are to be fulfilled is critical. This is particularly relevant when considering the Minister's proposal in his written statement on how school improvement can best be supported at three levels. We are unclear how a school improvement model based on "*supporting school to school working at a local level*" will allow Local Authorities to fulfil their statutory function.
- The Minister also refers to "*supporting school improvement at national level*". Again, it is unclear how this will impact on the statutory responsibilities of Local Authorities.

- We believe that clarity on the two points above is critical before Local Authorities can move forward and plan any new arrangement for school improvement.

Please be assured that our workforce has the best interests of learners at its heart. We are committed to school improvement and will continue whilst we can, to support schools and learners in North Wales with compassion and to the best of our ability in extremely difficult circumstances.

We look forward to hearing the views of the GwE Joint Committee on these points.

Yours faithfully,