

Dear Graham Boase,

Thank you for engaging positively in our discussions during the recent risk and assurances workshop. I am writing to outline the assurances and risks we discussed during that workshop which are based on our work with the local authority over the last year.

**We highlighted the following assurances:**

- **The Directors of Education and Children's services collaborate effectively**

The professional collaboration between both services provides effective support for learners and their families. The cross-sector meetings, for example the Multi-agency Provision (MAP) meetings are well established and are an opportunity to share relevant information and provide bespoke provision regarding attendance and behaviour of individual learners. Additional training by both services to up skill school based pastoral staff to provide support to groups with identified learners has been beneficial, for example in supporting learners to reengage with their learning. Leaders in different providers state that they feel are well supported by officers.

- **The officers' knowledge of providers is generally effective in terms of challenge and support for leaders**

The officers know the strengths and areas for improvement well. The Family Support Officers are an invaluable part of the service and they have sound working relationships with learners and their families. This strong partnership helps learners to engage in learning. School leaders have been trained as Trauma Informed School practitioners and leaders and now 'training' their staff as there was such a high demand.

- **Inspection outcomes since restarting in February to December 2022**

- Non-maintained: 6
- Primary: 4 (including 2 best practice case studies)
- Secondary: 3 (2 in SM)
- Special/Pupil Resource Units: 2 (1 Independent Special School & 1 Independent Special College) & 1 Independent School

Inspection outcomes are generally strong across most sectors. However, 1 secondary school was placed in follow-up in July 2022.

- **Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS) Estyn thematic visit (Autumn 2022) provided valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the provision**

All EOTAS decisions are made through multi-agency panels consisting of professionals from education, inclusion services, health, psychology, education welfare officers, SNAP Cymru, youth justice.

EOTAS provision is generally broad and meets the needs of learners. The curriculum requirements are clearly set out, for example by the pupil referral unit, and is overseen by the senior leadership team and the management committee. Recently, the LA has developed a draft policy around part time timetable of pupils in terms of mapping and tracking and how often the reviews should take place.

The Local Authority (LA) expect all learners accessing any EOTAS provisions to re-integrate into mainstream education, further education, employment, or training. Staff within the outreach team are employed to support schools and learners during this process. Learners in Year 11 are supported through a multi-agency approach through the Engagement and Progress team, which includes services such as Careers Wales, Youth Service etc. In general, the provision seems appropriate for EOTAS learners. The evaluation is provided via the reports drafted for scrutiny and the regional consortia.

- **Helpful support for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform**

The ALN support for learners and their families is a strength of the local authority partly due to the effective collaboration between Education and Children Services. Leaders and practitioners are positive about the workshops and professional learning opportunities, for example to support Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCO) with the quality of the Individual Development Plans for pupils identified as needing further support in their learning. In addition, they state that lines of communication of relevant information to all partners has been effective.

The regional partnership seems to be strong and helps to ensure consistency across all local authorities.

The Costed Provision Maps inform well to the work of other partners such as Team around the Family provision and this 'joined up' approach is effective. In general, there is a beneficial working relationship with health board which results in positive impact on children and their families.

- **In general, the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) support meets the needs of leaders and practitioners**

The local authority reports that all primary schools are implementing CfW. Individual meetings with all schools by GwE Support Improvement partners provide informative plans to support their 'journey'. Leaders state that they need time to 'run with it' before being able to evaluate and make further progress, for example providing guidance regarding a deeper understanding of assessment in line with the Progression Steps.

Only 1 of the 8 secondary school (Ysgol Glan Clwyd), has officially implemented CfW since September, 2022. The Director of Education states that all 7 secondary schools are 'trailing' the principles/methodology in preparation for the statutory Y7 & Y8 implementation in September, 2023.

- **Ambitious Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plan**

The plan was approved by Cabinet members on 25 August 2022. The 5 year interim plan has been drafted with the seconded lead officer putting systems in place, for example in establishing committees responding to all 7 outcomes of the plan.

**We also highlighted the following risks that we feel you should consider as part of your improvement planning.**

- **16 out of 55 (29%) of schools in the LA have newly appointed headteachers since summer term 2020**

The local authority has a well-established induction process for newly appointed headteachers which includes a business manager and finance manager to support them in their new roles. . This support is evaluated on an annual basis and adapted following feedback provided by the new leaders. The number of new leaders highlights a potential risk in terms of sustaining effective and strong leadership. The impact of support has not yet been evaluated.

- **Providers in non-statutory and statutory follow up / schools causing concern**

- Since February 2022 - 2 providers have been placed in Estyn Review, 0 in SI & 1 in SM
- Non-maintained: 1 in ER (Early Learners Day Nursery)
- Primary: 1 in ER (Ysgol Fron Goch)
- Secondary: 2 in SM (1 in SM [Christ the Word & Well-being letter was issued highlighting concerns about safeguarding]) & Denbigh High has been in SM since 2016 [7 follow up visits])

The effectiveness of the support in helping schools to improve and be removed from follow-up is variable for example Denbigh High has been in SM for a very long period of time.

- **EOTAS (Pupils not transferring from Y10 to Y11) is variable**

Following on from the Estyn's thematic visit in Autumn term 2022 focusing on EOTAS, there seems to be a lack of clarity about the number of learners who successfully return to mainstream education and maintained their placement in the last academic year or any other previous years prior to the pandemic. This also includes learners moving on to further education, training, or employment.

- **Evaluations of services clearly focus on measuring the outcomes of young people's children in receiving the support**

The local authority processes are developing to be more focused on the impact of its services on the well-being, attainment and outcomes of learners. The newly developed regional consortia platform (C360) supports leaders in providers and officers in the local authority to share documentation and relevant papers in a more cohesive and collaborative manner. The aim is that the system will allow transparency between all partners which will result in a more bespoke and aligned support package to meet the needs of individual schools. However, it is too early to measure the impact on this new 'system' on learners' experiences and progress in providers.

#### **Variable circumstances regarding the LA's budget**

Currently, there are 3 secondary schools: (Ysgol Dinas Bran, Rhyl High School and Ysgol Glan Clwyd) with substantial reserves. Local authority officers monitor the deficit budget of 3 schools through a financial recovery plan and the local authority predicts that more schools will be managing a deficit budget in the near future.

- **The effectiveness of Scrutiny Committee members**

Scrutiny sessions are currently more about sharing information than the impact of systems and services on learners' well-being and progress. Nearly all members are new to their posts and need a lot of background information prior to moving the agenda forward during this academic year.

Kind regards,

**Richard Thomas**  
His Majesty's Inspector  
of Education and Training