

Mr Stuart Rosser  
Interim Chief Executive  
Caerphilly County Borough Council  
Tredomen Park  
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25 October 2013

Dear Mr Rosser

**Estyn Monitoring Visit 9 – 10 October 2013**

Following Estyn's inspection of education services for children and young people in July 2012, the authority was identified as requiring follow-up through Estyn monitoring. A monitoring plan was subsequently agreed with your Estyn link inspectors, and the first monitoring visit took place from the 9-10 October 2013. This letter records the outcomes of that visit.

Mrs Jane Taylor HMI led a team of three inspectors to review the progress made by the authority against three of the five recommendations arising from the previous inspection, to consider the current performance of the authority and to identify any further areas for improvement. A further monitoring visit is scheduled to evaluate progress against the remaining two recommendations. It will also review the overall progress made against all recommendations from the previous inspection and current performance overall.

The team held discussions with the leader of the council, elected members, the chief executive, senior officers, headteachers and partner representatives. Inspectors scrutinised documentation, including evidence on the progress made on each of the Estyn's recommendations.

At the end of the monitoring visit, the team reported their findings to the Interim Chief Executive, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning and the Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion.

## **Outcome of the monitoring visit**

Since the Estyn inspection in 2012, the authority has prioritised the actions needed to improve its education services for children and young people. The previous acting chief executive, the current interim chief executive and the director of education and lifelong learning acknowledged the need for swift action in order to remove barriers to progress and improve planning and performance management, in conjunction with the development of the new single integrated plan (SIP).

Elected Members and senior officers are committed to taking difficult decisions to improve provision and make effective use of resources. They have taken useful steps to bring about improvements in the three recommendations reviewed in this visit.

## **Progress on recommendations 3, 4 and 5 of the inspection report**

### **Recommendation 3: improve the robustness of self-evaluation and target setting**

Since the previous inspection in 2012 the local authority has made good progress in addressing this recommendation. It has developed appropriate self-evaluation and target setting process within the education and lifelong learning directorate.

Following useful training and regular staff meetings on data analysis and self-evaluation, lead officers are now re-evaluating their service areas and summarising their findings into succinct and useful reports. The lead officers then undergo a structured process of peer challenge, in the newly established 'challenge meetings' where they are scrutinised about the evidence for, and accuracy of, their judgements in these summative evaluation reports. This peer challenge is helping all lead officers to improve their self-evaluations and to incorporate appropriate action points into their service improvement plans.

As a result of this, lead officers are able to make more accurate judgements about their own services and have a sharper focus on areas for improvement. In addition, all lead officers have been involved in a challenge meeting with senior managers about standards. This is helping officers to develop a greater clarity of purpose in how each part of the directorate can contribute to improving standards across the authority's services for children and young people. This is contributing to a greater level of trust in each other, allowing open and honest challenge to take place, leading to a growing culture of effective self-evaluation in the authority.

The local authority is increasing its challenge to secondary schools about the targets they set themselves for performance. For example, several schools had set targets

that were too low for the proportion of Year 11 pupils that were expected to achieve the Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics. The authority is working with the school improvement service in their regional consortium to develop targets based more closely on the schools' knowledge and expectations for each individual pupil. Because of this, a clearer focus on individual pupil performance is emerging, which has been adopted by all secondary headteachers, thereby ensuring a common understanding and consistent approach to target setting in all secondary schools across the local authority. This shift in approach to target setting has led to significantly higher expectations of schools and of learners. The new approach is developing well. However, the authority will not be able to evaluate how well it impacts on learner outcomes until it becomes a routine methodology.

The local authority and the regional consortium school improvement service have identified additional interventions with pupils in each school to help them achieve their targets. The manager for Learning, Education and Inclusion is currently reviewing the 2013 results for all year 11 pupils with each headteacher, evaluating carefully the impact of interventions against targets and challenging under-performance robustly.

It is too early to demonstrate the impact of the improvements in self-evaluation and target setting on outcomes for learners

**Recommendation 4: align corporate and partnership strategic planning processes in order to make best use of available resources to improve outcomes for children and young people**

The previous Estyn inspection noted that planning processes were too complex, and that there was a lack of clarity about how well the plans of wider partnership arrangements linked with council priorities. It also noted that it was difficult to identify how well priorities were addressed because of the lack of consistency of agreed priorities across different plans.

Since then, the authority has made good progress in bringing about improvements in planning processes at Corporate and Directorate levels. Together with the improvements in self-evaluation, target setting, and performance management, this has a clear impact on the development of an authority-wide cultural change towards planning and performance management. This is designed to help officers and partners to gain a better understanding of the purpose of these processes and how to improve service delivery through effective use of them.

The senior leadership team of the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate has driven significant changes to the planning of learning across the county borough, within the authority and with external partners. In one example, the manager for

Learning, Education and Inclusion in conjunction with the regional school improvement service has developed significant changes in approach to pupil monitoring with each secondary school. This is an interesting example of how the commissioned school improvement and the local authority's inclusion services work together with schools to review individual learner progress and to plan jointly for improved learner outcomes. It is too early to indicate the success of this approach.

At corporate level, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, who is also the acting deputy chief executive, has worked closely with the previous acting chief executive, the current interim chief executive and the corporate management team, to share the improvements in planning processes achieved in her directorate. This is successfully addressing the Estyn recommendation for improvement and also supports the changes necessary for the Single Integrated Plan (SIP), 'Caerphilly Delivers' well. A useful analysis of services has led to the development of a clear Performance and Delivery Framework for 'Caerphilly Delivers'.

The Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate has established robust guidance for improvement planning. The guidance includes directorate improvement planning, service improvement plans and personal development reviews. These effectively align planning with performance, and help to enable all staff to understand their roles, responsibilities and contributions towards corporate objectives. For example, the Early Years' Service analysis shows that there is already a substantial positive impact from improved partnership planning and joint working.

Through the Children and Young People's Partnership, all partners have received a very useful guide to help them to understand self-evaluation better and their role within that process. It aims to enable them to self-evaluate their own contributions for children and young people in Caerphilly, at the level that suits them best. This is a useful foundation for future work with children and young people in Caerphilly County Borough.

**Recommendation 5: take urgent action to reduce surplus capacity in schools generally and secondary schools in particular.**

Since the inspection, the local authority has made good progress in relation to the need to reduce surplus capacity in its primary and secondary schools.

Officers and elected members have given this work a high priority. A key feature is the effective joint working between them in order to drive the proposals and plans in a timely manner. The local authority established a specific cross party working group to consider the school reorganisation options and to prioritise the way ahead. This group worked well, it considered the options over a ten week period and provided

regular updates to the elected members through the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet and the Full Council.

The local authority carried out a comprehensive review of individual secondary school capacity and an update of the School Asset Management Plan and the Schools Places Plan which provided the cross party working group with the latest evidence to inform their work. The Working Group agreed on the key principles which they used to underpin their decision making. The updated documentation and detailed plans and proposals have helped the Working Group to give due consideration to the whole range of school reorganisation options and to make valid recommendations to the full Council.

The local authority is about to implement the public consultation on the first phase of its secondary rationalisation programme and the proposals are underpinned well by a firm financial commitment by the local authority and the Welsh Government. Based on actual pupil numbers, the rationalisation proposals aim to reduce surplus places in Caerphilly County Borough Council to 16.9% in the Secondary sector and 11.9% in the Primary sector by September 2016.

### **Next steps**

Your link inspectors will continue, through their normal role with the authority, to monitor overall progress and to advise on the preparation for the final monitoring visit.

I am copying this letter to the Welsh Government and the Wales Audit Office for information.

Yours sincerely



**Clive Phillips**  
Assistant Director

cc: Welsh Government, Wales Audit Office, CCBC Director of Education and Lifelong Learning