

CONTEXT

Further to the Scrutiny report shared on March 15th 2021, CSCJES and the LA have worked together to shape and design evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements for the local authority. These are in line with the principles and processes agreed at that meeting, and as set out in the report. These arrangements will include eight aspects, as discussed in the recent June 8th 2021 workshop for members.

As a recap, the features of the work are as follows:

- Conditions for Improvement, Evaluation and Accountability
This is about the culture of the organisation – will include CSC, LA and Council corporate attitudes to improvement and accountability. The promotion in the region of self-improving schools, a systematic LA which uses powers appropriately, a supportive region, clarity of expectation regarding all reforms including ALN, and competence to plan and evaluate accordingly.
- Expectations
These are the standards set by LA – i.e. the expectations regarding literacy, numeracy, digital competence, wellbeing. These will be unique to the LA's context but align with policy expectations and reform. Recent changes to the publication of targets and pupil attainment data in external examination and to the categorisation of schools allow us to shape these expectations.
- Transparency
This is about making sure citizens and stakeholders will know what to expect at schools and service level. Also, the plans in place to deliver improvement; how the LA, schools and partners plan to get there, and how systems for accountability and improvement and escalation work. This transparency will help citizens in the LA to know and understand the Expectations, how they can support these expectations and contribute to the implementation arrangements. Stakeholders and citizens will also know about the routines and systems which will allow them to know if schools and pupils are making sufficient progress. For example, schools will share SDP online, or report to Governing Body.
- Improvement
This is the core work of the regional consortia. How schools are supported to continually improve and to enhance their own improvement planning based on accurate self-evaluation. Dependant on need, specific strategies are used and practised. This will include the work of CSC, as both IPs and strategic team. It will also include support from the LA for HR, Finance and buildings. In particular, the combined support for Governing Bodies is especially important.
- Monitoring
The monitoring arrangements give LAs confidence that the Expectations are met or not. Some of the monitoring arrangements are delegated to CSC – not all. This is one of the LAs statutory duties. The approach to monitoring is dependent on culture and conditions, as highlighted above. Along a continuum, LAs and regions can support capacity building and self-improving schools or can create a top-down approach to compliance. The approaches of the LA and region working together to monitor schools is key to securing appropriate accountability, timely intervention and should add value to schools.
- Accountability
Secure and confident accountability arrangements, within schools to the Governing Body and in the LA to Cabinet, the region to Joint Committee must be clear. Performance management of all, including the Headteacher, service level performance management, Director, CSC, Democratic accountability – Council and Scrutiny, Governing Body – via SIP Improvement Priorities. Any external Boards or inspection also here. Joint Committee for CSC work.
- Intervention
Clarity on escalation arrangements, Powers of Intervention, CSC guidance and using statutory powers/ gaining Ministerial support for intervention.

INTRODUCTION

This document will set out how the local authority will set out its **Expectations** for standards in schools. This means that as part of the RARS strategy, the local authority will design its own success criteria and set its own expectations for schools and pupils. The local authority is aware that as we shape this development in partnership with CSC and our schools and stakeholders that we need to make sure that standards are high, that expectations of pupils are at least in line with academic expectations for their age and include a broad range of well-being measures.

As set out above, this approach aims to support the LA to develop arrangements to hold the Council and subsequently its Officers to account.

Approaches and Engagement

This approach has been developed with stakeholders and noted below are the formal opportunities used to discuss and work at detail in this paper.

- May 17th 1.00-2.00pm Headteacher discussion
- May 17th 4.00pm Governing Body workshop
- May 18th Leader, Chief Executive, Corporate Team in LA
- May 27th further detailed discussion with Strategic Group of Heads
- May 27th further discussion with Governing Body Chairs and Vice Chairs
- June 7th Elected Member workshop
- June – discussions with school leaders
- June 30th workshop with school leaders
- July – Scrutiny Committee

Together, the LA and CSC established a working group of officers and school leaders. This group drew together the feedback from Governors, wider group of school leaders, senior officers including the Chief Executive and in his Senior Leadership Team elected members and local authority staff.

Themes from the feedback included:

- a clear opportunity to shape a contextualised system to drive improvement where and when we want it locally;
- the need to focus on schools as safe places, a haven to support learners and their families;
- the need to focus on positives within the schools and maintain a momentum and the desire to get the best for citizens of Merthyr Tydfil;
- allow pupils to develop an awareness of their local community, Wales and the world as active informed citizens;
- support self-confidence, mental and physical wellbeing through oracy, literacy, numeracy, physical literacy and digital competence;
- the outcomes should align to the notions embedded in the new Curriculum for Wales;
- the strengths of building democratic accountability in from the outset and aligning to the LAs strategic objectives;
- the need for a common approach across the LA to give a consistent baseline in a pupil's early years of schooling and then tracking the pupil's performance up to age 16 and beyond;
- the need for assessments to support the learning of individuals by providing diagnostic information on their strengths and weaknesses;
- assurances that data is used appropriately, and that schools are protected and safeguarded from use of pupil data for high stakes accountability;

- the need for primary and secondary schools to use the same approaches to assessment to improve the quality and value of information transferred between schools;
- the need for schools to be held accountable for the progress of their learners by their GBs; and
- ensure that the LA has high-level data to shape strategy and provide democratic accountability to elected members, and monitor the effectiveness of Governing Bodies in leading school improvement;

Others felt it was appropriate to avoid shaping a local approach to support the implementation of the RARS and national policy incentives. This feedback included:

- the sense that WG would shape and dictate expectations in due course;
- the notion that RARS does not refer to primary schools being in need of improvement;
- the notion that many schools have individually an excellent knowledge of their own pupils through the strategies that are already in place;
- schools have autonomy in how they carry out non-statutory assessment, and that
- collaboration and mutual improvement across the LA was not a priority for all school leaders.

Under the Chief Education Officer's guidance, this working group is tasked with shaping and working over the coming academic year 2021-22, on building a mutually owned process, that allows the best practice to be identified and shared, but also challenges any perceptions which do not raise the bar for learners in the authority's schools.

What do we want to do?

- establish a clear set of expectations for school in relation to pupil outcome and progress;
- support all schools to share and use a common system and approach to implementation which will build trust and consistency in the validity of data;
- It is expected that this will become a bespoke model for Merthyr and its constituent schools to use to raise standards and to support pupils to get the best outcomes possible.

Why do we want to do it?

- the local authority is aware that there are inconsistent expectations and inconsistent standards in schools across the authority. In addition, the region's work in supporting and monitoring of schools identified that there was good and effective practice ready to be shared. School leaders have also identified that there is variation in the implementation arrangements for specific tests and support strategies.

PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Initially the group established some core expectations and principles and relation to behaviour and how we wanted the set of expectations to support school improvement across the local authority.

These principles are as follows:

- broad, no single indicator;
- promoting data sharing between schools to support learner progression;
- protecting and safeguarding schools from use of pupil data for high stakes accountability;
- support transition at many points;
- collaborative and school led, cross LA approach;
- providing quality data within schools to promote learner progression and set high aspiration;
- allow practice to be shared and build teacher capacity and learning as we focus on Curriculum for Wales;
- common understanding of what data is used for which purpose, including what data is used by schools, for GB reports, LA, for democratic accountability. Clarifying the improvement, transparency and accountability purposes; and
- build a picture of pupils throughout their school careers and beyond.

These principles reflect well those set out in Welsh Government's draft guidance on school improvement. In addition, to these principles we also agreed a set of agreed content expectations as we shape the arrangements.

Content

- sets and agrees a common baseline;
- consistency in expectation and approach across LA;
- teaching and provision aligned to Curriculum for Wales;
- self-evaluation and improvement focused;
- attainment and achievement;
- allows for effective analysis to support intervention at pupil/ teacher level and supports the universal provision aspect of the ALN Act;
- diagnostic assessments and analysis which support interventions and expectations;
- allows for tracking of attainment and progress within years, between years and between settings.

NEXT STEPS

As we shape the next stages, the following considerations will be part of the working group's thinking.

1. Terminology: Standards, expectations, entitlement, aspiration,
2. Content: Academic, wellbeing, community based
3. Technical: Legal, data sharing, IT solutions, statutory duties
4. Practice: Best practice, common systems, research and evaluation, professional learning and capacity building, policy and curriculum context
5. System level benefits:
 - Pupils
 - Any system would give diagnostic feedback that would allow teachers to individualise learning;
 - Learners would know which areas they need to work on;
 - All learners would be treated fairly through having a common approach to assessments; and
 - When a pupil transfers between settings, teachers will have a common picture of their progress, thus making transition more effective and accelerating learning.
 - School
 - A common approach that is understood by all and supported by Improvement Partners;
 - Peer support through Improvement Partners identifying areas of need / good practice and facilitating collaborative work;
 - Improved links between primary and secondary schools; and
 - Sharing and notion of Merthyr pupil being supported by all.
 - Local authority
 - A shared set of expectations for all stakeholders, designed and shaped together;
 - the opportunity to create a framework for Merthyr that is bespoke and sector-leading; and
 - the capacity to report to Elected Members on the progress of groups of pupils across the Borough.
 - Region
 - A shared approach to accountability within Merthyr;
 - the opportunity to learn from and replicate the approach throughout the region.
6. Cost and value for money – collaboration, existing packages and opportunities
7. Access and communication – who will see what, when and for what purpose?
8. Reform, rebuild, recover arrangements to support school community post Covid.

Plan for 2021-22 academic year

This will be led by the 'coalition of the willing' working group under the joint leadership of the LA and CSC. Using a collegiate capacity building approach, the aim will be, as noted earlier, to build a bespoke package which will include a broad range of tools/ approaches.

There will be three main aspects to the plan as set out below.

- **Setting the expectation** – establishing the norm, non-negotiables, shared understanding, high aspirations
- **Affirm** – test, evaluate, analyse the information
- **Intervention** – provision, support for pupils and / or teachers

Specific tasks will include:

- Teachers will work together to **shape the expectations of pupils at each year group** – prioritise Years 6/7, 2/3
- **Mapping approaches** in schools and then evaluate their effectiveness by IPs – what, when, why, frequency
- **Agreed approaches** to establish what data is used for which purpose by whom.