



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**Report following the monitoring visit to the
EAS Consortium
Tredomen Gateway
Tredomen Park
Ystrad Mynach
Hengoed
CF82 7EH**

Date of visit: September 2017

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and
Training in Wales**

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Introduction

In May 2016, Estyn inspected the school improvement services provided by the EAS. In September 2017, Estyn visited the EAS to review the progress made by the consortium in relation to the recommendations identified in the inspection.

In evaluating progress for each recommendation we considered the following:

- 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 as well as 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 enough within its working practices to secure sustained improvement?

In coming to a view about the progress against the recommendations, the monitoring team took into account the trends in performance over the last five years as a context for the evaluation of the impact of its work in schools. However, it is important to note that outcomes cannot be attributed to solely to the work of the regional consortium as other partners in the system also play an important role.

The monitoring team considered a range of evidence including the consortium's business planning, evaluations, challenge advisers' reports, target setting procedures, risk assessments and the views of headteachers.

Estyn does not plan to make any further follow-up visits to the EAS. Any remaining areas for improvement will be monitored informally by Estyn's regional link inspector and the relevant local authority link inspectors, and considered during future inspections of local government education services.

Progress since the inspection

Recommendation 1: Consider the use of a wider range of performance indicators at school and regional level to ensure that the progress of all groups of learners is challenged and supported

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

The EAS provides schools and local authorities with useful analyses of a comprehensive range of performance data.

Governance groups including the Joint Executive Group (JEG) and the EAS Company Board receive helpful summaries of performance, including that of groups of learners. Officers use this data well for a range of purposes. For example, they use it along with contextual information about schools to maintain a register of schools causing concern. This enables them to allocate challenge and support proportionately. The range of indicators in the business plan now also includes a wider range of targets, for example the capped point score and A*-A for core subjects at key stage 4.

Senior managers provide clear and helpful guidance to schools and challenge advisers that supports the target setting process well. Schools are strongly directed to take into account prior attainment, comparative data and information about performance provided by the Welsh Government in order to set targets with an appropriate degree of challenge. The EAS expects schools to set a range of targets for the performance of pupils based on the latest Welsh Government legislation. The EAS also requires secondary schools to set targets for outcomes at A*-A for core subjects at key stage 4. Schools are required to set targets for individual pupils, which the EAS aggregates to school level for all indicators. However, the consortium does not prompt schools well enough to consider these aggregated targets across a sufficient range of groups of learners, such as boys and girls, or those with additional learning needs. As a result, the EAS and schools have a weaker grasp of the starting point of these groups and consequently the progress they are making.

Principal challenge advisers ensure their teams support schools to set suitable targets for required indicators. They carry out their evaluation role effectively for this aspect of their work and link well with local authorities when agreeing targets. Together, the EAS and local authorities take robust and decisive action when schools are reluctant to set suitably aspirational targets for learners.

The consortium has strengthened its challenge to schools about how well schools are evaluating their progress towards targets. Schools and challenge advisers understand the system well. All schools are required to account for the progress of individual pupils regularly during the academic year. In primary schools, challenge advisers have a sharp focus on the progress of vulnerable pupils. Challenge advisers do not focus consistently on these pupils across all secondary schools.

The quality of challenge across the full range of indicators in the secondary sector is variable. In the best examples, challenge advisers and secondary school leaders

scrutinise progress towards all targets in detail and ask headteachers to justify the progress of all pupils and groups towards their targets. This includes A*- A grade targets at key stage 4 and the capped points score. Together they also scrutinise the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals to ensure that they are on track to meet the targets set for them. EAS advisers from the core subject teams work alongside challenge advisers to validate outcomes in books and lessons. This is enabling the EAS and their partner authorities to have a clear view of progress in these schools.

However, despite the strengthening of target setting and evaluation systems, in a majority of secondary schools challenge advisers still focus on too narrow a range of indicators. In particular, there is insufficient emphasis in these schools on the attainment and progress of pupils that are more able, and vulnerable groups. This means that it is difficult for schools or the consortium to evaluate how effective their strategies are for these groups and whether these pupils make good progress.

Recommendation 2: Improve consistency in the quality of evaluation of school improvement activities throughout the service

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection in 2016, senior officers have ensured that all teams within the organisation are implementing consistent approaches to evaluating their work. All stakeholders understand well the evaluation processes. The EAS use the FADE (focus, activity, do, evaluate) approach more consistently to evaluate the work of the service and apply it to all school improvement activities.

There is a detailed timetable of activity that sets out when each aspect of the work of the service is to be evaluated. This document also sets out clearly the officers responsible for the evaluation of each service area.

Senior managers now evaluate the work of challenge advisers effectively and hold them to account well for the quality of their work in most instances. Quality assurance processes are thorough and help to ensure that senior managers tackle underperformance of their own advisers robustly. In addition, senior officers challenge and support advisers well to improve their work through the performance management system. As a result, local authorities and headteachers are more confident that challenge advisers provide good levels of challenge and support to their schools.

During the last academic year, the Brokerage, Intervention and Support (BIS) team has adopted similar approaches to evaluate the work of their advisers. An evaluation of the impact of the work of the BIS team has resulted in the EAS taking a different approach to the way they support identified schools. Support programmes are now bespoke to each school, delivered through a school-to-school working approach and monitored by service area lead advisers. This way of working has led to closer collaborative working practices between the challenge advisers and the subject advisers. As a result, support programmes for schools are better aligned to their needs, linking directly to the areas needing improvement that were identified during

the categorisation process.

Many evaluations of school improvement work now concentrate more precisely on the specific actions that school leaders need to take to bring about improvements in their school. These include focusing on pupil performance and the quality of teaching and leadership. In addition, all advisers' evaluations now consider a wider range of firsthand evidence to help the EAS evaluate provision and leadership and identify the precise aspects of their work that need to improve. Advisers gather the evidence through a range of suitable activities such as classroom observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and taking account of pupils' views.

In most instances, FADE evaluations now link more clearly to other evaluative documents made about school progress. For example, they are used more effectively to evaluate specific aspects of the overall school support plan. However, during the last academic year, a minority of evaluations, especially of secondary school performance, do not focus specifically enough on outcomes for pupils or the quality of teaching and leadership. As a result, these documents are not helpful in identifying for the school or the EAS exactly what needs to improve. EAS managers have identified these shortcomings through the EAS's quality assurance processes and have strengthened their systems in response.

Senior managers make honest and accurate evaluations of the strengths and shortcomings in the school improvement activities that they provide for schools. They have a clear understanding of how to link the findings from self-evaluation activities to improvement planning.

Recommendation 3: Identify and manage risks more effectively

Very good progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the inspection, the consortium has made very good progress in addressing this recommendation.

The EAS has produced a new risk management policy and guidance document and has shared this with all staff. These documents provide useful direction for EAS managers in the identification, categorisation and mitigation of risks which are then included on the risk analysis register. The register also includes useful summaries of risks, and is updated regularly according to the level of risk. For example, senior managers review very high risks every two months.

In addition to senior managers, the senior leadership team have all received training in how to identify and manage risks. Senior managers have used performance development reviews to ensure that senior staff across the EAS are suitably involved in the risk management process.

Risk management has a much higher profile in the consortium than at the time of the inspection. EAS officers and staff discuss risks and mitigation measures in meetings at all levels. The audit and risk assurance committee, the company board and the JEG all monitor and challenge these risks regularly. For example, the EAS has correctly identified the risk of failing to attract and deploy high quality staff to work

with the schools in the region. The EAS has developed appropriate workforce planning and succession management strategies to mitigate against these risks.

Chief officers of the partner local authorities have a good understanding of the risks identified by the EAS and monitor these risks in their cross directorate meetings. There is an improved alignment between individual local authority risks and the EAS risks.

Recommendations

In order to maintain and improve on this progress, the consortium should continue to sustain the level of progress it has already made, and continue to address those inspection recommendations where further progress is required.