



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Analysis of training and development needs of pupil referral unit management committees

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The Welsh Government would like to thank the Welsh Local Government Association and its researcher Rod Alcott for undertaking this analysis.

Further information

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Background

This report sets out the findings from a project looking at the training and developmental needs of Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Management Committee (MC) members across Wales.

This project is a sub-set of a larger piece of work to develop a Framework for Action to improve standards in Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)¹ being overseen by a task and finish group established by the Welsh Government (WG). The fieldwork was conducted over the period October 2016 to January 2017. Given the mix of approaches adopted for this project (see below) it is inevitable that evidence would be gathered that is relevant to the effective functioning of Management Committees and, more widely, PRUs themselves, but falls outside the agreed specification. Falling outside the specification does not invalidate this evidence but does require it to be presented separately, in the form of further observations, as Appendix 5 to this report.

¹ EOTAS is education provision designed to meet the specific needs of a relatively small cohort of pupils. There were around 2,110 pupils in EOTAS in 2015/16.

Project objective

The objective of this project was to establish the training and development needs of MC members and provide suggestions as to how these needs might be met.

The study has contributed to this final objective by:

- gathering information on the composition and modus operandi of MCs;
- identifying the barriers preventing MCs making a more effective contribution to the performance of PRUs;
- considering how these barriers might be addressed and the role that training and development might play in addressing these barriers; and
- considering how identified training and development needs could be met.

Project methodology

The approach comprised:

- an initial desk based document review;
- meetings with Teachers in Charge²;
- attending MC meetings;
- meetings with Local Authority Officers;
- meetings with Estyn;
- raising awareness of the project through speaking at an Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) meeting;
- liaising with the Director of Governors Wales;
- developing, producing and distributing questionnaire surveys;
- collating and analysing evidence that has been gathered;
- drafting an interim report.
- meeting with the EAS Challenge Advisor and lead for governor support;
- creating and analysing an overview of Estyn inspection reports (shared and agreed with Estyn);
- analysing questionnaire responses; and
- producing a final report

The document review comprised consideration of earlier work on the subject from several sources to provide background information and understanding. A list of all the people who have been spoken to face to face and all the MCs attended is included as Appendix 1 to this report. The questionnaire that was distributed to MC members is included as Appendix 2 to this report; and a summary of responses is included as Appendix 3. The overview of Estyn inspection reports is included as Appendix 4 to this report.

The final phase of the project involved analysis of the returns from the questionnaire that is included as Appendix 2 to this report. The questionnaire had a wide circulation that both included, and went beyond, MC members that had already been involved. Analysis of returns enabled the findings from observation and interviews to be validated and supplemented as necessary.

² Some PRUs use the term Headteacher while others use the term Teacher in Charge. The term Teacher in Charge will be used throughout this report to refer to both designations

Findings from the study

The headline messages from the study in relation to the four strands of activity referred to earlier are set out below.

The composition and modus operandi of MCs (based on observation of eight MC meetings and survey results)

- Most of the attendees were employees of the respective Local Authority either as teachers in the PRU, education officers or related professionals and this was confirmed through survey responses where 83% of respondents identified as staff members or local authority representatives.
- Survey responses show that most members have joined their MC as a result of being nominated by the local authority, some have been invited by the MC, some have volunteered and none appear to have gone through any formal application process.
- Most members are relatively new to the role with survey responses showing that 64% of respondents have joined since 2015 when the legal requirement for an MC was introduced.
- The majority (61%) of survey respondents had not had school governor experience prior to joining their MC.
- Only two of the meetings attended had a parent representative present and one of those was attending for the first time
- Only one meeting attended had a representative from the local business community (a local restaurant owner who was attending for the first time)
- Five meetings attended were chaired by local authority officers, one was chaired by an elected member and two by community members
- The conduct of meetings was informal with little business directed via the Chair. The Chair's role appeared generally to be one of ensuring the agenda was followed rather than directing and summarising the debate or discussion
- The overall approach tended to be passive and retrospective rather than proactive and forward looking
- Agendas were heavy (with twenty items in one case) and the volume of business was often not conducive to considered reflection by the MCs within time constrained meetings
- Some MCs operate a system of sub-committees to look at issues in more detail, but sub-committee reports were only brought forward in one meeting
- Some MCs used sub-committees to broaden their base of expertise by involving individuals who are not members of the MC
- There was anecdotal evidence that in some cases sub-committees were seen to be more challenging (and the challenge more appropriate) because they were considering specific issues relating to the PRU in more detail
- Some MCs meet termly while others meet half-termly
- The tone of the meetings was overwhelmingly supportive, non-challenging, accepting of what was presented and the focus was operational rather than

strategic. Survey responses supported this with 33% of respondents identifying their MC as high support/low challenge compared to 3% identifying as low support/high challenge. Similarly, 29% of respondents identified their MC as having an operational bias as opposed to 12% with a strategy bias.

- The tendency towards the focus being operational rather than strategic was exacerbated on occasions by agendas that in terms of both size and content encouraged this approach.

The barriers that are preventing MCs making a more effective contribution to the performance of PRUs:

A prerequisite to identifying barriers is clarity regarding what constitutes an effective contribution. Evidence gathered through this study suggests that the critical prerequisites for effectiveness are providing support that includes challenge, and contributing to strategic leadership. Through conversations with Estyn, reading inspection reports and attending MC meetings, it is clear, that MCs are generally supportive in terms of offering advice, encouragement and congratulation on positive achievement; and therefore, the provision of support, in this context is not an area of particular concern. The issue is one of achieving the optimal balance between this kind of support and providing the necessary challenge. While more challenge is deemed necessary it must be made clear that the challenge that is being sought is an informed and constructive one, not an aggressive or adversarial one. In addition to the nature of the challenge, it is also important that challenge is multi-directional with a willingness to challenge the PRU leadership, the local authority and the consortium.

In relation to strategic leadership, MCs need to understand the difference between intervention at a strategic level ('what' needs to be done) and interference in the operational management responsibilities of the Teacher in Charge and staff of the PRU ('how' actions are carried out).

If one accepts the above, then it follows that this needs to be clearly understood by MC members if they are to perform their role effectively. Survey results in relation to the split of activity between strategic and operational approaches show that 29% of respondents identified their MC as having an operational bias as opposed to the 12% who identified a strategy bias. These findings support the findings from observation of MCs as part of this study and Estyn inspection reports.

However, while understanding their role is essential if MC members are to perform effectively, having this knowledge is not enough in itself to guarantee effective performance. To perform effectively MC members, need to know:

- what they are expected to do;
- how they are expected to do it; and
- why they are expected to do it.

In relation to the 'what', there is clear guidance from the Welsh Government regarding composition and roles and responsibilities and survey results show that 94% of

respondents had been given, or been directed towards, this guidance. However, its use appears to be restricted to that of a compliance tool, particularly in relation to MC composition and the rules around being quorate. The issue here is not one of availability of support material but rather one of MCs making insufficient use of what is available.

In relation to the *'how'* there is some emerging clarity for MC members as a result of the messages coming from Estyn, particularly with regards to the need for more challenge. However, while these messages provide a clear pointer in terms of expectations regarding performance, there is still a void when it comes to equipping members to perform in this way.

In relation to the *'why'*, there appears to be little common understanding of why MCs exist in terms of what precipitated the need for them. This general lack of understanding was captured in the phrase *'I would love to know what the thinking behind it was'* that was used by one interviewee when discussing the Welsh Government's guidance.

Consideration of how these barriers might be addressed:

In summary, these barriers might be addressed through:

- making better use of the Welsh Government's guidance to address the *'what'* issue in relation to the role and responsibilities of MCs;
- developing a case study approach³ to illustrate *'how'* that role is best performed in relation to issues of understanding data, providing support and challenge and providing strategic direction; and
- addressing the *'why'* MCs are important through the production of an explanatory note that forms part of any induction training or handbook.;

The role that member training and development might play in addressing these barriers:

Clearly there are issues surrounding effectiveness that are not easily resolved through training and development. In particular, issues such as the breadth of membership, frequency of meetings and attendance at meetings require approaches that are independent of training. Nevertheless, member training and development has a key role to play in addressing the barriers that appear to exist currently. In particular, it has a key role to play in equipping members to address the issue of *'how'* they are expected to perform their role.

Consideration of how identified training and development needs could be met:

Given the similarities between the functions of MCs and school governing bodies, the obvious starting point in seeking to meet the training and development needs of MC members is to examine the wide range of training materials available for governors. This examination needs to ascertain whether what is available is:

- relevant;
- collectively exhaustive (covers the range of potential training needs); and

³ An example of this approach is included on page 8 of this report.

- capable of being tailored to recognise the differences that exist between the respective bodies.

An initial trawl through the materials and comparing them with survey results suggests that they would meet the first and third criteria but might need to be supplemented to cover the range of identified needs.

Based on MC observations and survey responses, it appears that the approach needs to involve tailoring the generic core of the governor training modules; and recognising any need to supplement them with additional material.

For illustrative purposes, we can take the issue of providing challenge as an example of the way in which this approach might work. Observation of meetings, and conversations with members, suggest that there is a need to address the 'why' to challenge as well as the 'how'.

In relation to the 'why', the training needs to address current perceptions around support and challenge. There is a tendency to equate support with encouragement and empathy for PRU staff and pupils in a quasi-pastoral sense. This contrasts with the rather negative view of challenge that appears to prevail, where for many it is seen as implying criticism and the apportioning of blame, with consequent concerns about the appropriateness of such an approach. More universally it is seen as something that needs to be done to satisfy Estyn, rather than something that can add value to, and is intrinsic to, the search for continual improvement.

It is essential, therefore, when considering support to emphasise that the overall purpose of support is to support improvement in outcomes for PRU pupils, and that support for PRU staff, in a pastoral sense, is a component of this wider role. If one accepts that constructive challenge is also a catalyst for improved outcomes, then it becomes possible to view it as a component of support rather than its antithesis. It is probably more helpful to think that there is a range of support mechanisms, of which challenge is one; rather than think in terms of a spectrum where support and challenge are presented as polar opposites. The current perception appears to be that a Management Committee can **either** challenge **or** support rather than challenge **as part of** support.

Clarifying the nature and purpose of challenge to convince MC members of its role and value would be a necessary precursor to engaging them in training to equip them with the skills and knowledge to undertake effective challenge. It might be that in any future training package for MC members it will be important, within the presentation of support and challenge, to recognise challenge as an integral component of support rather than an alternative. Perhaps the training should encourage MC members to consider the extent to which they use constructive challenge as part of their toolkit for supporting improvement.

In essence the training needs to be designed to take MC members through acceptance and on to practice. In relation to practice, and sticking with the example of challenge, it might be worth considering a case study approach such as that outlined below.

Example 1: (a composite from a number of observations)

The quality of teaching, based on lesson observation, is an item in the Teacher in Charge's report to the MC. The observation shows that the percentage of lessons deemed to be good or better was 70%, an improvement on the previous year. The MC noted the improvement, congratulated the Teacher in Charge, and moved on to the next item. What are the training issues that this illustrates in relation to how the MC could/should have acted? What questions could have been asked in relation to understanding data and providing support and challenge?

To ensure that they fully understood the data that was being presented to them, members could have asked:

- what are the different categories that lessons are placed in?
- what criteria are used to determine categorisation?
- who undertakes the observations? and
- how is the categorisation moderated?

In relation to providing challenge, members could have asked:

- was the cohort of teachers being observed the same for both years (to establish whether the same staff were now performing better or whether the improvement was due to new staff)?
- if the cohort was the same, were the same people responsible for the lessons categorised as less than good in both years?
- if it was the same people, what has been/is being done to improve their performance? and
- what steps are being/will be taken in the event of no improvement in the quality of their teaching?

The members could also have asked if there was anything they could do to support the leadership of the PRU, particularly in relation to dealing with any persistent underperformance.

All of the above could/should have taken place in the context of recognising and applauding the improvement while expressing concern that 30% of lessons observed were less than good and seeking assurance that this was being addressed.

If this case study approach was favoured, then it would be possible to draw up a list of frequently occurring issues and develop exemplar case studies for them. The list could include issues such as attendance, attainment, exclusions and well-being indicators.

In considering the training needs of MC members, consideration will also need to be given to how the potentially differentiated needs of members can be met. It is quite possible that the training needs of the Head of Inclusion for a local authority might be quite different to those of, for instance, a parent member. However, evidence from observation suggests that when it comes to issues such as challenge a common approach would probably be appropriate.

Conclusions from the study

From the work undertaken it appears that in relation to the way Management Committees currently operate:

- MCs are not clear about the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of their role
- Insufficient use is being made of the Welsh Government's guidance in relation to clarifying the 'what'
- MCs generally are currently in the position that school governing bodies were in ten years ago

From the work undertaken it appears that in relation to the training needs of MC members:

- The most obvious starting point for the development of training materials is to examine what is currently available for school governors and consider the feasibility of tailoring these materials to meet the needs of MCs
- The difficulty of recruiting members means that great care needs to be taken to ensure that training to improve effectiveness is seen as adding maximum value with minimum additional burden

Specifically the training will need to address:

- The need for clarity in relation to the roles and responsibilities of MCs and the consequent need to be familiar with Welsh Government guidance
- The need for clarity around the purpose of MCs and the ethos and purpose of PRUs. Survey results support this with respondents ranking various training topics (with 1 as the most important and 5 as the least important) as follows;
 1. Understanding the ethos and purpose of the PRU
 2. Understanding the role of the Management Committee
 3. How to act as a 'critical friend' providing support and challenge
 4. How to provide leadership to the PRU
 5. Understanding data
- Other training topics that were suggested by respondents including;
 - Understanding the needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people attending the PRU
 - Understanding the link between the Local Authority, the Management Committee and schools
 - Understanding the role and expectations of a Management Committee member
 - Specific topics such as finance, performance management, safeguarding, benchmarking of expected outcomes, the use of wellbeing measures
- The different needs of individual members

- The current situation where the need for more challenge is consistently pointed to by Estyn, but the role and value of challenge, beyond satisfying Estyn, is not widely appreciated
- The perception that challenge is synonymous with criticism and apportioning blame rather than part of a toolkit for supporting improvement
- The perception that challenge is seen as an end in itself rather than recognising that it is only through action taken in response to challenge that things improve
- Any possibility that an emphasis on improving the level of challenge fails to take note of the very important role that advice, praise and encouragement play in what is a very difficult environment for staff to work in

Recommendations

- Establish the feasibility and sufficiency of tailoring⁴ existing Governor training to meet the training needs of MC members identified in this study.
- Consider alternative sources of training materials and develop new training materials as necessary to ensure that the full range of training needs identified in this study are met.
- Ensure that consideration of mandatory and voluntary approaches and differentiation of need form part of any training and development package for MC members.
- Ensure that any future training emphasises the role that the performance of MCs play in relation to leadership and improving quality, and the role that these play in Estyn judgements.

⁴ Tailoring in this context refers to adapting existing training materials to reflect the different roles and responsibilities of governing bodies of autonomous schools compared with management committees of local authority PRUs.

Appendix 1: Contact list

The fieldwork involved contact with Teacher in Charges, either individually or as members of MCs from the following PRUs:

- Canolfan yr Afon (Blaenau Gwent)
- Bridge Achievement Centre (Newport)
- Bridgend Portfolio
- Bryn Y Deryn (Cardiff)
- Canolfan Addysg Nant-y-Bryniau (Conwy)
- Denbighshire Portfolio
- Flintshire Portfolio
- Monmouthshire Portfolio
- Powys Portfolio
- Ty Glyn (Torfaen)
- Wrexham Portfolio

The fieldwork involved observation of MC meetings in the following local authorities:

- Blaenau Gwent
- Bridgend
- Flintshire
- Monmouthshire
- Newport
- Powys
- Torfaen
- Wrexham

The fieldwork involved contact with the following individuals:

- Jassa Scott: Assistant Director, Estyn
- Jeanette Rock: Senior Manager Inclusion & Progression, Flintshire Council
- Phil Norton: Achievement Leader, City of Cardiff Council
- Steve Davies: Challenge Advisor EAS
- Elizabeth Everson; Governor Training Lead EAS

Appendix 2: Survey questionnaire

Management Committee Survey Member Questionnaire

Name: _____

Occupation: _____

Name of PRU (please detail below):

**In what capacity, do you serve as a member of the Management Committee?
(Please place an X in the appropriate box)**

Parent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sponsor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is your role? Please place an X in the appropriate box below:

Chair	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 1. Appointment process

a) How were you appointed? Please provide details below.

b) When were, you appointed?

-
- c) Have you been given, or been directed to, the Welsh Government's guidance on the role and responsibilities of Management Committee members?

YES/NO (Please delete as appropriate)

- d) Did you have previous school governor or Management Committee experience prior to being appointed to the Management Committee?

YES/NO (please delete as appropriate)

- e) If **YES**, did you receive any training for that role?

YES/NO (please delete as appropriate)

- f) If you answered **YES**, what training did you receive and how useful has it been for your current role?
-

Question 2. Training and development

A) Have you received any training for your current role as a Management Committee member?

YES/NO (Please delete as appropriate)

i.) If **No**, do you think training would have been helpful for the role?

Yes / No (please delete as appropriate).

ii.) If you answered **Yes**, what training did you receive and how beneficial has it been to your role? Please detail below.

B) If training was to be developed for Management Committee members, which of the following do you consider to be the most important to the role. Please rank in order of importance with **1** being the most important and **5** the least important:

Before responding to this question please read the following brief explanatory note:

The term 'critical friend' is hard to define - 'questioning friend' might be more appropriate. The word 'critical' is used in the sense of the Management Committee's responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the PRU's effectiveness and the continual striving for improvement. Although Management Committees should provide support, they must not be afraid to ask challenging questions and seek further information or clarification when necessary.

Management Committee members need an understanding of PRU performance data and the knowledge to enable them to ask questions about the data to fulfil their role effectively to raise standards in the PRU. They also need to be able to identify possible implications for the PRU from the data and any action that needs to be taken.

Understanding the ethos and purpose of the PRU

Understanding the role of the Management Committee

How to act as a 'critical friend' providing support and challenge

How to provide leadership to the PRU

Understanding data

If there are any other areas where you think training would be helpful, please specify what these would be.

C.) If training was to be provided do you think it should be:

All mandatory

Some mandatory

All voluntary

If you have indicated that some should be mandatory, please specify which elements these would be.

Question 3. Strategic Leadership, Challenge & Support

Management Committees are expected to provide strategic leadership combined with challenge and support.

A) In relation to the **strategic role**, please tick the box that best describes your Committee:

Concentrates mainly on strategy (what needs to be done)

Concentrates mainly on operational issues (how actions are carried out)

Splits time equally between strategic and operational

B) In relation to **support and challenge** please place an **X** in the box that best describes your Committee:

High support/high challenge

High support/low challenge

Low support/high challenge

Low support/low challenge

C) The following details **the role(s) contained in Welsh Government statutory guidance with regard to each Management Committee.**

Please rank each in order of importance. Where 1 indicates the most important role and 3 the least important role as far as the Committee is concerned.

Setting out appropriate aims and objectives

Identifying and including policies, targets and priorities

Setting out arrangements for monitoring and reviewing aims and objectives and whether the policies, targets and priorities are being achieved

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Please return by Friday 13 January.

Electronic copies to rjacon@hotmail.co.uk

and paper copies to:

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Appendix 3: Summary of survey responses

Survey Return Summary

- 35 returns from 12 different local authorities
- Majority of respondents were LA officers
- Category of membership:
 - 22 (65%) local authority;
 - 6 (17.5%) staff;
 - 6 (17.5%) community;
 - none from parent or sponsor
- 4 (11%) returns from Chairs; 31 (89%) from members
- Appointment process largely nomination by local authority; some approaches from Committee; some as part of job and a minority of volunteers. No evidence of interviews or formal application process
- 18 out of 28 (64%) of respondents had been appointed from 2015 onwards
- 31 (94%) of respondents said that they had been given, or been directed towards, WG's guidance while 2 (6%) said they had not
- 13 out of 33 (39%) of respondents had previous School Governor or Management Committee experience while 20 (61%) had not; with 10 (77%) of those with prior governor experience having received governor training
- 30 out of 34 (88%) of respondents had not received training for their current role as a MC member while 4 (12%) of respondents replied that they had received training for their current role on MC
- 2 of those who had received training had received/accessed governor training; 1 had received training from the LA and Estyn; and 1 had received bespoke training through ERW as part of the Challenge Advisor role
- 21 out of 27 (78%) felt that training would have been helpful for the role with 6 (22%) saying it would not have been helpful. The reason for not considering it to be useful was that the respondents felt that their job role and knowledge meant that they would have received little or no benefit from training although some did indicate that they could see that training could be of value for other MC members
- The rank order for various training topics (with 1 as the most important and 5 as the least important) was as follows;
 1. Understanding the ethos and purpose of the PRU
 2. Understanding the role of the Management Committee
 3. How to act as a 'critical friend' providing support and challenge
 4. How to provide leadership to the PRU
 5. Understanding data

- Other training topics that were suggested included;
 - Understanding the needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people attending the PRU
 - Understanding the link between the Local Authority, the Management Committee and schools
 - Understanding the role and expectations of a Management Committee member
 - Specific topics such as finance, performance management, safeguarding, benchmarking of expected outcomes, the use of wellbeing measures
- 16 out of 35 (46%) of respondents were in favour of all training being mandatory; 13 (37%) favoured some being mandatory and 6 (17%) favoured all training being voluntary
- 4 out of 34 (12%) of respondents felt that their MC concentrates mainly on strategy (what needs to be done); 10 (29%) that their MC concentrates mainly on operational issues (how actions are carried out); and 20 (58%) that their MC splits its time equally between strategic and operational. However, these results need to be treated with some caution because of the possibility of respondents feeling that the equal split response was the 'right' answer. It is, however, significant that of the other responses 29% opted for the operational bias as opposed to the 12% who opted for the strategy bias. The latter findings are consistent with findings from observing MCs as part of this study and also with the findings from Estyn inspection reports.
- 16 out of 30 (53%) of respondents felt that their MC offered high support/high challenge; 9 (33%) that their MC offered high support/low challenge; 1(3%) that their MC offered low support/high challenge; and 4 (13%) that their MC offered low support/low challenge. Once again these results need to be treated with some caution because of the possibility that high support/high challenge was perceived to be the 'right' answer. The selection of alternative responses is significant in that 33% opted for high support/low challenge compared to 3% opting for low support/high challenge. The latter findings are consistent with findings from observing MCs as part of this study and also with the findings from Estyn inspection reports.
- The rank order of importance of the roles contained in WG statutory guidance with regards to MCs (with 1 as the most important and 3 as the least important) was as follows
 1. Setting out appropriate aims and objectives
 2. Identifying and including policies, targets and priorities
 3. Setting out arrangements for monitoring and reviewing aims and objectives and whether the policies, targets and priorities are being achieved

Appendix 4: Estyn inspection report summary

PRU Estyn Inspection Report Summary:

The following summary is based on published reports as of the end of January 2017

- 20 out of the existing 24 PRUs have a previous inspection report across 16 Local Authorities (LAs)
- 3 LAs currently have no PRUs (Merthyr, NPT, Gwynedd) and there are PRUs in 3 further LAs which do not have a current core inspection report (Newport, Swansea, Monmouthshire)
- 1 PRU is currently in Special Measures in Powys
- 3 PRUs are in Significant Improvement category in Carmarthenshire, Anglesey, Wrexham
- Excellent practice was identified in 3 of the existing PRUs in the Tai Centre in RCT, Canolfan Addysg Nant-y-Bryniau Education Centre in Conwy (formerly known as North Wales Adolescent Service) and in the Ceredigion PRU.

The rate at which PRUs go into category is a concern in that of the 21 current PRUs who have received an inspection and that form the basis of this analysis, 4 are currently in a statutory category and a further 5 were originally placed in a statutory category. This means that 9 (43%) of PRUs inspected were placed in a statutory category. In addition, 6 of the PRUs were in need of Estyn Monitoring. As a result, 15 out of the 21 (71%) PRUs inspected went into follow up.

Estyn Recommendations relating to Management Committees:

- Ensure that the PRU, the management committee and the local authority work together effectively to raise standards
- Work with the local authority to widen the expertise and representation on the management committee
- Ensure that the PRU, management committee and local authority work together effectively to raise standards
- Provide appropriate information to the management committee about behaviour, attendance and standards within the PRU
- Provide more challenge from the management committee
- Provide more challenge from the management committee to support school improvement
- Strengthen the expertise and representation on the management committee in order to provide more appropriate challenge
- Develop the strategic role of the management committee⁵
- Continue to strengthen strategic management to provide support and challenge to the PRU

⁵ Estyn tend to refer to the strategic role when it is felt that the Management Committee is not working well enough with the Local Authority and other partners to set the direction for the PRU and ensure it is appropriately resourced and that any barriers to improvement that lie within, for example, the Local Authority are addressed.

- Widen the representation on the management committee to include local businesses
- Ensure that the PRU, management committee and local authority work together effectively to raise standards

These recommendations appear to reinforce messages from the study about challenge, strategic leadership and breadth of representation.

Appendix 5: Further observations

As mentioned at the beginning of the report there was inevitable gathering of evidence that, while it fell outside the training and development needs analysis specification for the project, is worth capturing. That evidence is presented in this Appendix in the form of additional barriers that were identified to the effective functioning of MCs, along with additional conclusions and recommendations that emanate from this wider collection of evidence.

Additional barriers

At a practical level, poor attendance at MCs is a significant barrier to effectiveness, with concerns about being quorate being a fairly regular feature. There was anecdotal evidence that attendance would be good when a PRU was in an Estyn category but would tail off once the PRU came out of category, and other concerns became a priority for the local authority members who invariably formed the bulk of the membership.

A further possible barrier to effectiveness in relation to challenge and strategic direction lies in the composition of those MCs whose meetings were observed. The presence of PRU staff, local authority education officers, leaders from local mainstream schools and professionals from related disciplines ensured that there was considerable expertise around the table capable of providing effective support and guidance.

MC members were often aware of the circumstances surrounding children and displayed well informed empathy. On occasions this appeared to have the effect of encouraging the MC to act in an operational *'team around the PRU'* role at the expense of providing the challenge and strategic direction that is also expected of them. Thus, there were examples when concerns were raised about pupils and the range of related expertise and knowledge around the table led to a discussion, provision of advice and agreement on the best way forward.

Given that PRUs are part of the local authority, unlike autonomous schools, then the presence of local authority members on MCs can create a potential conflict of interest that inhibits challenge. An example from one meeting that was observed might serve to illustrate. The meeting had seven attendees, one of whom was a community member from a business background attending for the first time. A detailed self-evaluation report was presented that was authored by three members. This meant that only four members were left to challenge, one of whom was the new member and another of whom was the Head of Service. In the circumstance, it is hardly surprising that the challenge was less than robust.

However, it is clear from evidence gained through interview and conversation that attracting members is problematical particularly in relation to community, parent and sponsor members. Therefore, the solution may well rest in better equipping current members to fulfil the wider role expected of them and supplementing the membership with Challenge Advisors, where this is deemed to be appropriate, and a member of staff from a neighbouring PRU where this is feasible. Using peer staff members would ensure detailed understanding of issues, facilitate sharing of good practice and act as a

developmental tool for the individuals involved. While acknowledging recruitment issues in the categories referred to above, there does appear to be scope for attempting to broaden the membership base through proactive approaches that could encompass direct approaches to:

- local business (from multi-national to SMEs);
- the third sector;
- parent governors from local mainstream schools; and
- ex-pupils

Further Conclusions

- It is difficult to attract certain categories of members and meetings are often poorly attended
- The use of sub-committees has the potential to increase the level of challenge and broaden the base of membership
- An imbalance in membership in favour of local authority representation can create a potential conflict of interest that inhibits challenge
- The presence of Challenge Advisors at meetings can help to highlight the need for constructive challenge
- Informal networks of PRUs have been established in some areas and these have the potential to alleviate the sense of isolation that some PRUs feel
- Regional consortia could play a role in fostering the development of embryonic self-improving school systems among PRUs, to provide mutual support and encourage the sharing of experiences and good practice
- The provision of single Challenge Advisors to work across all PRUs within a consortium region is welcomed and seen as beneficial
- Communication between local authorities and PRUs is often a cause for concern with many PRUs feeling *'left out of the loop'*

Additional Recommendations

- Identify a working group of practitioners to develop a consistent approach to assessing pupil progress based on establishing a common approach to constructing a baseline, including well-being indicators, against which subsequent individual pupil value-added can be assessed.
- Explore current models of school to school support, and existing practice from within the PRU sector, to establish a self-improving PRU system based on regional consortia boundaries.
- Set up regular meetings of Challenge Advisors to share and learn from good practice and encourage consistency of approach.
- Encourage MCs to consider the involvement of Challenge Advisors and peer staff members from neighbouring PRUs.

- Consider whether any amendments need to be made to existing WG guidance to reflect the findings from this study.
- Review the current NPQH to determine whether it meets the particular and different needs of PRU Teachers in Charge.