



# Estyn

*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

## Ensuring all learners achieve their potential An evaluation of local authority strategies



BUDDSODDWYR MEWN POBL  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



APRIL 2010

**The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:**

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- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ Local authority education services for children and young people;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contracted employment programmes in Wales.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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## Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this survey is:
  - to identify and evaluate local authority strategies that are designed to ensure that all learners reach their potential; and
  - to highlight effective practice and its impact.
- 2 The Welsh Assembly Government asked Estyn to look at how local authorities address this issue through:
  - analysing data to identify underperforming groups;
  - using analysis and strategies to target resources, including grant funding, to these groups;
  - developing specific strategies;
  - promoting collaboration between schools and other agencies; and
  - sharing good practice.
- 3 The report builds on previous remit work, inspection evidence and makes links to the School Effectiveness Framework<sup>1</sup> (SEF) where possible.
- 4 The report includes a summary of findings from previously published Estyn reports that offer detailed evaluation of local authority strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> The School Effectiveness Framework outlines the Assembly Government's vision for tri-level reform of school improvement in Wales. Its purpose is to improve collaboration and alignment between schools, local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government.

## Background

### Context

- 5 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (section 1) places a duty on all local authorities to promote high standards and to seek to ensure that every child fulfils his or her potential. This Act (schedule 17) defines the standards of performance of pupils as low when compared to:
- 'the standards that the pupils might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to attain,
  - where relevant, the standards previously attained by them, or
  - the standards attained by pupils at comparable schools.'
- 6 The SEF analysis<sup>2</sup> concludes: 'the fact that we can identify significant variation in performance between schools which have children and young people of similar ability and with similar backgrounds, demonstrates that children and young people in Wales are not currently offered an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential.' The SEF rightly identifies the crucial role that schools, local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government, working together, have to ensure that all learners achieve their potential.
- 7 There is still too much variation in performance of pupils of similar abilities and backgrounds within and across schools. Previous Estyn remit reports have focused on local authorities' use of data to identify and target support for underperforming schools and, in particular, schools causing concern. Estyn has carried out remit work around the achievement of particular groups of pupils including more able and talented pupils, pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language and those at risk of disengagement from education. Other recent reports<sup>3</sup> have focused on skills development and transition planning. This report looks at the strategic management of a number of these initiatives that help to ensure all pupils achieve their potential.
- 8 Local authorities promote a wide range of initiatives to support learners to reach their potential. These include national strategies like RAISE<sup>4</sup> and those supported by Basic Skills Cymru<sup>5</sup>, as well as the development of local strategies for:
- effective transition protocols – formalising arrangements for secondary schools and their partner primary schools to work together on curriculum, learning and assessment issues that relate to the 7-14 phase of education;

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<sup>2</sup> School Effectiveness Framework: 'Building Effective Learning Communities Together'. Welsh Assembly Government 2008

<sup>3</sup> See page 11

<sup>4</sup> Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education (RAISE) is a Welsh Assembly Government programme addressing the link between socio-economic disadvantage and pupils' underachievement in Wales

<sup>5</sup> Basic Skills Cymru is the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy to help children and adults in Wales who struggle with basic literacy and numeracy.

- subject specific provision – introducing better practice and new initiatives to improve teaching, learning across the curriculum;
- behaviour support and alternative provision - sharing effective practice in promoting positive behaviour and attendance in schools;
- assessment for learning – helping pupils to understand learning objectives, their progress and how they can move on to the next stage of learning;
- effective provision for underperforming boys - combating the under-achievement of boys at key stages 2, 3 and 4;
- basic skills support - intervening when pupils are falling behind in their learning because of poor basic skills and raising awareness and skills of teachers;
- thinking skills - developing and applying thinking across the curriculum through the processes of planning, developing and reflecting;
- emotional intelligence – supporting the development of skills like self awareness, managing emotions and empathy;
- enterprise skills - creating more entrepreneurially aware young people motivated to start a business;
- IT solutions - using the internet, and interactive educational resources;
- sustainable support for young carers, teenage parents, looked after children, English as a second or other language and additional learning needs - effective multi-agency practice in supporting learners from vulnerable groups through a mix of withdrawal, small group activities and support in mainstream classes; and
- leadership skills - raising awareness and skills of middle and senior leaders related to supporting all learners to reach their potential.

<b>Evidence base for this survey</b>
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- 9 Judgements are based on the analysis of evidence from:
- inspections of education services for children and young people in local authorities between 2008 and 2009;
  - recent and relevant thematic reports;
  - interviews with senior officers of six local authorities and review of their policies and guidance;

- interviews with senior officers of CYNNAL<sup>6</sup> and ESIS<sup>7</sup> and a review of their policies and guidance;
- interviews with primary and secondary headteachers in school clusters in those local authorities involved; and
- interviews with headteachers of schools, as identified from recent inspection reports, where learners make good progress towards fulfilling their potential.

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<sup>6</sup> CYNNAL is a limited company established by Cyngor Gwynedd and Ynys Môn County Council to provide curriculum support services for schools within the two authorities.

<sup>7</sup> ESIS is a joint working arrangement between Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Councils to provide education support to the four local education authorities and their schools.



## Overview of local authority strategies

- 10 Local authorities are generally confident in their use of data to analyse performance, to identify underachievement and to target challenge and support appropriately. However, some local authorities and schools do not use data well enough to identify groups of underperforming learners in need of additional support. In addition, there is not enough measurement and analysis of the performance of those receiving additional support.
- 11 There is a shared understanding of the need to be more rigorous in monitoring and evaluating the impact of all initiatives on learners' development. This is essential in order to identify which strategies are helping all learners to reach their potential. Local authority officers monitor strategies that depend on specific grant support and evaluate their impact appropriately. However, locally developed strategies often have only informal monitoring and insecure evaluation of impact. This practice makes it difficult to evaluate the benefits of many initiatives.
- 12 The best authorities are rationalising the large number and variety of school improvement initiatives. They are seeking to identify and deliver only what has a proven positive impact on underperforming learners. This rationalisation will also help schools to identify more easily how to access appropriate resources, training and support. Some local authorities use shared services within regional consortia in order to make the most of their capacity to impact on outcomes for learners.
- 13 Although joint working between services and agencies is not robust enough at present to support all learners effectively, all local authorities are working to promote partnership between schools, school improvement services, children's social services and other statutory and voluntary sector agencies. The best authorities monitor partnership working and have evidence of the positive impact on groups of young people at risk of disengagement from education. Across Wales however, the development of multi-agency partnership working to support vulnerable learners is not consistent.
- 14 The best authorities invest resources and time to raise the capacity of all schools to meet the needs of learners, vulnerable groups and those at risk of exclusion from education. They support schools to help themselves. They give this a priority above the development of discrete central services delivering targeted interventions for sustainable impact on all learners.
- 15 Local authorities play an important role in facilitating collaboration between schools in the interest of learners. There are some good examples of local authority support for school consortia work in developing and coordinating provision of 14-19 learning pathways.
- 16 Primary schools are more likely than secondary schools to depend on local authority leadership and support for the sustained impact on learners of the initiatives listed in the context section of this report.

- 17 Schools and local authority education services use the evidence of their data analysis, informed by schools' own self-evaluation, in order to agree targets for school development and additional local authority support. Secondary schools are less likely than primary schools to value the impact of this challenge and support from local authority officers.
- 18 Although these routines are well established, some local authorities have to use considerable resources to address the underperformance of a number of their schools. This reactive practice limits their capacity to develop and implement pro-active strategies. It is evidence of inefficient monitoring systems and data analysis on which those systems depend.
- 19 There is inconsistent practice in the identification and sharing of good practice in supporting learners to reach their potential. Generally there is little deliberate sharing of best practice with those who would benefit the most from such support. Regional networking is generally undeveloped. There is little monitoring or evaluation of the impact of the professional sharing that does occur. In some local authorities, too often schools have to take the lead in identifying effective practice and arranging for its dissemination.
- 20 There is not enough awareness, or strategic use, of Estyn thematic remit reports and recommendations on the impact on learners of specific local authority support strategies.

## **Case studies demonstrating good practice in local authority strategies**

### **Strategic leadership**

- 21 The best authorities share the strategic aim of raising the capacity of schools to support all learners and not simply to develop central services that might or might not be sustainable. The work of the education service in Pembrokeshire is a good example of this strategy in practice. In order for this strategy to bear fruit, all stakeholders must have a good understanding of the strategic principle and the way it informs decisions on funding for schools. In Pembrokeshire, there is evidence that the strategy is having a positive impact and the local authority has raised the capacity of schools to meet the needs of wider groups of learners.
- 22 Where the authority is committed in this way, major strategic documents, such as the policies relating to school improvement and inclusion, stress this purpose. The key principle is always to raise the capacity of schools to drive and sustain their own improvement. The implementation of the strategy helps to develop a culture of inclusion, improve standards and better outcomes for children and young people. The major elements of support, training and advice for schools and pupils is then based on establishing good practice in schools and empowering school staff to develop appropriate knowledge and expertise.
- 23 In Pembrokeshire, the same principle governs partnership work where it affects, for example, the promotion of emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. There is a commitment in partnership planning to develop multi-agency teams based on 'families of schools'. These teams will extend the capacity of existing services and programmes to meet the needs of vulnerable learners.

### **Data analysis and its use**

- 24 Across Wales, there is generally well-established data sharing with schools each year. This includes data comparison with schools in the local authority and in some identified 'families of schools'. The data traditionally informs general analysis of school performance by the local authority and helps to identify issues of gender related underperformance. There is usually no facility to identify other underperforming groups and it is limited in its impact on local authority strategies to support all learners to reach their potential. Estyn's survey of the use of performance data by local authorities and schools in 2008 evaluated data analysis and its impact on learners' progress.<sup>8</sup>
- 25 The best authorities increasingly use data to identify groups of learners at risk of disengagement from education and to plan to address their needs. The focus of this strategy is on improving the impact of data analysis on learner outcomes. Advisers follow up all evidence of underperformance rigorously and require schools to plan improvements with measurable outcomes. Advisers help the sharing of good practice identified through this process.

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<sup>8</sup> The Use of Performance Data in Local Authorities and Schools, March 2008.

- 26 In Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, there are emerging developments to the process of challenge to schools informed by data analysis. Cynnal is supporting schools to develop the capacity to complete the analysis themselves and to extend the analysis in order to identify underperforming individuals and groups. Following a joint review of very detailed performance indicators, schools are required to analyse and plan for appropriate supportive action to help all learners reach their potential.
- 27 A proforma guides the schools' initial analysis following self evaluation of its data set. Schools are required to make judgements about their impact on learner development and not just to describe outcomes. They also evaluate the quality of their own analysis and development planning and forward this to Cynnal before the annual school performance challenge. Advisers assess schools' effectiveness in using data in this way in order to support them further.

### **The implementation of specific learning strategies and sharing good practice**

- 28 Although there is inconsistent practice in the identification and sharing of good practice in supporting learners to reach their potential, there are some good examples of local authorities seeking to improve support for learners through its use. Some education services are even exploring the use the internet to support this, as in Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf where schools have access to the Link2Learn framework developed by ESIS. Schools identify their priorities for development and advisers facilitate work to improve the quality of learning and teaching. They record and upload the outcomes of this work to the Link2Learn good practice database.
- 29 In collaboration with the four local authorities and schools, ESIS has developed its skills based training programme called Think2Learn. This programme of modules provides a whole school approach to thinking and learning and has been developed and accredited to Masters level in partnership with higher education. It uses action research in order to ensure the application of lessons learned from the taught programme. There are extensive classroom resources underpinning the programme. Currently five of the modules are available through the medium of Welsh.
- 30 Think2Learn supports a strategic framework for networks of schools to promote and share good practice. (Link2Learn is the name of the collaborative framework designed to accelerate joint working between schools, good practice sharing and capacity building). Schools identify their priorities for development and advisers facilitate work to improve the quality of learning and teaching. They record and upload the outcomes of this work to the Link2Learn good practice database. There is also an annual good practice sharing conference.
- 31 Think2Learn co-ordinates a range of specific learning strategies in a way that maps coherently a number of initiatives that support learners to achieve their potential:
- assessment for learning.
  - creative thinking.
  - critical thinking.

- emotional intelligence.
- memory and recall.
- planning for learning.
- presentation.
- problem solving and decision making.
- research skills.
- taking responsibility for learning, and
- working with others.

As well as theoretical underpinning, the modules focus on practical classroom implementation strategies.

- 32 Schools and families of schools engage with these programmes voluntarily. The local authorities do not explicitly target these strategies at schools where there is the greatest need. The Cyfarthfa ‘family of schools’ in Merthyr Tydfil has a history of engagement in collaborative practice beginning in the 1990s and facilitated by joint work with the Universities of Newcastle and Nottingham. Headteachers from that cluster value the theoretical framework of Link2Learn. They measure impact by the achievement of school development targets, learning outcomes, improved attendance and behaviour and the raised capacity of staff to support learner development.

### **Collaboration between schools, wider agencies and local authorities**

- 33 Many schools have traditionally worked together and transition plans have made those links stronger. Estyn’s survey of the impact of transition plans in 2008 evaluates the outcomes of such collaboration.<sup>9</sup> There is increasing wider collaboration between schools, other agencies and local authority services often targeted at groups at risk of disengagement from education. Where monitoring and evaluation is systematic, there is evidence of positive impact from this developing practice as in Swansea.
- 34 The Education Directorate in Swansea offers an excellent range and quality of services to support vulnerable groups through targeted initiatives with effective multi-agency working. Good support for vulnerable pupils is achieved through effective liaison and collaboration between a range of local authority, health and other external services. Partners have made good progress in developing information sharing protocols and shared data sets, with ongoing work to improve this further.

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<sup>9</sup> The impact of Transition plans Estyn June 2008

- 35 The Improving Attendance Strategy is making a significant impact on attendance levels in most schools. In addition, targeted work in areas of high social deprivation has significantly improved attendance levels, in some schools by as much as 10 percentage points.
- 36 The Behaviour Support Service provides very good support and easily accessible resources to schools. There has been a reduction in permanent exclusions in schools over the past three years and current levels are better than the Wales average. The Education Directorate has successfully kept permanent exclusions to a low level by targeting its services at young people at risk of exclusion.
- 37 There is a range of high quality partnership based initiatives to target and engage more disadvantaged children and young people. Of these, the Early Intervention and Prevention strategy successfully works with pupils both during and outside of the school day. Support for this strategy from the police, the voluntary sector and the youth offending team is particularly good.
- 38 The trend in performance of looked after children (LAC), at the end of key stage 4, is improving. In 2004-2005, 30% of LAC left full-time education without an approved external qualification, while by 2008-2009 the figure was reduced to 15%. This underlying trend is supported through excellent one-to-one support by education officers at key stage 3 and key stage 4.
- 39 The Traveller Education Service delivers excellent support to Gypsy and Traveller children. In partnership with other agencies, the service contributes well to increasing levels of relevant attainments of these children. The service also works well with schools to build their capacity to support Gypsy and Traveller children, and to raise the awareness of their community and its culture.
- 40 EMLAS<sup>10</sup> provides services of outstanding quality for ethnic minority pupils, to help learners develop effective English language skills and achieve their qualification aims. At key stage 1, many of these pupils perform below the main cohort, due to their need for English language support. However, by key stage 3 most of these pupils go on to perform better than the main cohort and significantly better in key stage 4.

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<sup>10</sup> Ethnic minority language and achievement service.

## Findings from recent Estyn reports 2008-2010

41 These recent Estyn reports are relevant to this survey as each one is a detailed evaluation of a specific strategy. The full reports can be found on the Estyn website.

42 [Tackling child poverty and disadvantage in schools January 2010](#)

This report looks at how schools are tackling child poverty and disadvantage in Wales. It draws on evidence from the three Estyn reports on the RAISE initiative published in 2007, 2008 and 2009, and from inspection reports on schools and local authorities. It evaluates impact on the performance of disadvantaged learners in Wales and considers relevant research evidence. It recognises that local authorities can contribute a great deal to improving the achievements of disadvantaged pupils, identifies examples of effective practice and identifies further action that will improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils.

43 [Local authority support for the children of migrant workers October 2009](#)

Estyn visited eight authorities and 20 schools in order to find out how well they meet the educational needs of children of migrant workers. In general, the report concludes that the best local authority support for the children of migrant workers is provided in the city areas of Wales. In these areas, local authorities have extensive experience of providing support to schools for learners whose first language is not English or Welsh. The report concludes that many local authorities do not monitor the work of centrally employed specialist staff well enough. This means that managers generally do not know enough about the strengths and weaknesses of their specialist staff.

44 [How effective is provision for learners aged 16-19 with English language acquisition needs? July 2009](#)

The report judges the quality of provision for learners with English language acquisition to be variable. There is no consistency between providers from similar institutions and there is a greater divide between school and other post-16 sectors. There is little local or national planning for the transition stages of learning when a learner moves from one level of education to another (for example between GCSE and AS level). Communication between key partners is weak. Information about a learner's prior language support and ability with the English language does not transfer with them between providers.

45 [Best practice in maths June 2009](#)

Estyn analysed national data and inspection reports and visited schools and local authorities to survey best practice in mathematics for 3 to 7-year-old pupils. From 2003-2008, key stage 1 assessment results remained static with 87% of pupils reaching the required level 2 or better. Overall, girls continue to perform better than boys by four percentage points. However, the number of pupils gaining level 3 has fallen from 25% in 2004 to 22% in 2007 and 2008. Not all teachers accurately assess the ability of more able pupils at the end of Year 2. Consequently, teachers

in key stage 2 tend not to challenge these pupils enough and often give them work that is too easy. Some teachers have insufficient subject knowledge to be able to diagnose what pupils should learn next. Schools and local authorities need to work together more effectively to address these issues. There is significant variation in assessment outcomes of 7-year-olds across local authorities in Wales. Not all local authorities take a consistently strong approach to evaluating and challenging standards of mathematics in schools and some have a greater impact than others in raising standards.

46 [The impact of RAISE 2008-2009 June 2009](#)

Across Wales, and at all key stages, pupils entitled to free school meals perform significantly less well than other pupils. This gap in performance is wider in secondary schools than in primary schools. There is also a wide variation between different local authorities in the level of performance of free-school-meal pupils and the rates of improvement over the last three years. After two full school years of the RAISE initiative, there have been no major changes in the performance of free school-meal pupils against the main performance measures. Many of the pupils who are disadvantaged do not directly benefit from RAISE-funded work. This is because nearly all the schools that receive RAISE funding identify their targeted pupils by using criteria other than disadvantage. As a result, few average or more able disadvantaged pupils benefit from RAISE-funded activities. Most schools do not do enough to monitor the achievements and progress of all disadvantaged pupils. Very few schools have comprehensive strategies to close the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils.

47 [Local authorities and schools causing concern May 2009](#)

During inspections, inspectors identify a small number of schools across Wales as requiring special measures or significant improvement. Nearly all local authorities support these schools well after inspection and the schools improve within the expected time. However, local authorities are not always able to improve these schools quickly enough before their inspection to avoid inspectors judging them a cause for concern. A range of factors contributes to this. Most local authorities know their schools well and many now focus more sharply than in the past on the schools that need the greatest improvement. However, a minority of local authority officers do not use data well enough to challenge schools or to evaluate rigorously enough the quality of leadership and management in a school. In a few cases, the governing body is not aware that the school needs to improve or is reluctant to take firm action to address poor performance. In addition, local authorities do not always keep elected members fully informed about the performance of schools. In a few schools causing concern, attendance is poor and there are many exclusions. In these cases, different services do not work closely enough together to help all aspects of the school to improve. A few schools remain very difficult to improve because their local authorities do not use the full range of powers that are available to them.

48 [Best practice in reading and writing March 2009](#)

Estyn analysed inspection and research findings to identify successful ways of learning and teaching reading and writing for pupils aged five to seven years of age.



Overall, girls attain higher standards than boys in English and Welsh. The difference between the performance of boys and girls has been around nine percentage points for the past eight years. The widest difference is in their standards of writing, where girls are 12 percentage points ahead of boys in English and 15 percentage points ahead in Welsh. In the best practice, schools use a range of performance data well to track pupils' progress and techniques, such as assessment for learning, so that pupils know where they are, what they need to do to improve and how to bring about improvements. Many schools are better at using assessment information to improve the standards of pupils' reading than their writing.

49 [Using data to plan strategically for children and young people February 2009](#)

Estyn used inspection reports and visits to a sample of five local authorities to judge the extent to which local authorities and their partners use data to plan strategically for children and young people. Overall, local authorities and their partners use a wide range of data to assess children and young people's needs. Local authorities and their partners struggle to collate data on outcomes for children and young people other than data on school examinations and teacher assessments. There are gaps in the data used by local authorities and their partners. Often, local authorities and their partners know the priority areas where services are required, but do not use the available information to deliver services and resources to the children and young people who need them.

50 [The impact of Transition plans June 2008](#)

Many schools have worked together for some time to help pupils to change schools confidently. All schools are now working on joint schemes of work that span key stages 2 and 3. Primary and secondary teachers are also sharing teaching techniques to make learning more interesting. This work is helping to accelerate pupils' progress when they move to secondary school. However, very few secondary schools offer a more integrated approach to the curriculum that builds on the way that pupils learn in the primary school. Most schools exchange assessment information and track pupils' progress better than before. Primary and secondary teachers are beginning to assess pupils' work together. However, transition plans do not use this information well enough to plan for the needs of particular groups of learners. In Year 7, some less able pupils do not receive the support they need and more able pupils are given work that is not challenging enough. Transition plans have made links between schools stronger. However, most transition plans are not specific enough about how schools will measure the impact of planned improvements on the standards that pupils achieve.

51 [Meeting the learning needs of children and young people who offend June 2008](#)

Overall, local authorities do not do enough to ensure that youth offending teams (YOTs) in Wales secure full-time education, training or employment (ETE) for children and young people in the youth justice system. Local authorities do not always provide sufficient leadership and management to YOTs or contribute to the YOT management board at a high enough level. Between April 2006 and March 2007, only 59% of young offenders in Wales were in full-time education, training or employment. This falls short of the target of 90% set by the Youth Justice Board for

YOTs. Many YOT boards do not have plans to improve this level of performance. Most local authority education services do not ensure that they offer these learners the recommended 25 hours of learning per week. In the main, schools are reluctant to offer places to children and young people who have offended, been excluded and/or who have been in custody. The Welsh Assembly Government needs to collect data on the attainment and achievements of children and young people supervised by YOTs and to make sure that local authorities fulfil the requirements of the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy.

52 [Education in children's homes March 2008](#)

The quality of education provided for pupils living in children's homes across Wales varies too much. Too often, these learners do not receive enough education appropriate to their needs. These young people with poor records of school attendance live in small privately-operated children's homes. These young people may receive education at home provided by one teacher or, in a few cases, receive no education at all. Placing authorities from across the UK often neglect their role as corporate parents. They are slow to provide schools with learners' records and do not monitor learners' progress well enough. They do not always make sure that a school can meet a learner's special educational needs.

53 [The use of performance data in LAs and schools March 2008](#)

One of the roles of a local authority is to challenge and to support schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning. All local authorities use data on pupils' achievements and progress, inspection outcomes and other evidence to evaluate school performance. However, a few local authorities do not analyse this data well enough to accurately identify and to support schools in need of improvement. Most local authorities and schools do not know how well pupils in specific groups perform in comparison with their peers, such as those with different ethnic backgrounds, those who are looked-after by the local authority, those who are young carers or who have special educational needs. Most local authorities target additional resources to help schools that perform poorly to improve, but the criteria used for this targeting are not always clear. Nearly all local authorities work well with schools identified by Estyn as causing concern. Governors and elected members do not receive enough information to understand which schools perform poorly and why, or how the local authority is responding in order to make improvements.

54 [Closing the gap between boys and girls' attainment in schools March 2008](#)

In the last twenty years, the gap between the results boys and girls attain in school has widened. There are many reasons for this, but the most important is that fewer boys than girls develop the language skills to achieve well in school. As a result, a significant minority of boys develop a sense of failure and frustration. This increases as boys get older. Schools that get good results from both boys and girls teach in ways that appeal to both. This sometimes includes teaching boys and girls differently. These schools successfully improve boys' literacy skills. They make skilled use of ICT as part of specific strategies. This helps to make many boys more confident and motivated. However, too many schools use too limited a range of approaches to cater for the differences between girls and boys of the same age in relation to how mature, confident and capable they are as learners.

## Recommendations

### **The Welsh Assembly Government and local authority consortia should:**

Use the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) and the Quality and Effectiveness Framework<sup>11</sup> (QEF) to:

- R1 ensure that analysis of learner outcomes forms the basis of evaluations, when developing policy proposals;
- R2 promote the use of strategies that secure positive outcomes for learners and actively promote their consistent use across all local authorities;
- R3 facilitate the sharing of good practice, through the further development of on-line materials and training for schools, targeted to areas of underperformance; and
- R4 promote better collaborative working within and across local authorities to improve outcomes for all learners.

### **Local Authority Education Services for Children and Young People should:**

- R5 focus on raising the capacity of schools to drive and sustain improved outcomes for all learners;
- R6 insist on careful monitoring and evaluation of all learning strategies in order to identify those that have a measurable and positive impact;
- R7 promote the targeted and co-ordinated use of sound learning strategies to improve outcomes for those learners who are failing to achieve their potential;
- R8 plan the purposeful sharing of good practice to drive forward school improvement, particularly where underperformance is identified;
- R9 continue to improve their officers' use of data, including information provided within All Wales Core Data Sets, in order to identify schools or groups of learners at risk of underperforming and implement timely corrective procedures;
- R10 work collaboratively within and across local authorities to improve outcomes for learners;
- R11 promote more collaborative working between families and consortia of schools to ensure learning is co-ordinated between key stages; and
- R12 lead and co-ordinate multi-agency collaboration to meet the needs of vulnerable groups of learners in every school; and make better use of Estyn reports and recommendations in undertaking self-evaluation and in evaluating strategies to help learners reach their full potential.

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<sup>11</sup> This is the post-16 counterpart to SEF and its purpose is to support continued improvements in the quality of education and training.

## **The remit author and survey team**

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