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

The Annual Report of
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
of Education and Training in Wales

2008-2009

Key challenges in improving education and training in Wales

BUDDSODDWYR MEWN POBL | INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Iechyd at Waith
Health at Work

The Annual Report of
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
of Education and Training in Wales
2008-2009

Key challenges in improving education and training in Wales

Foreword and commentary

Dr Bill Maxwell
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

I am pleased to introduce my 2008-2009 report on the quality of education and training in Wales, which summarises the key findings emerging from our inspection activities over the past year.

In my 2007-2008 annual report, I drew on analysis of findings from across all the sectors we inspect to set out four key challenges for all involved in delivering the Welsh education system. These challenges are:

- making sure that all learners can reach their potential, including learners from a variety of vulnerable, under-achieving groups;
- meeting the needs of bilingual learners;
- working together to make things better for learners; and
- making best use of self-evaluation and information about learner performance.

These are cross-cutting challenges which are relevant to all sectors and phases. Improving our collective performance in meeting all four of them will be essential if we are to fulfil the ambitious set of aspirations for education and training set out by the Welsh Assembly Government in 'The Learning Country' and 'One Wales'.

Of course, all of the challenges require a continued, long-term focus if they are to be addressed successfully. None of them will be resolved in twelve months.

Nevertheless I thought it would be useful to use this year's annual report to give an indication of the extent to which we have seen practitioners from all sectors of education and training rising to these challenges, giving an initial view of how strong the progress has been and in which aspects we have seen particular action being effective.

This year's report therefore includes a section devoted to the challenges, bringing together our inspection findings from across the sectors as we present our view of progress against each of them.

In each case there is certainly evidence of positive progress, but there is equally clearly a substantial journey yet to be made before we get to where we need to be.

Whilst I am not suggesting that the broad nature of the challenges needs to be altered at this stage, the evidence we have gathered over the last year has allowed us to focus in on how they are being addressed in some quite specific contexts.

Our thematic review work, including the work commissioned from us through the Minister's remit letter, has meant that we have particularly strong evidence to report on certain groups at high risk of underachievement, including children from ethnic minority backgrounds and learners in independent special schools and small children's homes.

On a different challenge theme, my comments on the partnership challenge this year focus in on the work of 14-19 partnerships and Children and Young People's Partnerships as our inspection work has considered these as key vehicles for developing better joint working in Wales. In all sectors we have evidence on the development of self-evaluation and improvement planning approaches and on the promotion of bilingualism.

For the first time, the 2008-2009 annual report also includes a number of individual exemplars of good practice drawn from our inspections and thematic work, illustrating particularly interesting ways in which providers have been tackling aspects of the four challenges. We have included these exemplars this year, and identified the providers concerned, because I believe it is important to recognise that there are providers in Wales that are rising to the challenges very well.

I am keen to celebrate their work and to highlight them with a view to encouraging other providers to learn from their success.

As a complement to the cross-sectoral look at the four challenges, this year's report also includes a more traditional sector-by-sector analysis of trends and issues emerging from our programme of inspections in the year just past.

Across the whole inspection programme, our findings generally show that most providers in most sectors are performing well overall and that there is far more good and outstanding work than work at an unsatisfactory or poor level. All the indications are that progress is being made across the system. However, too much variability exists in every sector and it is clear that more needs to be done to bring the performance of the weakest providers up to match the levels being achieved by the best.

There is certainly some encouraging evidence of continuing positive progress in the inspection findings from the early years and schools sectors. In non-maintained pre-school settings we have seen continued improvement in standards and improvement in the use of assessment to support learning, although the development of systematic approaches to self-evaluation continues to be a serious weakness.

In schools, we have seen encouraging evidence of an upward trend in the quality of leadership and management. In primary schools we gave more high ratings in these areas than in previous years and in secondary schools we also saw a significant increase of top ratings, with over a third of schools being evaluated as having outstanding features in leadership and strategic management.

Key challenges in improving education and training in Wales

We have seen evidence of improved partnership working especially in aspects such as the planning of pupil transition between phases and in planning extra-curricular programmes. It has to be of concern, however, that, as we put increasing expectations on schools to be driving their own improvement, we still find self-evaluation to be weak in around a fifth of primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools.

There is also some encouraging evidence of progress on standards at the compulsory schooling stages. In primary schools our inspections have indicated a continued improvement in standards across all subject areas. That includes some improvement in Welsh as a second language although standards in that area remain conspicuously poor relative to other areas.

In secondary schools we saw more outstanding teaching and better standards, especially at key stage 4, although the proportion of teaching with major shortcomings remained stubbornly static. Standards in many areas of the curriculum were generally good, and we saw an encouraging increase in uptake of the Welsh Baccalaureate.

However, standards of work we saw in science and Welsh as a second language continue to cause concern. The standard of secondary school accommodation and facilities also continues to cause concern, with over 40% of secondary school inspections noting shortcomings in that regard.

In special schools and pupil referral units we found generally strong performance across the sample of provision we inspected last year especially in relation to care and guidance but also often on teaching and the standards achieved by pupils. On the other hand, we rarely saw outstanding practice in relation to self-evaluation and improvement

planning. As in other sectors, this is a challenge that needs to be addressed more directly in the special provision sector.

In local authorities, we found that school improvement services were generally good and provided effective support for schools. We found outstanding features in local authority provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). This included early identification of ALN in pre-school settings and multi-agency provision to ensure good quality advice and support for these pupils. The weakest service area we inspected was access and school organisation. We found that the local authorities inspected were generally too slow in addressing the challenge of unfilled places in schools and school buildings that were unsuitable. We also found that strategic management had important shortcomings in four out of the seven local authorities we inspected.

If you set our inspection findings alongside the evidence on pupil outcomes provided by national analysis of pupil testing and exam results, a broadly consistent pattern emerges. This is a picture of gradual progress across the system, but with much scope for further improvement and the need for improvement to be made more quickly if we are to compete effectively.

The pattern of pupil outcomes at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3 indicates a generally positive trend. The percentage of pupils who achieved at least the expected level and the percentage who achieved the core subject indicator both improved slightly this year.

The pattern of pupil outcomes has also improved at key stage 4 in the year just past, with the percentage of pupils in Wales gaining the level 2 threshold at the end of key stage 4 rising to 61% in 2009. There have been larger improvements in many local authorities in Wales, for example in Flintshire, Denbighshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport and Powys, where the percentage has increased by more than eight percentage points since 2007.

These are encouraging signs, although it is worth noting that, when you focus in on pupils who have achieved the level 2 threshold, but have also achieved a GCSE A*-C grade in English or Welsh first language and mathematics, the figure drops to below half of the pupil population (47%). Again, 47% is a slight improvement on results on previous years, but it is over 13 percentage points lower than the unrefined level 2 threshold figure, and the gap between the two indicators is increasing. Too many pupils who achieve the level 2 threshold do so without a GCSE A*-C grade in these key subjects, which are so important for pupils to achieve if they are to move successfully into further education, training or employment.

It is always healthy for us also to benchmark ourselves against the performance of pupils in other countries, within the UK and beyond, and to use this information to help target the areas in which we need to focus our national efforts to improve. Participation in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is one very robust way of getting comparative benchmarking information of this sort and I am pleased that Wales is continuing to participate in the programme. I look forward to seeing the results of the 2009 survey in due course.

In the meantime it is also helpful to keep reflecting regularly on our performance relative to our immediate neighbours in England. It is certainly the case that direct comparisons of assessment and exam results need to be treated with caution. This is due to increasingly divergent policies on the approach to assessment in the primary and early secondary stages, on the design of the curriculum and qualifications and on the use of published exam results to drive school choice and accountability. However, even bearing these cautions in mind, cross-border comparisons certainly give no support for complacency.

Whilst Wales is still generally close to or above the average performance for England against a number of headline indicators in the primary stages, performance in Wales appears to fall behind England from key stage 3 onwards, and the gap at key stage 3 has again increased in 2009, despite the apparently more equal performance of Wales at the earlier stages.

At key stage 4 we have also seen a further slight increase in England's performance advantage over Wales, if we make a direct comparison based on the 'Level 2 threshold' measure, including a grade A*-C in English or Welsh and mathematics. That gap has increased to 2.5 percentage points in 2009.

In the context of the challenge of ensuring every young person can realise their full potential, I also highlighted last year the need to get more of our pupils to the highest levels of achievement.

In our inspection activity this year we saw evidence of a continuing need for more focus to be placed on stimulating and extending the learning of the most able pupils.

More specifically, we also saw evidence of the need for schools to identify and support potential talent amongst pupils from less advantaged backgrounds who may be at particular risk of underachieving due to limited expectations and aspirations in homes and communities.

The proportion of learners who achieve above the expected level at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 3 has remained static or declined in most core subjects since the start of the current inspection cycle in 2005. Once again, the proportion achieving above the expected level is very similar this year to last year.

The quality of work overall in the post-16 sector was mixed last year and reflected a slightly worse pattern of inspection outcomes overall, especially in work-based learning and the provision for the Department for Work and Pensions. Learners often achieve good standards in further education colleges and in adult community-based learning. However, the provision for basic skills was not always good enough in adult community-based learning, and some smaller colleges struggled to provide a broad enough curriculum for their learners or did not provide enough formal and regular tutorial support. The quality of work in work-based learning and the provision for the Department for Work and Pensions was too variable overall. While there were examples of very good work and provision, there were also too many occasions when standards and the quality of provision had important shortcomings. The work-based learning sector had a weaker performance in the inspections we conducted last year than in the year before.

So, there is much to celebrate in the approaches and emphases that are being taken in Wales, in the very real achievements of children and young people, and in the quality of teaching that underpins those achievements, but there is still much work to be done to improve the education and training system in Wales.

As we look forward, I anticipate that providers will continue to engage strongly with the key challenges, and there will be much to learn from those that do so most successfully.

Key challenges in improving education and training in Wales

There are a range of major national policy developments that should help support and guide local action.

In relation to the challenge of embedding bilingualism, providers should be responding to the new Welsh-medium education strategy.

With regard to the challenge of improving partnership working, the Welsh Assembly Government's initiative to require all partners to co-operate to produce local 'transformation' strategies for post-16 provision, combined with the implementation of the 14-19 learning pathways arrangements, are providing an impetus for development across the sectors.

The challenge of embedding effective self-evaluation and improvement planning is being given a very strong national focus through the development of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF), for the schools sectors, and the Quality and Effectiveness Framework (QEF) for post-16 providers. An important strand in both these frameworks is the welcome development of improved national data and advice on its use for benchmarking purposes, alongside a strong focus on enhancing the extent to which front-line practitioners and managers engage in active development of their teaching practice through self-reflection and joint professional development activities with communities of colleagues.

All of these national strategic developments also have the potential to help with the more generic challenge of tackling underachievement and ensuring that all learners can reach their potential. If the SEF and QEF are implemented well, for example, they should provide a means identifying groups of learners who are at risk of underachieving within individual schools and other learning providers, understanding why this is happening and mobilising action to address the issues emerging.

Inter-agency partnership working, such as that being promoted through the national strategy for developing Children and Young People's Plans in each local authority area, is also potentially very powerful in trying to break the cycle of social and educational disadvantage. Coherent action across a range of public service areas is required to have a sustained impact on that complex and deeply embedded problem.

In September 2010, we will be starting a new cycle of inspections and we will be changing the way we inspect quite radically across all sectors. I am grateful to those who engaged with the variety of consultation and piloting exercises that we have undertaken over the last year as we developed and refined our inspection models for the new cycle. There are many significant changes including: more streamlined, proportionate inspection models which involve less engagement with stronger providers and more engagement with weaker providers; stronger focus on evidence produced by providers themselves in through self-evaluation; a stronger role for peer inspectors on all inspections; a much shorter notice period before inspections; an enhanced focus on learners' needs and experiences; and much shorter and clearer reports than in the past. Fuller details of the changes are available on our website.

We intend to make next year's Annual Report a retrospective review of the six years of the inspection cycle. We are planning to look at inspection outcomes and other performance indicators to see how far education and training have travelled over the last six years.

In the meantime, I hope you find this report interesting and helpful.

I would be pleased to hear from you at chief-inspector@estyn.gov.uk if you have any comments on this report.

Dr Bill Maxwell
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
of Education and Training in Wales

Key challenges in improving education and training in Wales

Contents

About Estyn

1   Estyn is the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. We are independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales. The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales.

2   Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- youth and community work training;
- local authority education services (LAES);
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies;
- offender learning; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of training programmes funded by the Department for Work and Pensions.

3   Our inspection work is aimed directly at raising standards and quality in education and training across Wales. In a number of sectors, we work with other regulators and inspectorates to inspect provision. We work in partnership with Ofsted to inspect the three special colleges in Wales and work-based learning provision which operates both in Wales and England. Our inspectors liaise with CSSIW to inspect residential schools and the local authority secure children's homes. We also take part in inspections, led by HMI Probation, of youth offending teams (YOTs) in Wales and we join HMI Prisons and Ofsted to inspect institutions for young offenders in England that have significant numbers of Welsh young people. In addition, we include inspectors from the Wales Audit Office when we inspect local authority education services.

4   We also provide advice on specific matters to the Welsh Assembly Government in response to an annual remit from the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. Our advice provides evidence of the effect of the Welsh Assembly Government's strategies, policies and initiatives on the education and training of learners.

5   We make public good practice based on inspection evidence. We have a unique and independent view of standards and quality across all aspects of education and training in Wales, and this contributes to the policies for education and lifelong learning introduced across Wales.

6   If you want to find out more about what we do and how we work, please follow this link: www.estyn.gov.uk

7   When we inspect we use our Common Inspection Framework for education and training in Wales (except for the inspections of local authority education services).

8   There are seven key questions organised under the following headings.

Standards

1   How well do learners achieve?

The quality of education and training

2   How effective are teaching, training and assessment?

3   How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?

4   How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?

Leadership and management

5   How effective are leadership and strategic management?

6   How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?

7   How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?

9   When we carry out our inspections, we use the following scale of grades to show our inspection judgements (except for the inspections of local authority education services).

Grade 1	Good with outstanding features
Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Grade 4	Some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
Grade 5	Many important shortcomings

10   In local authority education services, we use the following grades to show our inspection judgements in relation to two questions:

How good is the local authority's performance?	
Grade 1	Good with outstanding features
Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Grade 4	Shortcomings in important areas

Will the local authority's performance improve?	
Grade 1	Improvement prospects are good, with significant improvements already in place
Grade 2	Improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers
Grade 3	Some good prospects, but barriers in important areas
Grade 4	Many important barriers to improvement

11   We publish tables alongside this Annual Report that show the grades awarded for each key question in the providers we inspected and re-inspected during 2008-2009.

12   This information is already available in our published inspection reports which you can see on our website.

This inspection cycle

13   This inspection cycle began in 2004-2005. It is a six-year cycle and will end in August 2010. A new six-year cycle of inspections will begin in September 2010.

Explanation of words and phrases used to describe our evaluations

14   The words and phrases used in the left-hand column below are those that we use to describe our evaluations. The phrases in the right-hand column are the more precise explanations.

nearly all	with very few exceptions
most	90% or more
many	70% or more
a majority	over 60%
half or around half	close to 50%
a minority	below 40%
few	below 20%
very few	less than 10%

15   Figures in charts are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. Totals may therefore not be equal to 100%.

Key challenges in improving education and training in Wales

16   In last year's Annual Report, we drew out four key challenges from our inspection findings for the education and training sector in Wales. We believe that these challenges continue to have an important relevance this year if the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for transformation in education and training is to become a reality.

17   The challenges we set last year were in the following four areas:

- making sure that all learners can reach their potential;
- meeting the needs of bilingual learners;
- working together to make things better for learners; and
- self-evaluation and using information about learner performance.

18   In this year's report, we revisit these four challenges and use our inspection findings to see how well schools and other providers are responding to these challenges.

19   For the first time, we include examples of good practice that we have come across in the course of our inspection work. In doing so, we hope to show that there are schools and other providers who are performing very well in these key areas of challenge. We are happy to celebrate their success and hope that other providers in Wales will work hard to emulate them.

Ensuring that all learners can reach their potential

20   In last year's Annual Report, we particularly highlighted the strength of the link between poverty and low educational attainment in Wales and we reported on how schools and other providers were responding to the challenge of improving the performance of learners from relatively poor backgrounds.

21   This year, we focus once again on the performance of pupils from relatively poor backgrounds and the group of gifted and talented pupils. However, this year we also focus on some other vulnerable groups, namely ethnic minority learners, those who wish to learn English as an additional language, and, probably the most vulnerable group of all, those learners who are looked after in independent special schools or small children's homes.

Children from poorer backgrounds

22   The performance of children from relatively poor backgrounds is an important area of concern because relative poverty affects a large number of pupils in Wales. It has a significant impact on overall educational achievement and there are signs that previous efforts to tackle the issue in Wales have had only a limited effect in recent years.

23   Although not perfect, entitlement to free school meals is a useful tool for measuring the relative poverty amongst the pupils in particular schools or local authorities.

24 Overall, at all key stages, pupils entitled to free school meals perform much worse in public examinations than those who are not eligible. This gap in examination performance between the two sets of pupils and between their performance in different local authorities is too wide. Over the last three years, the gap (in terms of percentage points) between the pupils from relatively poor backgrounds and the rest has not changed much. The rate of improvement of free-school-meal pupils is also not much different to the rate of improvement of the rest.

25 As we mentioned last year, there is also significant variation in the overall performance of free-school-meal pupils in Wales compared to England with Wales falling increasingly behind, mainly due to improvements in performance in England with Wales showing little or no improvement.

26 In schools, it appears that the performance of all learners, irrespective of whether the pupils receive free school meals or not, declines as the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals increases. The chart opposite shows, for example, that in schools where there are higher proportions of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, there is a negative effect on the performance of pupils who are not disadvantaged as well as on those who are in achieving the core subject indicator in key stage 4. There is an almost identical pattern in key stage 2.

Chart 1: Difference between performance of pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals (FSM), KS4 CSI, 2006-2008
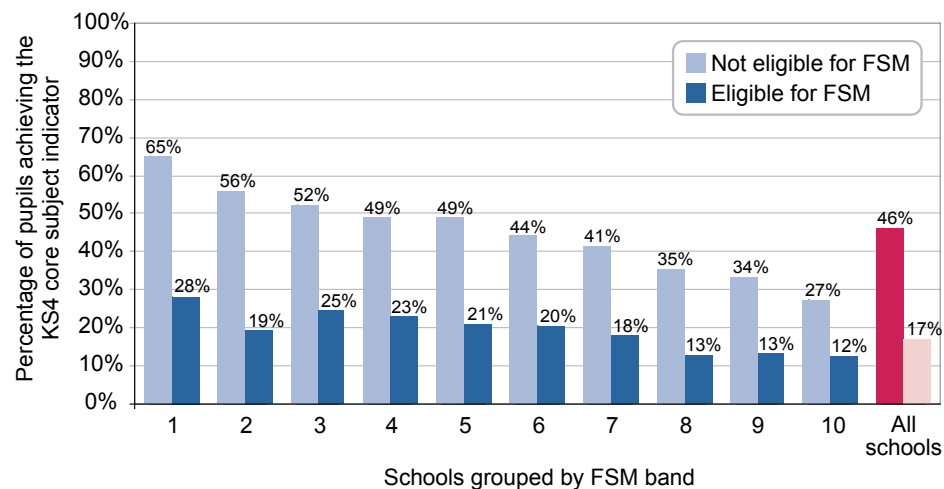
27 This pattern suggests that the 'whole-school effect' is considerable when the proportion of free-school-meal pupils in a school is relatively high. Free-school-meal learners' performance is affected negatively by their own experience of deprivation, but the other pupils, who may not be so relatively disadvantaged, are also affected negatively by the general level of deprivation in the school. In fact, research, such as that in Bramley Report, suggests that the school effect is greater than the individual effect.[1]

[1] Alternative Resource Allocation Models for Local Services in Wales (the 'Bramley Report') Welsh Assembly Government 2007

28 Free-school-meal pupils in schools where there are high proportions of free-school-meal pupils are therefore doubly disadvantaged. This is because, in addition to performing worse than pupils in the same school who are not entitled to free school meals, the free-school-meal pupils are likely to perform less well than they would do had they been in a school with a lower proportion of free-school-meal pupils.

29 We know what effective schools and local authorities are doing to help to maximise the achievements of learners from relatively poor backgrounds.

30 The findings of this year's round of school inspections tend to confirm that successful schools in disadvantaged areas do well by doing the same things in general terms as all other successful schools. We found during inspections that these schools tend to have high expectations in both standards and behaviour, and do not allow staff to use a relatively high proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals as an excuse for low performance. They pay substantial attention to developing social and emotional skills, and improving pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Staff often show a willingness to provide extra curricular activities and extra support at lunch times or after school. Primary schools often have well developed links with parents and ensured a quick start on entry to school through early assessment and intervention. Secondary schools readily work with other schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to develop partnership provision at key stage 4 and post-16. Successful schools in disadvantaged areas always play a strong role and have high standing in their local community. Most attach great importance to enrichment, extra-curricular and out-of-school-hours activities.

Kitchener Primary School in Cardiff has about 460 pupils and nearly a third of these are entitled to free school meals. Most of the children (90%) are learning English as an additional language. It achieved seven grade 1s (outstanding) in its inspection this year. In its report, we said:

"Kitchener Primary is an outstanding school. It provides high quality teaching, a vibrant and stimulating curriculum, strong parental and community links, a firm ethos of care, support and guidance and highly effective leadership and management. As a result, pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds make outstanding progress both in their academic learning and in their personal and social development."

31   In the local authorities where pupils entitled to free school meals are doing better than elsewhere at the end of key stage 4, such as Neath Port Talbot, Conwy and Swansea, the local authority and schools have worked together over a number of years to develop a culture that promotes high standards of achievement, especially for disadvantaged learners. Having this shared culture means that the authority and schools analyse performance data thoroughly to identify underperformance. They focus on the performance of individual pupils and also compare the performance of schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. Effective local authorities challenge their schools robustly and intervene where outcomes are not good enough. This same approach to challenge and targeted intervention is also used by the schools themselves to address any identified weaknesses in their performance or provision.

32   The Welsh Assembly Government has targeted funds at schools with significant proportions of free-school-meal learners through the RAISE programme. This programme has run for the last three years.

33   It is still early to assess fully whether RAISE has had any long-term impact on the performance of free-school-meal pupils. Also, it would be difficult to attribute any improvement to RAISE alone as a number of other factors may also be contributing to learners' standards of work. In addition, just under a third of free-school-meal pupils in primary schools and about a half of free-school-meal pupils in secondary schools are taught in schools that are not actually involved in the RAISE programme.

Hafod Primary School in Swansea has about 220 pupils and over a third are entitled to free school meals. Over half the children are learning English as an additional language. It achieved seven grade 1s (outstanding) in its inspection this year. In its report, we said:

"Hafod Primary is an outstanding school and a beacon of excellence. Standards of achievement, the quality of teaching, curricular provision, care and guidance and leadership and management are all outstanding features… by the end of key stage 2, pupils make very good progress in line with their age and abilities. This is a considerable achievement given the attainment of most pupils on entry, the transient nature of the school population and the increasing number of pupils with English as an additional language. The latter achieve very well by the end of Year 6, but their progress at the start of school is slow because they have little or no experience of English and many have no written form of their home language."

Pontypridd High School has about 930 learners aged 11-18 and a higher-than-average percentage of these (20%) are entitled to free school meals. It achieved seven grade 1s (outstanding) in its inspection. In its report, we said:

"At KS3, standards are higher than they are nationally. The proportion of lessons where standards were awarded grade one or two is five points higher than the corresponding KS3 figure for all secondary schools inspected in Wales… At KS4, standards are considerably higher than they are nationally… Standards were awarded grade one or grade two in all lessons observed in this inspection. This is 29 points higher… and the percentage of lessons where grade one was awarded is 19 points higher than the national KS4 figure… A range of strategies is used to tackle social disadvantage and stereotyping very successfully. This is an outstanding feature."

34 It is clear to us from our inspection evidence that school staff are trying far more ways to improve the achievement of pupils from poorer backgrounds as a result of the extra funding they have received. However, a key issue in nearly all the RAISE-funded schools we visited this year is that the pupils who directly benefit from RAISE-funded work are not always those from poorer backgrounds. This is because nearly all the schools that receive RAISE funding used criteria other than relative poverty to identify the pupils who would benefit from the RAISE-funded activities. We found that schools tended to use performance in literacy and numeracy as their main criteria for selecting the pupils. In other words, they focused on the pupils who were poorer in educational terms rather than in socio-economic terms. One result of this was that few average or more able pupils from relatively poor backgrounds actually benefited from the RAISE-funded activities. This meant that the schools were not doing all they could to maximise the achievements of this specific group of learners.

35 Overall, it is clear that most schools do not do enough to monitor the progress of pupils from poorer backgrounds. In our report on RAISE, we recommended that schools should establish better systems to monitor and report on the standards achieved by disadvantaged learners. We think schools should give a senior leader the responsibility for improving the standards of these learners. We also recommended that local authorities should use data on the performance of disadvantaged pupils, for example free-school-meal learners, when monitoring and challenging schools. The Welsh Assembly Government should also help to develop national benchmarks and to set national targets for improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

36 The schools that are making most progress with tackling disadvantage have comprehensive strategies to close the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils and they try to compensate systematically for the barriers that often exist for learners from relatively poor backgrounds. This means that they work effectively at a variety of levels to tackle the problem. They make sure that teachers consider carefully how they teach and motivate free-school-meal learners. They monitor the performance of learners carefully and pick up any dips in performance or other problems, like poor attendance, very early. They provide mentors and coaches to help learners. They give learners opportunities to complete work at school after school hours. They liaise very well with parents and carers to makes sure the learners receive appropriate support and encouragement at home.

37 Above all, these schools liaise well with other local authority services to make sure that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds get co-ordinated help and support. They work best when they form part of a community-based approach within the local authority to improve the education and services for disadvantaged pupils in the most deprived areas.

38 The Welsh Assembly Government also introduced the educational maintenance allowance (EMA) for 16 to 18-year-olds over a three year period (2004-2005 to 2006-2007). This scheme is aimed at learners from lower-income families and provides a financial incentive for learners to remain in full-time education after the age of 16.[2]

---

[2] Learners eligible for the EMA receive a weekly allowance of £10, £20 or £30, depending on household income. No award is available if the household income is greater than £30,811 and the full award of £30 a week is allocated where the household income is less than £20,810. Learners only get the allowance if they attend satisfactorily at a learning centre in Wales. They can get an additional periodic bonus of £100 if they meet agreed learning objectives. Schools and colleges administer the system on a day-to-day basis by monitoring the attendance of EMA learners. The applications and payments are administered by the Student Loan Company.

In a remit survey on RAISE undertaken this year, we found the work of Neath Port Talbot local authority was particularly effective and their disadvantaged learners in secondary schools achieve relatively well. At key stage 4 in 2008, it was the best performing local authority with 28% of pupils achieving the CSI compared to just 8% in the worst and 19% on average. In the remit survey, we say:

"A key factor in the success of Neath Port Talbot has been the high quality of leadership from the local authority and from individual schools. The local authority and schools have worked together over a number of years to develop a culture that promotes high standards of achievement, especially for disadvantaged learners. There is a clear emphasis on openness and partnership working… This has led to a transparency in sharing information about the performance of all schools and a willingness to share good practice."

Ensuring that all learners can reach their potential

39   Just over 32,700 EMAs were awarded last year. Most allowances (83%) are awarded at the full amount of £30 a week. About 60% of applications were from learners at further education colleges. Most of the remainder were from post-16 learners in school sixth forms.[3]

40   In 2008-2009, the total funding of EMAs was equivalent to about £900k a week, or roughly £29m a year. This is a significant level of funding and reflects a serious investment by the Welsh Assembly Government in providing financial support and incentives for young people from lower-income households to increase their life chances by continuing in education and training.

41   Many learners say that they would not have continued in education or training without the EMA allowance to encourage and support them. Our inspection evidence suggests that the introduction of the EMA did have a significant effect when it was introduced in terms of boosting levels of enrolment in the targeted age groups. However, there is currently no requirement or incentive for schools and colleges to look more broadly at the performance of the group of learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Overall, no analysis has taken place to gauge whether the funding is returning good value for money. As a result, it is unclear whether this significant degree of funding is having the desired effect in terms of improved staying-on rates or improved attainment rates by learners from lower-income households.

Ethnic minority children and learners with English language acquisition needs

42   Our inspection of schools and survey work conducted last year indicates that many schools provide well for newly-arrived pupils for whom English, and/or Welsh, is an additional language. Where local authorities have well-established services to support ethnic minority children, the learners often receive good support within very inclusive schools, and they often receive expert teaching from experienced teachers of English as an additional language (EAL). These services are usually most well developed in large cities with established ethnic minority communities, such as Cardiff, Swansea and Newport.

---

[3] 'Student Finance: Education Maintenance Allowances Awarded in Wales, 2008/09 (provisional)' SDR 10/2009 Statistical Directorate, Welsh Assembly Government, January 2009

43 Too often, however, staff in schools cannot make the best provision for pupils with EAL because many schools do not assess the language needs of ethnic minority children as soon as they arrive in school. This information is important to help the school to identify each pupil's stage of language acquisition and the kind of work needed to develop their Welsh and English skills further. A few schools and authorities have been successful in meeting these pupils' needs through innovative approaches, for example by devising a quality award linked to inclusion and by using bilingual members of the community as learning mentors.

44 Most schools provide care, support and guidance of good or outstanding quality for ethnic minority learners. They treat everyone in the school community equally and fairly regardless of their racial group.

45 In a survey this year on the impact of schools' race equality policies, we found that most had race equality policies, but only around half had adapted them to reflect their particular circumstances. Other schools, mainly where numbers of ethnic minority pupils are low, did not see the development of race equality policy and practice as a priority. This is a cause for concern because it is not preparing pupils well enough for the diverse world in which they will live.

46 Last year we saw only a few schools which tracked the progress of their pupils by minority ethnic group well. This is often the case where there are significant numbers of ethnic minority learners in a school and where a local authority develops specific policies to underpin the achievement of ethnic minority learners.

Pillgwenlly County Primary School in Newport has about 620 pupils. Forty-four per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals and nearly two-thirds have English as an additional language. There are 29 languages spoken across the school other than English or Welsh. In the school's inspection report this year, we said:

"The quality of provision for equal opportunities is outstanding. A sense of fairness, acceptance, and inclusion completely permeates the school. Policies effectively promote equal opportunity, gender and race equality. In practice, the school takes full account of pupils' social, ethnic, linguistic and educational backgrounds to ensure that all are treated fairly and are equally well supported. The school is highly successful in promoting gender equality and in challenging stereotypical choices.

"Outstanding arrangements are in place to eliminate bullying, harassment and racial discrimination. The majority of pupils in key stages 1 and 2 understand the 'Red card for racism' system and the 'listening boxes' to tackle bullying issues. Procedures effectively reflect the school's commitment to inclusion and the work of outside agencies such as the Gwent Education Minority-ethnic Service is invaluable in this."

47 However, few schools make use of data on academic attainment by ethnic group to identify underachievement so they can best target their efforts to improve. In a way similar to free-school-meal learners, reducing these kinds of gaps in achievements of ethnic minority learners is a crucial challenge for schools if children are to achieve to their full potential.

48 This year, we looked at the provision in a sample of areas across Wales for learners aged 16-19 with English language acquisition needs. We found that the provision for these learners was often weak and there was far too much variation between the quality of provision for these learners in schools and colleges. Few providers monitor the outcomes of these learners in any systematic way. Few have a policy or any action plans to address the needs of these learners and there is no clear national strategy to bring together the various agencies and government departments that work with these learners.

49 Overall, the situation for ethnic minority learners and learners with English acquisition needs is similar to that for pupils from relatively poor backgrounds. The message is the same, namely that too many schools and providers appear reluctant to look at the performance of specific groups of learners, either the group of socially and economically disadvantaged pupils or the ethnic minority groups or the EAL group. Schools and providers appear to focus too exclusively on individuals and their educational disadvantage rather than on groups. This is something that needs to change if the achievement of specific groups is to improve overall.

In a survey of provision for ethnic minority learners this year, we found that Newport local authority has an effective strategy to raise schools' awareness of the importance of inclusive practice. It has developed a challenging school inclusion and equalities award, based on a self-evaluation model linked to the Estyn inspection framework. This model recognises and celebrates the achievements of schools where inclusion and equal opportunities have been firmly embedded into the culture and ethos of the school. An integral part of the authority's inclusion ethos and practice is the very good use of ethnic pupil achievement data, which helps officers to identify pupils' underperformance and to establish effective intervention strategies for schools when needed. In working to achieve the award, more schools explore equalities and achievement issues in greater depth, leading to greater tolerance, appreciation of differences and higher standards of achievement for minority ethnic pupils.

Learners in independent special school and small children's homes

50   We inspect independent special schools in Wales, and small independent schools linked with children's homes. These schools cater for a relatively small, but highly vulnerable, group of learners whose education is funded from public funds. (There are about 300 publicly-funded pupils across 21 schools of this type in Wales.) These learners are almost always looked-after children with significant special educational needs. They come from all parts of the United Kingdom, but most are there as a result of their placement by local authorities in England and Wales.

51   We have found that instability in leadership is a particular issue in these schools. Twelve of the 21 independent special schools have had a significant change of senior leadership in the past two years, sometimes a change of proprietor, but more often a change of principal and/or headteacher. (There are about 170 pupils in these 12 schools.) Typically, proprietors have found it difficult to recruit and to retain suitably qualified and experienced staff with the capacity to lead and manage the school. In most cases, this means that the school does not improve as much as it could from year to year. In a few schools, inspectors have identified shortcomings in areas where previously there was good practice, including failure to meet registration standards. As a result of these weaknesses, learners do not receive an acceptable quality of education in these schools.

52   We have also seen many examples of local authorities failing to fulfil their full responsibilities as corporate parents towards these learners. They do not always check that the schools can meet learners' special educational needs before placing learners there, particularly when the school is linked to a children's home where the learner resides for 52 weeks of the year. Following placement, authorities do not always monitor learners' educational progress closely enough, for example by visiting the school for annual reviews and/or attending parents' meetings. In view of the finding that the quality of provision in this sector can change significantly from year to year, local authorities, not only from Wales but from all parts of the United Kingdom, need to be much more vigilant on behalf of those highly vulnerable learners for whom they act as corporate parents.
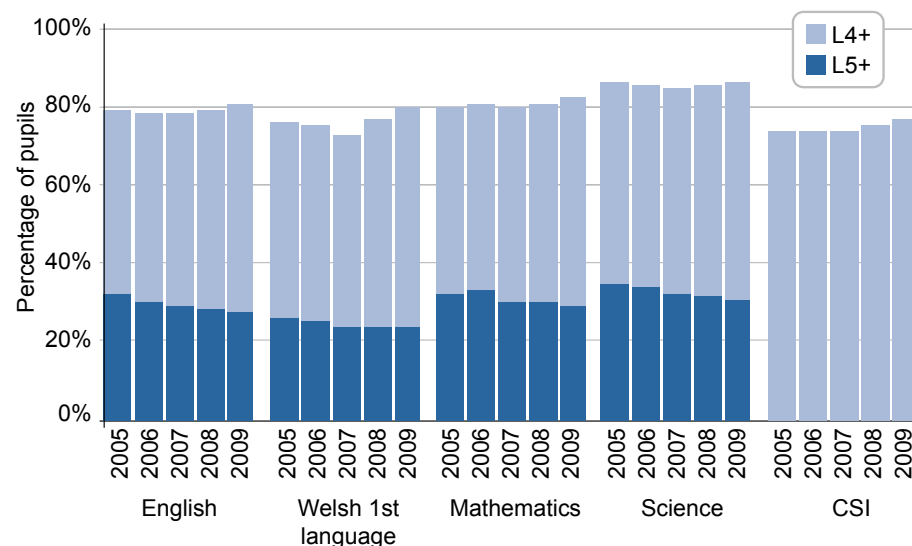
More able and talented learners

53 In last year's report, we also emphasised another source of underachievement where more able pupils are failing to reach their full potential. We argued that more needed to be done to ensure that more learners in Wales reach the highest standard of performance and that schools need to focus not only on disadvantaged groups, but also on how they provide for more able and talented learners in order to maximise their achievements.

54 In May 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government published a set of Quality Standards[4] to improve the way that providers meet the needs of more able and talented learners. In Wales, approximately 20% of learners aged 3 to 19 are considered 'more able', while the top 2% are considered 'exceptionally able'.[5]

55 We have found over the last year that more and more schools want to make better provision for their more able and talented learners. However, in too many, there are often misconceptions or narrow interpretations of what defines a more able and talented learner and this is hindering their identification and support for them. In too many cases, the provision for more able and talented learners is restricted to out-of-hours work when these learners need stretching learning experiences during the school day.

56 Only a minority of schools provide more able and talented learners with tasks that enrich and challenge their learning. More able learners often tell us that they find it demotivating when teachers only set more of the same kind of work, for example longer rather than different writing tasks that would really challenge them.

57 Last year we reported that too few pupils achieve the highest standards of achievement as they progress through the school system. This trend has generally continued in 2009.

58 In national curriculum teacher assessments in Wales at the end of key stage 1, pupils are expected to achieve level 2 or above with the most able achieving level 3.

59 In 2009, the percentage of pupils achieving level 3 improved slightly in English, Welsh first language and science. More pupils now achieve level 3 in these subjects than at the start of this inspection cycle in 2004-2005. In mathematics, the percentage awarded level 3 has decreased steadily since 2005. More pupils achieve level 3 in Welsh first language than in the other core subjects. In 2009, fewer than a quarter of pupils in key stage 1 achieved level 3 in English, mathematics or science in 2009.

Chart 2: Key stage 2 – percentage of pupils achieving the expected level (level 4) and the expected level plus one (level 5), 2005-2009

4 Meeting the Challenge Guidance Circular No 006/2008 Welsh Assembly Government

5 The term 'more able and talented' includes learners who are more able across subjects within the curriculum as well as those who show talent in one or more specific areas, such as music, sport and drama.

60   At the end of key stage 2, pupils are expected to achieve level 4 or above with the most able achieving level 5. In 2009, the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 has continued to decrease in all the core subjects except Welsh first language. In all four core subjects the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 is below that in 2005. Slightly more pupils achieve level 5 in science than in the other core subjects.

61   At the end of key stage 3, pupils are expected to achieve level 5 or above. The most able pupils achieve level 7 or above. The percentage of pupils achieving this level in English, Welsh first language and science has steadily decreased since 2007. Only in mathematics has the percentage improved. One in six pupils achieved level 7 in mathematics in 2009, more than twice as many as achieved this level in English and Welsh first language.

Chart 3: Key stage 3 – percentage of pupils achieving the expected level (level 5) and the expected level plus one (level 6), 2005-2009
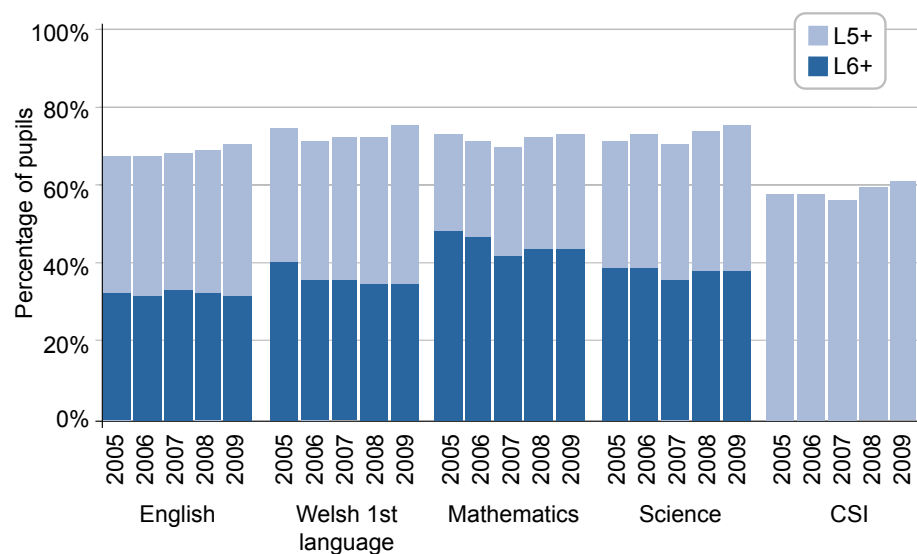
62   There has been a very small improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving level 6 in Welsh first language, mathematics and science in 2009. However, in all the core subjects, the percentage of pupils achieving level 6 has decreased since the start of this inspection cycle. More pupils achieve level 6 in mathematics than in the other core subjects.

63   Addressing the needs of more able and talented learners needs to be a higher priority for many schools so that more able and talented learners can achieve their full potential.

Ensuring we meet the needs of bilingual learners

64   The second challenge we highlighted last year was ensuring that we meet the needs of bilingual learners.

65   There has been much recent activity in relation to building a more strategic framework for the development of education and training through the medium of Welsh. For example, the Welsh Assembly Government has consulted widely on a new, wide-ranging Welsh-medium education strategy. This is timely as there continue to be significant challenges, as well as opportunities, in developing an education and training system fit for a bilingual nation.

66   We highlighted last year that children often begin learning of Welsh positively in the early years, but the picture becomes more blurred as they move through primary into secondary school and then worsens still as they move into the post-16 sectors.

67   During our inspections last year, we found that many children under 5 (80% in non-maintained settings and 89% in nursery provision in schools) made good progress in the area of Welsh Language Development. Slightly more (85%) made good progress in Welsh-medium settings and schools. Where children made less progress than expected in English-medium settings, practitioners were still in the process of developing their own Welsh language skills and lacked confidence in using the language with the children. This meant that children in these settings heard little Welsh spoken and were not able to use Welsh as much as they could in play activities.

Litchard Infant School in Bridgend is a good and improving school with outstanding features in standards of Welsh and bilingualism. All pupils speak English at home and no pupils speak Welsh as a first language. Standards in bilingualism are good with outstanding features. Progression in pupils' linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in Welsh is consistent across classes so that pupils at the upper end of the key stage have a very high level of language acquisition. They ask and answer questions confidently and use their Welsh readily on all occasions.

68   From our inspections in primary schools last year, we found that many pupils in key stage 1 achieved at least good standards in Welsh and Welsh second language in their lessons, and primary schools were doing well in terms of establishing pupils' early bilingual skills. In Welsh, the proportion of schools we inspected with good or better standards was about the same in key stages 1 and 2. Welsh was about the third best subject in primary schools in relation to the proportion of schools with good or better work. However, while Welsh second language in key stage 2 was much better than in the previous year, it remained the poorest performing subject, and the proportion of schools with good or better work still dropped significantly from 89% in key stage 1 to 74% in key stage 2.

69   In the secondary schools we inspected last year, Welsh first language was the best performing subject in the curriculum. All the schools we inspected this year that teach Welsh first language achieved good or better standards and 40% achieved outstanding standards. Standards in Welsh second language are improving year on year. The proportion of lessons we judged as good or better in Welsh second language has increased from 51% to 59% over the last three years. However, it still remains one of the worst subjects overall.

70   In terms of the development of pupils' bilingual skills and the promotion of the Welsh dimension within the curriculum, just under two-thirds of the schools we inspected had shortcomings this year compared to about half in the previous two years. The provision for the development of pupils' bilingualism was good in only one in five English-medium secondary schools.

71   Overall, the return for many pupils in Welsh-medium schools in terms of the development of their skills in Welsh is good. However, in English-medium schools, pupils' return on 11 years of studying Welsh as a second language is poor in terms of their Welsh language skills when they leave school at 16.

We inspected Ysgol Y Preseli, a secondary school in Pembrokeshire, this year and judged standards in Welsh first language to be outstanding in key stage 3 and in the sixth form, and good in key stage 4. All pupils follow the full Welsh first language course. Pupils' bilingual skills are developed fully and the language is used in all subject areas. The Welsh language is evident in and around the school. Nearly all pupils use Welsh as a means of communication to teachers or fellow pupils. They are able to transfer their skills from one language to the other with confidence and ease. This was also evident when discussions were held with members of the school council.

Most lessons are taught through the medium of Welsh. Opportunities are provided across the key stages to develop the bilingual skills of the pupils through provision of dual literacy activities. There is good practice in planning cross-phase standards in English and Welsh between key stage 2 and key stage 3. The extent to which the school succeeds in developing pupils' competence in both English and Welsh is outstanding. The school successfully develops their bilingual skills to a high level.

Hyfforddiant Gwynedd Training is a wholly bilingual provider whose aim is to ensure that all learners are able and confident to work bilingually. It works to Gwynedd County Council's Welsh language scheme. All learners have access to a fully bilingual learning experience. During the last financial year, nearly two thirds of learners completed their learning in Welsh and almost half the learners completed all or part of their assessments in Welsh.

In Health, Public Services and Care, all bilingual learners benefit considerably from the wide ranging and very good opportunities that they have to undertake all elements of their programmes bilingually. All bilingual learners use and develop their Welsh language skills, particularly their oral skills, very well in the workplace and at the training centres. Learners with only a basic understanding of Welsh also benefit and improve their Welsh language skills well through bilingual teaching and training sessions.

72 In other sectors of education and training, provision for developing learners' bilingualism in Welsh and English is developing, but at a relatively slow pace and with significant variation between individual providers and sectors.

73 Further education colleges and adult community-based learning providers are getting better at meeting the needs of bilingual learners in areas where a significant proportion of learners are Welsh speaking. For example, in adult community-based learning, there has been a substantial increase in the range of courses offered in Welsh or bilingually in Gwynedd. However, the provision of bilingual opportunities is relatively weak in other parts of north Wales and in most parts of south east Wales, where all providers offer their courses in English only. In areas like these, providers often do not do enough to research or to cater for the learning needs of Welsh speakers and learners.

74 There continue to be staffing capacity issues that affect the amount of teaching that providers can offer through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. For example, none of the adult community-based learning providers we visited this year has enough tutors who can, or who choose to, deliver courses through the medium of Welsh and this leads to significant gaps in the provision.

75 Overall, managers in the learning area of Welsh for Adults continue to work well with their partners and implement good planning processes. In the Welsh for Adults centre that we inspected this year, which was in an anglicised area of south east Wales, the provision was very effective in providing a supportive Welsh-speaking culture for learners with little opportunity to hear or to speak Welsh on a day-to-day basis in their surrounding area.

76 Work-based learning providers are doing more to promote the importance of bilingual skills. For example, a small number of learners in Gwynedd and Anglesey complete their training in Welsh, usually in the areas of Health, Public Services and Care or SkillBuild. However, few learners in the rest of Wales complete all or part of their training in Welsh or bilingually. Often providers do not set targets for the number of learners completing all or part of their training in Welsh.

77 In most work-based learning providers, there are too few staff with the confidence to deliver and to assess learners' work in Welsh, even when they often use Welsh informally with their learners. In the best cases, providers offer all provision bilingually, and teachers use bilingual training materials skilfully to meet the needs and abilities of all learners.

78 On a few occasions, we come across situations where providers actively discourage learners from undertaking their learning or assessment in Welsh.

79 More generally, post-16 providers in anglicised areas are less successful in supporting learners who have been educated previously in Welsh or in providing bilingual or Welsh learning opportunities for Welsh speakers. Most colleges also do not do enough to promote the advantages of bilingualism to their Welsh-speaking learners.

80 In other post-16 sectors, there are many issues in relation to the support for the Welsh language. For example, in youth support services, partnerships do not plan well enough to increase provision through the medium of Welsh or bilingually and do not collect and analyse information on the needs of young Welsh speakers. Youth support services often do not yet know how much Welsh-medium and bilingual youth support service provision is actually available for young people. In many cases, staff in youth support services do not use the Welsh language in activities where opportunities naturally arise or plan well enough to promote Welsh culture.

81 In most prisons that we inspect, there is very little promotion of the Welsh language and offenders continue to have very limited opportunities in Welsh. However, the women's prison in Eastwood Park in England that we inspected this year had relatively good provision for prisoners from Wales with Welsh language needs. There were Welsh books in the prison library suitable for a range of reading abilities. The library also had a selection of children's books in Welsh so that parents could record stories for their children. Prisoners had access to software that translated from English into Welsh, and there was Welsh signage alongside other languages.

82 A few providers, across post-16 sectors of education and training, say they have gone as far as they feel they can go in providing opportunities for learners to undertake courses bilingually or through the medium of Welsh. At post-16, many providers claim that learners actively choose not to continue their studies through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. Given these positions, it is important that any new strategy for Welsh-medium education gives strong direction to providers, establishes clear targets at a national and local level, and helps to move providers beyond the language of encouragement towards a clearer view of learner entitlement to Welsh-medium education and training.

Ensuring that effective approaches to self-evaluation and improvement are in place across all sectors

83   The third challenge that we highlighted last year related to embedding further a culture of self-evaluation in education providers in Wales.

84   Estyn has promoted the development of self-evaluation approaches across all sectors for many years. The Welsh Assembly Government's strategy of 'tri-level' reform emphasises the importance of coming to a clear, shared view about the strengths and weaknesses in education and training in a locality so that providers can plan to improve services and options for young people.

85   Most sectors in education and training in Wales are making progress in establishing appropriate self-evaluation processes, often based on Estyn's Common Inspection Framework, but the quality of these processes and their overall effectiveness vary considerably across sectors of education and training in Wales.

86   In many primary and secondary schools, and in further education colleges, providers have developed and improved their self-evaluation systems over many years. This year, we judged the quality of self-evaluation to be good or better in about three-quarters of the primary and secondary schools we inspected. This compares to about two-thirds of schools five years ago at the start of the current inspection cycle. In nearly all maintained special schools and in many of the independent special schools we inspected this year, the quality of self-evaluation is good.

Of the maintained special schools we inspected this year, Ysgol Rhydygors in Carmarthen stands out as a school with outstanding practice across all key questions. It achieved the highest grade (grade 1) for each of the seven key questions. It is the first school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties to achieve this grade profile. In its inspection report, we said:

"The school has an open and self-critical culture. The staff and curriculum leaders play a leading role in evaluating progress and identifying need… The school has established a highly effective and comprehensive performance management structure, which is strongly embedded in its outstanding and well-established self-evaluation process… The school's excellent review procedures have identified measurable improvement since the last inspection in that standards have steadily risen with a greater concentration on life skills; the participation of pupils in setting targets for their own improvement; and the establishing of an engaging, investigative and varied curriculum. Effective partnerships with other interested parties have greatly improved."

87   In the most effective schools, colleges and work-based learning providers, there is a very detailed and thorough analysis of a range of information on performance that leads to planning for improvement. The self-evaluation processes are embedded in the day-to-day work of the school or college and there is an open and self-critical ethos that supports planning for improvement.

88   Schools involved in the pilot of the Welsh Assembly Government's School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) have also improved their self-evaluation processes as a result. Self-evaluation requirements have also been standardised across the post-16 sector and this has helped to establish more consistent approaches, although further progress is still required in the work-based learning sector.

89   In the further education colleges we inspected this year, there are often mature and well-established systems and procedures for self-evaluation. College managers encourage and support teachers and other staff to analyse and evaluate data rigorously and fairly. They link identified weaknesses closely to their plans for improvement. Most colleges carry out rigorous internal inspections and audits modelled on Estyn's Common Inspection Framework. These normally include observing classes to gain first hand evidence of standards of learning and teaching. Colleges also make good links between their arrangements for the performance management of teachers to other aspects of the management and improvement of quality. Occasionally, a college significantly overestimates the quality of its own work. This is often because leaders and managers have not kept fully abreast of the pace of current developments within the sector.

Deeside College, Coleg Llandrillo and Coleg Menai, three large further education colleges in North Wales, have well-established arrangements for sharing their quality and self-evaluation processes. The colleges have developed an open and honest approach to sharing their self-assessment reports and data on learner performance. Staff and managers responsible for quality improvement at their colleges meet regularly. They have established very good arrangements for improving quality and standards in their own colleges and they welcome the opportunity to share these with colleagues from other colleges. They attend quality events and training at each other's colleges. In the best cases, staff carry out observations at other colleges and contribute to their moderation and standardisation meetings.

of reliable data for benchmarking performance. The Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) has not developed well enough in relation to outcomes for adult community-based learners. Within individual providers, there is often a lot of useful data, but many staff do not analyse the data effectively to improve performance and this limits how well providers can monitor their progress in meeting the targets they set themselves.

92   Despite good work by many providers and across many sectors, in about a third of inspections this year, we found providers did not systematically identify their strengths and weaknesses or significantly overestimated how well they were doing compared to others. Often these providers did not analyse evidence and data on their performance robustly and honestly enough or they did not focus enough on monitoring the work of learners in coming to judgements about what was working well and what was not. These weaknesses significantly undermined their ability to plan for improvement or to judge whether an existing action plan had been successful or not.

93   In the pupil referral units (PRU) we inspected this year, managers are not as good as they should be at working out what the PRU does well and where there needs to be improvement. They do not collect and use data to get a good understanding of what is working well and not so well and how this affects pupils' achievement.

94   In about a quarter of work-based learning providers we inspected this year, self-evaluation processes do not identify areas of underperformance well enough and do not concentrate enough on the standard of learners' work or the quality of training and assessment. In these providers, managers do not set challenging targets for improvement and they do not monitor the progress of learners closely enough.

90   Overall, schools and post-16 providers are making better use of data to analyse how well learners are doing. In many cases, the analysis of data benefits from a range of benchmarking tools that are helping providers to see how well they are doing compared to others. Schools benefit from seeing their performance in relation to schools in similar free-school-meal categories. Further education colleges benefit from online, benchmarked data tools that allow them to compare their performance against other colleges from top-level whole-college data down to the comparative performance of individual courses. They also exchange information on their performance openly with each other and this is helping them to improve their monitoring of quality and financial performance as well as to set appropriately challenging targets for improvement.

91   However, some clear obstacles remain. For example, in adult community-based learning, there continues to be lack

95   In inspections of youth support services, we found that too many have yet to establish overarching quality assurance frameworks. As a result, they do not know well enough how providers of youth support services meet the needs of young people and they are not able to measure value for money effectively. Poor use of data to inform monitoring and evaluation of impact is often a shortcoming in partnership working. This means that the performance management of initiatives is not good enough and this weakness undermines the strategic and operational efficiency of partnerships. Children and Young People's Partnerships generally have only limited data on the achievements of young people. Most do not know how well young people are progressing or achieving. The self-assessment reports of the partnerships are detailed and comprehensive, but they are often too descriptive and not evaluative enough. Even when data is available, it is generally not analysed at partnership level to help to share and to celebrate good practice and to identify any trends to inform strategic planning.

96   In a couple of sectors, self-evaluation processes are developing from a low base, for example in playgroups and mainstream independent schools.

97   In the majority of settings for children under five years of age that we inspected this year, practitioners identify accurately what they need to do to bring about improvements and they analyse how the changes have benefitted the children. However, in over a third of settings, inspectors recommend that settings make improvements in self-evaluation. The most significant shortcomings in these settings are that practitioners are unclear about the purpose of self-evaluation or have yet to develop systems to support the gathering of information. Generally, self-evaluation is better in day nurseries and under-five units.

We found self-evaluation systems to be strong and effective in our inspection of the youth support services in Pembrokeshire this year. In this case, the Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) based its strategic plans on detailed demographic data, analysis of needs and community profiles. The partnership developed its priorities based on evidence and providers used research and consultation in a significant number of areas to ensure that the priorities reflected the needs of their local communities. The major partners to the CYPP had good and, at times, outstanding performance management systems in place.

For the first time in the current inspection cycle, we judged one independent school (Howells School in Cardiff) to have outstanding features in the quality of its self-evaluation arrangements this year. (It received 'outstanding' judgements in all areas of its work.) This school has systematic and rigorous procedures that involve all stakeholders. It uses the information gained from these analyses very effectively to identify clear priorities and to set appropriate targets for improvement.

Pontymoile Under Fives Nursery is situated in Pontypool Active Learning Centre in Pontypool Park, Torfaen. The Nursery includes three registered playgroups and a Flying Start playgroup for two-year-olds. The Nursery provides a range of wrap-around care including a toddler group, breakfast club, lunchtime care, an after school club, Saturday and holiday clubs. In the nursery's inspection report this year we said:

"Formal self-evaluation is well embedded and effective. Self review sheets for all curriculum areas indicate areas of strength and weakness and include an action plan with time scales, outcomes and monitoring. These are updated annually. Progress in improving the setting can be clearly tracked through the self-evaluation process; for example the monitoring of children's learning which feeds into planning… Strong systems are in place to monitor and review the quality of provision for children and parental satisfaction. All this reflects the very good management of the Nursery and a continual quest for improvement, where possible. Parents and carers, staff and children are all consulted as part of the process."

This is because these settings are subject to a greater degree of regulation and inspection than playgroups so that practitioners develop confidence and expertise in reviewing practice.

98   In maintained school inspections, there is often a strong link between weak self-evaluation and a school becoming a cause for concern. This year, there were important weaknesses in self-evaluation in nearly three-quarters of schools causing concern. In many of these schools, leaders and managers do not know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and are therefore unable to plan effectively for improvement. They often do not monitor provision rigorously enough and do not have effective formal arrangements to gain the views of everyone involved with the school. Governors are usually not sufficiently involved in setting the strategic direction of the school. These schools make little progress in addressing the shortcomings from their last inspection.

99   For mainstream independent schools, self-evaluation was new for most at the start of the inspection cycle in 2004-2005. At that time, we found processes for collecting information were not rigorous enough and many independent schools did not know how well they were performing compared with other similar schools. As the inspection cycle has progressed, we have observed gradual improvement in the quality of self-evaluation. However, since the inspection cycle began in 2004, we have judged only 18% of schools to have good self-evaluation procedures, and about half have shortcomings in important areas, so there is still much for the sector to improve.

Developing partnership working

100   The final challenge we highlighted last year related to developing partnership working. In the last year, we have seen evidence in particular of how well 14-19 partnerships and the children and young people's partnerships are rising to the challenges of partnership working.

101   When providers actively seek to involve and work with partners, this helps them respond more effectively to the educational challenges of the local area and to deliver improved learner outcomes and wellbeing. Working with partners helps to harness a fuller range of resources and expertise, and strategic partnerships can also contribute to the provider's own capacity for continuous improvement.

102   Over recent years, there have been many attempts to encourage more partnership working, but a variety of factors have inhibited any fundamental change. These included protective self-interest, a culture of competition between providers for learners and a lack of funding to support change and to make it happen.

Ysgol Plas Cefndy in Denbighshire provides education at four sites in and around Rhyl for pupils being educated otherwise than at school. Pupils have a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and are excluded or at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. Many pupils have acute personal difficulties and have often had long periods of absence from school resulting in them falling behind in their work.

The PRU makes excellent use of strong partnerships with other agencies and the community to meet pupils' needs. Together, these partners are developing well co-ordinated, agreed procedures and actions to support pupils and their families.

When pupils join the PRU, a panel which includes the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and educational psychologists meets quickly to decide what support pupils need and who will provide it. Staff in the PRU then work with a very wide range of agencies including Social Services, the Behaviour Support service, Rhyl Youth Action Group (RYAG), educational social workers (ESW), and health advisers to make sure that all pupils get the help that they need and benefit from their time at the PRU. Staff also work closely with the careers service, employers, schools and colleges and the community to offer pupils the chance to return to school and good quality learning and work placements.

The impact of this close working is that the PRU is able to provide pupils with the personal support that they need. This support helps them to deal with issues in their personal lives that may be preventing progress. The wider range of learning and work opportunities gives pupils confidence and makes it more likely that when they will leave the PRU they can get back on track and return to school or move onto further training or work.

14-19 partnerships

105 There is more and more progress in developing collaborative working through 14-19 partnerships to expand the range of study choices for young people. The implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure from September 2009 and the transformation agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government are likely to accelerate this process.

106 The Learning and Skills Measure sets out a clear entitlement for learners in key stage 4 and at post-16. This will specify the minimum number of courses that the 14-19 partnership should offer them and it is unlikely that any institution can provide all the courses by themselves. This means, therefore, that they will have to work with other schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to ensure that each learner gets their entitlement.

107 The transformation agenda will have far-reaching consequences on the nature of provision at post-16. The early plans from local authorities indicate that the traditional arrangements of separate sixth forms and further education colleges may change. In a few areas, there are proposals to move to full-scale tertiary provision, that is where learners go to a secondary school between the ages of 11 to 16 and then to a tertiary college after that. In other areas, there are plans for much closer and more formal partnerships between schools and colleges. A number of further education colleges are proposing to merge with each other to create larger institutions with a broader curriculum for learners to choose from. A few proposals focus on establishing new partnerships between providers in the work-based learning sector to secure better and more coherent provision for learners. Many proposals also focus on reducing unnecessary duplication.

103 Many of these barriers to change are coming down as providers respond to important strategic drivers from the Welsh Assembly Government, notably the emphasis on 14-19 partnerships and the transformation agenda[6].   Many providers are more involved in partnerships now than at any other previous period in the current inspection cycle and professional networks, such as those established in post-16 by fforwm and the National Training Federation for Wales, have helped to drive forward a more collaborative culture between providers.

104 There are also strong financial incentives that are driving providers to seek more efficient models for delivering education and training. For example, local authorities are planning to reduce surplus places in their schools and many are consulting with their local communities on school reorganisation plans. A number of colleges, faced with difficult financial circumstances, are also looking for efficiency savings and seeking to secure their medium to long-term future, for example through mergers with other institutions.

[6] The Welsh Assembly Government's policy, 'Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales', seeks to improve the delivery of education and training to 14-19 learners. It aims to widen the options available for 14-19 learners, reduce unnecessary duplication of provision by increased levels of collaborative curriculum planning and delivery, and move to excellence across networks of providers.

108 Taken together, we should expect to see fundamental changes in the nature and pattern of provision for 14 to 19-year-olds in the coming years. This should lead to a further increase in the choices available to learners, and to a more efficient and cost effective pattern of providers. Collaborative working will become a common pattern. The broad thrust of the proposals means less competition between providers for learners and more collaboration and co-operation for the benefit of learners.

109 Over the last few years, many 14-19 networks have improved provision for a generally small number of learners, often those who find academic courses unsuitable for their needs and aspirations. In a few areas, these arrangements are much more developed and are starting to have an impact on all learners. Currently, the arrangements are most developed at post-16, for example in the joint provision between schools and colleges that occurs in Caerphilly and Haverfordwest, and in the well-established network in Cardiff. There are more and more collaborative arrangements coming on stream at key stage 4 as schools start to implement the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure. In the past, collaborative working was hampered by competition and difficulties over transport or timetabling arrangements. In a few areas, these factors are still impeding collaboration, but in many areas partnerships are starting to address them with positive results.

110 We looked closely at the Caerphilly 14-19 network this year and found evidence of a strong strategic direction and clear vision to drive the work on implementing Learning Pathways 14-19, although there were also some shortcomings in the arrangements. We found that a lot of progress had taken place in establishing partnership working and collaborative provision in the Caerphilly local area over the last two years. Almost all 11 to 18 schools collaborate with other schools and colleges in the area we inspected to deliver a wide range of courses for 16 to 19-year-old learners. Most schools and colleges also collaborate to offer vocational courses to the 14-16 age range. The provision of opportunities for learners in the Welsh-medium school in the area means that learners can choose from courses offered in collaboration with another Welsh-medium school outside the local authority.

Children and Young People's Partnerships

111   The planning, co-ordination and delivery of all youth support services is generally managed through the mechanism of Children and Young People's Partnerships. A generally good cross-section of agencies is represented on these partnerships, including representation from the voluntary sector.

112   Last year we saw increasing evidence that regional partnerships are delivering better services for children and young people. The work of the SWAMWAC authorities (South West and Mid Wales Consortium) in supporting vulnerable groups and the South East Wales consortium in providing low-incidence special needs services are good examples of this kind of provision.

113   The effect of Children and Young People's Plans on partnership working is generally positive. This is particularly true where schools are aware of the plan's priorities and their role in its delivery. When we inspected Pembrokeshire, we found the quality of strategic planning and leadership, and the overall commitment to partnership working by youth support services, was very strong.

114   However, there are only a few examples of shared budgets or joint management of multi-agency provision for children and young people. An exception to this is the partnership provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties in Conwy. This good practice is delivering better access to support and improved outcomes for learners with these additional needs.

This year, we inspected the Integrated Adult Service in Merthyr Tydfil (a strategic integration of the adult community learning service with social care). We found that the arrangements provide very good opportunities for staff to make connections across social care, health and education sectors. This strategy represents very innovative and effective practice. The result is that adult community-based learning staff at all levels across the partnership have developed a wider understanding of how learners' needs are often interrelated and of each other's working practices. This helps staff to work together effectively to influence and to improve not only learners' chances of employment, but also their wellbeing.

115   This year we found generally good working relationships in the interests of children and young people between services like education, health, social services, the police, youth justice and the voluntary sector. For example, when we inspected Carmarthenshire and the Adult Integrated Service in Merthyr Tydfil, we found that these good working relationships are making a positive impact at all levels.

116   Multi-agency partnerships are contributing well to the identification of barriers to learning in the early years and the delivery of necessary support to children and families. Blaenau Gwent early years partnership is a good example of this, as are the partnerships in Flintshire, Conwy and Denbighshire.