

Foreword

Annual Report 2011-2012



My annual report this year draws on findings from the second year of the inspection cycle that began in September 2010.



Ann Keane

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

The report includes sections on:

- findings from inspections undertaken in 2011-2012;
- findings from the reports we write in response to the annual Ministerial remit letter to Estyn;
- the follow-up monitoring of providers that need to improve;
- progress on national priorities and in provision; and
- national performance data, including detailed data on inspection outcomes and from learner and parent questionnaire responses.

In this foreword, I want to highlight some of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence that my inspectors have gathered and consider their implications.

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Standards

In the schools we inspected this year, the proportion awarded good or excellent judgements is a little lower than it was last year. There is more excellent work in secondary than in primary schools, but there is also more unsatisfactory work (one in seven secondary schools is excellent and one in seven is unsatisfactory). Standards are good or better in most special schools and independent mainstream schools inspected this year. In other sectors, standards remain variable.

Standards of wellbeing are generally high across most sectors, although it is good or better in only half of the pupil referral units inspected. More generally, pupils are increasingly involved in making decisions about school life but in only a few schools does this include making decisions about what and how they learn. Attendance remains the weakest aspect of wellbeing for schools. Attendance is not good enough in over a third of secondary schools and it varies too much between primary schools in the most and least deprived areas.

The impact of 'follow-up' inspections



'Follow-up' is a new feature of our 2010-2016 inspection cycle and reflects a more proportionate approach to inspection. It means that we re-visit the schools and providers that need to improve to check on their progress. Just under half of the schools/providers we inspected last year were judged to require follow-up. What we found when we returned to the secondary schools in local authority or Estyn monitoring was that all of them had made enough progress not to require another visit. In the primary sector, 87% of schools no longer need further monitoring by Estyn. Schools that are placed in a category of being in need of significant improvement or requiring special measures usually take longer to come out of follow-up.

The schools that we removed from follow-up are the ones that have acted on our recommendations. They have introduced whole-school systems to deal with shortcomings and staff have agreed on how they will implement the systems in order to improve standards. Having a focus on how to strengthen teaching and learning to meet the specific needs of learners has been crucial to success. Typically, leaders and managers have adopted pupil tracking systems

to monitor performance and to set objectives. They have set new levels of expectation for self-evaluation and monitoring practices, using the scrutiny of learners' work and lesson observations to identify where performance is good and then sharing that good practice. Managers have made more confident use of performance management systems not only to support and challenge poor teachers but to raise everyone's performance. Teachers have been trained to co-ordinate the delivery of a curriculum to help all pupils to become more literate and numerate. Later on in this report, in the section on follow-up, case studies from Peter Lea Primary School, Ysgol Friars and Cylch Meithrin Penllwyn illustrate the kind of improvements that can make a big difference to standards. In post-16 sectors, as in schools, follow-up has led to improvements, particularly in adult community learning and Welsh for adults.

Local authority education services

Over the past two years a majority of local authorities have been found to need follow-up. Where areas for improvement are pronounced, a local authority is designated as being in a category “causing concern”. Around a quarter of the local authorities inspected so far have been placed in this category.

The shortcomings that inspectors identify in these local authorities causing concern are often symptoms of limited capacity and capability among officers as well as symptoms of failure in how well elected members challenge performance. The fact that many of the authorities that have been placed in categories are relatively small suggests that limited capacity is a significant factor.

Because of their size, small authorities cannot benefit from economies of scale. They have fewer officers to fulfil the full range of duties that they need to deliver.

A lack of depth in specialist expertise constrains the scope of advice and support. This means that officers will tend to deal at a more general and superficial level with the range of demands that they face. By comparison, in a larger authority, economies of scale enable a higher degree of specialisation, more distinct job roles and more focused expertise in the advice and support provided to schools. Economies of scale mean that more people can be employed to cover the range of responsibilities.

By comparison, the rationale for merging colleges of further education has in part emerged from projections illustrating the benefits of economies of scale. These benefits have subsequently been realised in several instances of merger, in all parts of Wales, and several of these mergers have been of larger with smaller institutions that struggled to cover the demands they faced alone.

However, further education and local authorities are not fully comparable. Colleges have stood alone since they became incorporated institutions around 20 years ago whereas local authority education services for children and young people co-exist with other services for children and young people in a local authority area. These services together share an infrastructure of corporate governance and control in the context of local democracy within a county or county borough council.

Merging services across local authorities is difficult because of the complex sets of interdependencies between statutory services within each authority. The Beecham report, in 2006, recommended collaboration between services and across local authorities and promised another whole-system review in 2011 if collaboration did not work. We now know that voluntary collaboration has not worked as well as it should have. The Thomas report of 2010

recommended a migration of school improvement services to regional consortia by September 2012 and this is currently in train. Although the school improvement service function is now to be organised regionally, it remains a statutory duty of the local authority and subject to local arrangements for commissioning, scrutiny and accountability.

Some authorities have services that are good and a few areas of provision that are excellent. We need to retain and extend these strengths across all authorities.

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Safeguarding

Local authorities play a key role in managing the safeguarding of children and young people. In the summer of 2011, we conducted a joint investigation with the social services inspectorate, CSSIW, of how well Pembrokeshire local authority safeguards children in its schools and other education services. We also undertook a joint survey of safeguarding and behaviour management in a wider selection of pupil referral units nationally. As a result of our published findings, local authorities, schools and pupil referral units across Wales have looked more closely at their own safeguarding practices. Increasingly, they have been developing and updating their policies and procedures for safe recruitment and child protection. There remain a few schools and local authorities where procedures are under-developed, arrangements for safe recruitment are not rigorously applied, key staff have not received recent training and a few are not aware of how to respond to a disclosure.

Local authorities are only now beginning to monitor regularly their schools’ use of behaviour management strategies, and how the schools report on them. Following our reports, the more pro-active local authorities have issued guidance about how to use ‘time out’ appropriately with pupils to de-escalate difficult situations.

Literacy, numeracy and closing the poverty gap

Introducing the national literacy and numeracy framework should help school leaders to raise standards by supporting teachers to focus more on literacy and numeracy. While a few schools have excellent skills provision, we need to achieve better standards of literacy in over half of all primary and secondary schools. Planning for progression in numeracy skills is at an early stage in many schools. Pupils often lack confidence in their basic number skills, such as division and working with fractions, and are reluctant to apply them to solve problems, particularly in the context of other subjects such as science and technology. Standards of writing are a concern across all sectors. While the Foundation Phase has been largely successful in developing children's confidence and independence through active learning approaches in the classroom and outdoors, children's writing shows too many errors in spelling, letter formation and punctuation. In other school sectors, teachers do not give pupils enough

opportunities to write independently, in different styles and for different purposes in lessons other than English or Welsh lessons.

Leaders need to make improving literacy and numeracy and closing the 'poverty gap' central to their planning. Teachers need to co-ordinate better their plans for developing pupils' skills across the school. In only a few secondary schools have well-established groups worked to strengthen literacy skills in subject schemes of work and only a few local authorities have worked with schools to promote good practice in developing literacy and numeracy skills. The national support programme for the literacy and numeracy framework has the potential to be influential in building capacity to plan teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders need to change the culture in schools in order to promote these priorities.

The results of national tests in reading and numeracy for all pupils aged 7 to 14 years, to be set from summer 2013, should provide

a more coherent set of data for schools to use to compare their reading and numeracy results with those from other schools. The results from the numeracy tests will provide the first national picture of pupils' numeracy abilities. This year, we asked local authorities to give us the data from the reading tests they set for pupils in the summer term 2012. It is not possible to summarise this information to give a fully coherent national picture of the reading abilities of pupils across Wales because different local authorities have used different tests at different stages. However, the information they provided suggests that there is an unacceptable degree of variability in pupils' reading scores between schools and between local authorities.

Schools with high proportions of pupils entitled to free schools meals tend not to perform as well as those with pupils from more advantaged backgrounds, but there are schools that are exceptions. Of the five secondary schools with excellent

performance inspected this year, three have about a quarter or more of their pupils entitled to free schools meals and these pupils perform well. This is because the schools concerned take a whole-school, strategic approach to tackling disadvantage. A common feature of these schools is strong leadership. Strong headteachers lead a structured, coherent and focused approach to closing the poverty gap by developing the expertise of staff, strengthening community links and engaging parental support. Most teachers say that engaging parents is a key factor in tackling the under-achievement of disadvantaged learners.

Building capacity



Issuing statutory new standards for literacy and numeracy and setting up a national testing system will focus attention in schools but teachers also need guidance, exemplification of standards and training on what is in effect a re-calibration of their curriculum if we are to see a step-change in outcomes. We need to build teachers' capacity to deliver the improvements that we want to see in national external assessments and in international tests like PISA. Teachers and other professionals need to be clear about how the curriculum and its delivery need to change and they need more support to make those changes.

Post-16 providers

Among some post-16 providers, attitudes to preparing young people for life and work vary to an unacceptable degree. Competition for learners and for funding sometimes means that the best interests of learners are overlooked. Some providers, including both schools and colleges, misguidedly retain learners in unsuitable provision or try to duplicate provision in schools that is better delivered in further education colleges or work-based learning providers.

Further education institutions are getting better at tackling the literacy and numeracy deficits of learners with additional learning needs but they have not addressed the need to plan courses that will challenge all learners to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in more practical contexts.

Some staff in the work-based learning sector recognise that their learners too need to be able to read and write well and carry out relevant numerical calculations. They are adapting their style of delivery so that learners can make more progress, often from a very low starting point. However, there is still resistance in the sector to preparing learners for more than the minimum basic skills requirements.

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Provision for 14 to 19-year-olds

The review of qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds has identified the Welsh Baccalaureate as a central vehicle for the 14-19 curriculum. Estyn’s recent report on the Welsh Baccalaureate has shown that this qualification offers many benefits for learners, particularly in broadening their curriculum through studying the Welsh Baccalaureate core, improving their essential skills and gaining a better understanding of a range of topics, including enterprise, politics and current affairs, than they would otherwise have achieved. In particular, carrying out their individual investigations helps many students to develop some of the research and analytical skills needed for further education, higher education and employment. However, currently, the standards being achieved on the Welsh

Baccalaureate are too variable. As part of this qualification, students gain qualifications in skills such as communication and application of number, but they do not always study these at a level that is appropriate to them as individuals and methods of assessment are not robust. The Welsh Baccalaureate can provide a sound basis for a future qualification system in Wales if there is more rigour in the way it is delivered and assessed.

Comparing post-16 outcomes

While we have plenty of national data on attainment at 16, there is no comprehensive national system to capture data at 18 on completion, attainment and progression rates across sixth form, further education and work-based learning sectors. This means that we cannot compare the success rates of post-16 courses, such as the Welsh Baccalaureate, A-level and vocational courses, in sixth forms and further education institutions. This means that learners and parents cannot make fully informed choices about what and where best to study.

Leadership

While this annual report celebrates the good practice that exists, there is still much to be done to improve education and training in Wales. It is in the capacity and quality of leadership that the remedy lies. By that I mean the leadership offered not only by headteachers and principals and local authority chief executive officers but in the distributed leadership offered by teachers, learning support assistants, learning coaches and everyone involved in delivering and servicing education and training in Wales. Each one can offer leadership in their actions, their behaviours and their commitment.

Senior managers have to devote time to matters of corporate governance. They must manage budgets, maintain facilities and plan the deployment of resources. They also have to work within statutory and regulatory frameworks that require high standards of compliance. Nevertheless their core business is the delivery of education and training to pupils and other learners. Their main focus should be on how they are going to improve learner experiences and outcomes.

Providers whose performance in their core business improves have leaders who develop, alongside other staff, a vision for change. They underpin that vision using programme and people-management skills of a high order, with which they co-ordinate several different and often interdependent projects and initiatives to do with better delivery of learning.

There is room for improvement in both general and specific ways. Specifically, in schools, more headteachers need to address mediocre teaching performance robustly. Secondary school headteachers need to address shortcomings in the performance of middle and senior leaders. Governors need to develop more expertise and to be more challenging.

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System leaders

System leaders¹ in regional consortia are key to helping schools to improve and change their culture. Their success will be judged by how well they can analyse challenges, plan interventions and support, use existing good practice, and set clear expectations for action, and by how effectively the action leads to an improvement in learner outcomes.

While there is evidence that some progress is being made in regional consortia on identifying, training and using system leaders, progress is uneven and there has been too little coherence in the thinking that is going on across Wales as a whole.

We need:

- common criteria for the selection of system leaders;
- agreement about the knowledge, understanding and skills/competencies that system leaders need to demonstrate; and
- agreed monitoring arrangements for quality assurance purposes.

There is a need to work to an agreed framework for system leadership and we need joint training at national level that will offer a common starting point and context for more regional training by consortia to build capacity in the school sector, among headteachers, middle leaders and teachers.

The outcome of the training at national level would be to set consistent standards for the role of system leader and consistent expectations for the level of professionalism that the role requires.

¹ Definition provided in the Glossary of inspection terms 2012

Change

It is clear that local authorities, schools and other providers are entering a period of major change, to do with the curriculum, with qualifications and even with possible structural change. The challenge lies in how they seize the opportunities offered by change.

I hope that leaders will use the findings in this annual report to think about how they can manage change in their organisations to refresh the culture, focus on professional development and enhance self-evaluation. The many case studies that illustrate best practice are to be found throughout this report and it is possible to get in touch with the school or provider featured to find out more. There are also PowerPoint packages on the Estyn website that can be used to stimulate discussion among professionals and with governors and parents. They offer a context and a starting point for discussion and planning.

I hope that, if you are a professional in the sector, you will use this annual report and its associated resources to make further progress on your particular journey of improvement.



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