



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

Summary of findings from our national thematic reviews

2012



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- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities;
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ independent specialist colleges;
- ▲ adult community learning;
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies; and
- ▲ offender learning.

Estyn also:

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

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Foreword

Estyn has a key role to play in contributing to the evidence base that underpins policy on education and training in Wales. Each year the Education Minister sends Estyn a 'remit letter' to commission advice on a range of topics or themes relating to the provision of education and training. In response, Estyn produces a series of reports.

In my annual report, I draw attention to the key messages from these thematic reports. However, in this publication I hope to do more than that by bringing together the detailed analysis and recommendations from each report for easy reference. In this way I hope that schools, pupil referral units, local authorities, FE colleges and other providers will make use of the information to improve their practice and to enhance outcomes for learners in Wales. The main findings and recommendations from all the remits published so far this year appear in this publication.

This publication is a quick guide and an overview. The full reports, including case studies, are available on our website: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/thematic-reports/recent-reports/>

I hope that you will find this summary and the detailed reports useful to stimulate debate and support your own planning for teaching and learning across Wales.

Ann Keane

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

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Title: A survey of the arrangements for pupils' wellbeing and behaviour management in pupil referral units – January 2012

Recommendations

Local authorities should:

- R1 set clear standards for the use of restrictive physical intervention and restraint by PRUs and for the keeping of records and ensure that line managers, management committees and elected members monitor these effectively;
- R2 make sure that incident reports are used to inform the review of the local authority's policies for the wellbeing and safeguarding of pupils;
- R3 hold teachers-in-charge to account effectively, by using reporting arrangements that focus on the wellbeing of pupils and evaluate the strategies for supporting pupils with challenging behaviour;
- R4 ensure that the local authority education service's safeguarding officer supports the PRUs contribution to pupil case reviews and monitors the progress of all cases referred to social services; and
- R5 make sure that management committees monitor how well parents and carers are kept informed about the behaviour of their child and its management by staff, and ensure that all complaints by parents, carers and pupils are properly recorded, reported and dealt with by the PRU.

Pupil referral units (PRUs) should:

- R6 review their policies regularly, and align them with Welsh Government and local authority guidance;
- R7 present information clearly to staff in their written policies and guidance;
- R8 deliver training to all staff in behaviour management, restrictive physical intervention and restraint that reflects best practice;
- R9 record incidents to capture accurately and fully the details of what took place from the perspective of all staff and pupils involved, and any staff who witnessed the incident;
- R10 give management committees the best information about pupil wellbeing, safeguarding and incident analysis to enable them to discharge their governance responsibilities fully;
- R11 use risk-assessments to improve the management of individual pupils' behaviour, and the management of off-site activities;

R12 improve filing arrangements and up-date information and records so that they can be used effectively to safeguard pupils; and

R13 ensure that behaviour management strategies comply with best practice and use 'time out' to support pupils, while challenging them to improve their own behaviour.

Main findings

Behaviour management

- 1 Teaching and support staff in PRUs do a difficult job with pupils whose behaviour is challenging. Many do it well. PRUs generally have the appropriate policies in place to help them in their work with vulnerable pupils, many of whom have challenging behaviour. However, not all policies contain enough helpful guidance for staff and, in the case of child protection, they do not always outline clear procedures or give the contact details needed for referrals.
- 2 Six PRUs have adopted behaviour management strategies, restrictive physical intervention and restraint methods that the British Institute for Learning Disabilities¹ (BILD) accredit. Staff in these PRUs are well trained and confident in using these techniques to defuse potentially confrontational situations. However, one PRU has not provided this important training to its staff, which leaves pupils and staff vulnerable in the event of an incident.
- 3 In the best practice, PRU staff teach pupils how to manage their own behaviour and use agreed behaviour management plans and individual pupil risk-assessments to help them. However, in most cases PRU pupil-planning systems do not address the management of difficult behaviour with individual pupils well enough. Frequently they do not use individual pupil risk-assessments or off-site risk-assessments well enough to safeguard pupils and staff adequately. PRUs do not do enough to monitor and evaluate for themselves the impact of their day-to-day practice on pupils' wellbeing and behaviour.
- 4 All PRUs use some form of 'time out', as part of their behaviour management strategy. Sometimes pupils themselves request this; at other times, staff require it of a pupil. In most cases, PRUs do not use designated spaces for 'time out' that protect or promote the dignity of the pupil. Incident reports show that 'time out' is often linked to restrictive physical intervention and restraint. In some cases, pupils interpret 'time out' as punishment rather than as an opportunity to regain composure and control.

¹ The BILD launched its physical interventions accreditation scheme in April 2002, and later revised it in 2010. BILD has issued a code of practice and guidance for professionals working with people who have learning disabilities. This guidance sets standards for professional practice, and for the training and development of professional staff. The code of practice and these standards currently represent best practice in behaviour management strategies, physical intervention and restraint methods.

Pupil wellbeing

- 5 All PRUs keep pupil files, which contain a range of personal information. However, the quality of these records, the information they contain, and the way records are managed are generally poor. Record keeping is generally unsatisfactory. When staff make child protection referrals to social services they do not always record them appropriately. PRUs cannot therefore use their records to support routinely the effective planning for the support and management of pupils. In the majority of cases, local authority education service safeguarding officers do not do enough to challenge or support PRUs to improve their practice in this area.
- 6 All PRU staff undertake safeguarding training at tier-one, and designated staff with safeguarding responsibilities undertake more specialist training. However, not all local authorities have effective systems for keeping track of which staff have completed this training.
- 7 Generally, pupils said they felt valued and listened to by staff in the PRUs. They said that they felt cared for and treated with respect. However, by contrast, they also said that a refusal to go voluntarily to the 'time out' space resulted in staff physically and forcibly taking them there. They also said that their reluctance to go to 'time out' is frequently because of the poor environment in the 'time out' space. Too often pupils see 'time out' as a punishment rather than the opportunity to regain composure and manage their emotions better.
- 8 Complaints by parents or pupils against staff following restraints are not always recorded, reported or investigated in a timely manner, and nor are the outcomes recorded accurately.

Local authorities

- 9 Pupil referral units are short stay centres that provide education for vulnerable and challenging pupils, followed by re-integration into mainstream schools. Unlike schools, which have their own governing bodies, local authorities have direct responsibility for the provision and the governance of PRUs. They discharge this responsibility through direct line management and the appointment of management committees.
- 10 Local authority arrangements for the line management and governance of PRUs are not robust enough. Line managers and management committees do not do enough to hold teachers-in-charge to account for the day-to-day running of the PRU. Reporting arrangements do not focus enough on the wellbeing of pupils and on helping PRUs to evaluate their strategies for supporting pupils with challenging behaviour.
- 11 All the local authorities surveyed have published an appropriate range of policies and guidance for safeguarding pupils, for managing pupils' behaviour and for the use of restrictive physical interventions in schools and PRUs. In most cases, this guidance is clear and promotes the method for restrictive physical intervention and restraint that is preferred by the local authority. This helps PRUs to ensure that staff are appropriately trained to agreed standards. However, local authorities do not always

follow their own advice in helping PRUs to monitor and evaluate the way behaviour management strategies are used. They do not identify well enough the impact of these strategies on the wellbeing of pupils or staff or on improving behaviour management practice in PRUs through better-targeted training. This lack of evaluation and reporting makes it hard for elected members and senior education officers to discharge properly their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils and vulnerable children.

Title: Skills for older learners – The impact of adult community learning on the wellbeing of older learners – January 2012

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 monitor the implementation of the delivering community learning policy to improve joint working across the departments, directorates and branches responsible for older people; and
- R2 gather data about learning opportunities in the Older People's Monitor, so that it monitors wellbeing through learning as well as access to employment.

The Department for Education and Skills should:

- R3 work with other Welsh Government departments to pool all budgets aimed at supporting older people's lifelong learning and wellbeing;
- R4 agree performance indicators or outcome measures for ACL partnerships to monitor their work with older people in supporting independent living; and
- R5 encourage and support ACL partnerships to support older people to organise and manage their own learning.

ACL partnerships should:

- R6 increase flexibility in delivery methods, curriculum choice, session length and methods of assessment for older people, especially those over the age of 70.

Local authorities should:

- R7 make sure that local service boards improve their use of the ACL partnership expertise in delivering lifelong learning and joined-up services for older people.

Main findings

- 1 The learning programmes for older people in Wales focus on improving qualifications and skills levels. These programmes do help many people to improve their job prospects and gain employment. There are a few examples where providers in the ACL partnerships work well to agree joint arrangements to offer good levels of support to learners who learn in local community and outreach centres.
- 2 Many older learners build their self-esteem and confidence through adult and community learning. Many of these learners progress to higher levels of learning. Many also widen their understanding of subjects that they have not previously studied. Others continue to contribute to family and community activities by using the skills they have learned.
- 3 Older learners who are still looking for employment and wish to improve their qualifications show enthusiasm and commitment when re-entering the world of learning. They are supported well by a few ACL partnerships where skilful and thoughtful approaches to planning focus on the needs of older learners. Even when support is generally good, not enough use is made of co-ordinated careers guidance services.
- 4 Once older people pass the age where they are seeking employment, their contact with local community programmes decreases rapidly. This is because the curriculum and subject areas on offer almost always revolve around the attainment of qualifications, which these much older learners do not want or need.
- 5 The analysis of trends emerging from a scrutiny of about 13,000 older learners' enrolment records shows that people past employment age still want to enrol on courses and classes that help them to remain well and healthy and to keep up with their interests. But enrolments drop dramatically in the over-70 age group.
- 6 Interviews with older people highlighted how loss of confidence and connections in the local community has a rapid negative impact on their wellbeing. Older people recognise that the stimulation that learning brings to their lives can help them to remain active and independent.
- 7 Many ACL partnerships do not plan well enough for the broad spectrum of older people's learning. They do not make enough use the funding available to offer a flexible curriculum that meets the needs and aspirations of older learners.
- 8 Departments in both the Welsh Government and local authorities do not have a clear strategy to meet the needs of the growing ageing population in Wales. They do not pool the resources aimed at older people in order to develop well-thought through plans for people in retirement.
- 9 The Welsh Government recognises that that there is strong quantitative evidence that participation in learning in later life reinforces people's independence and capacity to look after themselves, and can also slow the development of dementia, thereby delaying the need for expensive residential care. However, links are not made well enough between education, health and social services to support

wellbeing into old age. There are also strong humanitarian grounds for making available provision for older people that will support the United Nations Principles for Older People, which is that the state should support their independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

Title: Physical education in secondary schools – February 2012

Recommendations

To improve standards of physical education at key stage 3 and key stage 4:

Physical education departments should:

- R1 make sure that lessons provide suitable opportunities for pupils to keep physically active and engage in sustained physical activity;
- R2 develop pupils' wider skills, including communication, numeracy, thinking, leadership and evaluative skills, without detracting from subject-specific skill development;
- R3 offer learning activities that will enable pupils of all abilities to make progress and, in particular, provide suitable challenge for more able key stage 3 pupils;
- R4 develop engaging, and appropriately challenging, adventurous activities programmes at key stage 3;
- R5 develop systematic assessment, target-setting and tracking arrangements for key stage 3 and for key stage 4 non-examination programmes; and
- R6 strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning arrangements.

Local authorities should:

- R7 improve support and advice for physical education practitioners and promote best practice;
- R8 use the 5x60 initiative to promote more effective links with local clubs and organisations to promote healthy lifestyles and lifelong participation in sport and physical recreation; and
- R9 secure greater accuracy and consistency in judging National Curriculum levels at key stage 3.

The Welsh Government should:

- R10 consider how best to sustain the good practice and impact of the PESS and 5x60 initiatives.

Main findings

- 1 Since 2001, the percentage of key stage 3 pupils attaining the expected level (level 5) or above in National Curriculum teacher assessments has increased steadily in physical education. In 2011, the percentage of pupils attaining the expected level was broadly in line with other subjects. However, the percentage of pupils who attain the higher levels (level 6 or above) is smaller than for most other non-core subjects.
- 2 In 2011, the percentage of pupils in Wales entering GCSE physical education gaining grades A*-C was 73%, two percentage points above the figure for the UK, and an improvement from 70% in 2010. Around a quarter of pupils entered gained the higher grades A*/A.
- 3 In 2011, about two-thirds of pupils entering physical education at GCSE were boys. This is a higher proportion than for almost any other subject. The difference between the performance of girls and boys is smaller than for most other subjects.
- 4 Standards were good or better in around two-thirds of lessons observed for this survey and broadly similar at key stage 3 and key stage 4. In many lessons, pupils recall previous learning well and understand key concepts. They make good progress in developing and refining their subject-specific skills and in acquiring wider skills.
- 5 At key stage 3, pupils make the best progress in creative and competitive activities. In these areas, the most common outstanding features are in pupils' ability to:
 - create original and high-quality sequences with particularly good flow and accurate technical execution; and
 - perform specific skills with a high degree of accuracy, technical efficiency and control.
- 6 Pupils also make good progress in health, fitness and wellbeing activities, but their progress in athletic and adventurous activities is less secure.
- 7 At key stage 4, mainly in GCSE classes, there are outstanding features in pupils' ability to plan, perform and evaluate their own work and the work of others.
- 8 In about a third of lessons observed, there are shortcomings in the standards pupils achieve. In particular, more able key stage 3 pupils do not make as much progress as might be expected. In key stages 3 and 4, the most common shortcomings in the standards that pupils attain are their:
 - poorly co-ordinated and controlled movements and actions;
 - difficulties in transferring skills successfully from practice to game situations; and
 - lack of confidence in developing ideas or solutions to problems.
- 9 Physical education can make an effective contribution to the development of pupils' communication and thinking skills. In more than a quarter of schools, pupils make very good progress in developing these skills.

- 10 Teaching is good or better in about three-quarters of lessons observed. In many cases, teachers plan learning activities that:
 - keep pupils physically active and enable them to compete at an appropriate level;
 - build on previous learning and help pupils move forward at the right pace; and
 - develop pupils' understanding of key principles, terminology and technique.
- 11 In a few lessons, where teaching is excellent, teachers plan learning activities thoughtfully to challenge and engage pupils. In these lessons, learning activities provide extensive opportunities for pupils to reflect on, evaluate and improve their work and teachers have high expectations of what all pupils, including the more able, can achieve.
- 12 In the majority of lessons, there is a good emphasis on developing pupils' communication and thinking skills. This is most effective when it is embedded naturally into all learning activities and does not detract from the development of pupils' subject-specific skills. Generally there is less emphasis on developing pupils' numeracy or information and communication technology skills.
- 13 In a minority of lessons, teachers do not plan well enough to make sure that pupils of all abilities make progress. In these lessons, learning activities do not keep pupils physically active, and do not give pupils enough opportunities to learn independently and take leadership roles, develop their wider skills or to review and evaluate their work and progress.
- 14 In about half of the schools visited, teachers do not ensure that pupils who cannot participate actively in lessons are engaged, for example by carrying out roles as officials or by coaching their peers.
- 15 In about half of the schools visited, assessment, target-setting and tracking arrangements are not systematic or robust enough at key stage 3. Many teachers are not confident about the accuracy and consistency of levelling at key stage 3, especially when awarding higher levels to more able pupils. Arrangements for assessing and monitoring the progress of key stage 4 pupils following non-examination programmes are also weak. In most schools, assessment, target-setting and tracking arrangements for key stage 4 pupils following examination courses are appropriate.
- 16 The Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) initiative has had a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards, particularly in stimulating creative and adventurous activities in many primary schools. However, the initiative has had less impact on standards in key stage 3. Few secondary schools receive detailed information on pupils' physical education abilities from partner primary schools.
- 17 Generally, schools allocate a larger proportion of time at key stage 3 to competitive activities than to other areas of activity. This is particularly true for boys. However, schools are increasing the emphasis on creative and adventurous activities and health, fitness and wellbeing activities and this has helped to engage girls more

successfully. Most schools promote healthy lifestyles well. A few schools have well-designed cross-curricular arrangements to develop pupils' awareness of healthy lifestyles. However, few schools co-ordinate this work systematically enough across subject areas.

- 18 The majority of schools are developing their adventurous activities courses in key stage 3 well, but a minority have not developed sufficiently engaging or challenging programmes.
- 19 Most schools offer pupils a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. The 5x60 initiative has been successful in complementing the more traditional, largely team-based programmes most schools offered previously. New activities such as aerobics, street dance, pilates, zumba and boxercise have had a positive impact on the participation levels of girls. However, too often there has not been a close enough link with local clubs and organisations, which could offer enthusiastic pupils a chance to develop their interests after and beyond school.
- 20 In the majority of schools visited, there are systematic arrangements to monitor the work of the physical education department. However, in a significant minority of schools, self-evaluation reviews lack detail and do not provide a good basis for improvement, mainly because leaders and managers do not analyse standards or monitor teaching in a robust enough manner.
- 21 In the majority of schools visited, professional development arrangements reflect school and departmental priorities. Only a minority of local authorities provide good advisory support for physical education departments. In a significant minority of schools, the lack of strong advisory support narrows the context of professional dialogue and this can also prevent schools from observing good practice elsewhere.
- 22 In the majority of schools, accommodation, including playing fields and indoor facilities, is good and provides a suitable setting for effective teaching and learning. However, there are important shortcomings in the quality of accommodation in a significant minority of schools that impede pupils' progress in physical education. These include limited indoor space, poorly-equipped gymnasia, unsuitable changing facilities, and badly-drained or poorly-maintained playing fields.

Title: How do surplus places affect the resources available for expenditure on improving outcomes for pupils? – May 2012

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 consider the adoption of a standardised method to be used at a national level across all schools in order to identify the average cost of surplus places and surplus schools;
- R2 promote the reduction of surplus places as evidence of better resource management and impact on school improvement rather than as an end in itself;
- R3 work with local authorities to develop and promote good practice in evaluating the impact of school reorganisation schemes;
- R4 require local authorities to conduct impact assessments on school reorganisation schemes where Welsh Government money is being used to support implementation; and
- R5 work with local authorities to identify those school organisation and asset management strategies that contribute most positively to outcomes for learners and promote their use across all local authority consortia.

Local authorities and local authority consortia should:

- R6 ensure strategic leaders prioritise school organisation and asset management, taking into account the impact on school effectiveness;
- R7 engage all elected members, officers and headteachers in the drive to free resources in order to invest in improving outcomes for learners;
- R8 carefully monitor and evaluate all school reorganisation projects in order to identify freed resources and their impact on improving outcomes for learners;
- R9 improve officers' use of all available data to drive strategic developments and evaluate their impact, using challenge from the authority's scrutiny arrangements; and
- R10 work collaboratively within consortia to promote good practice, particularly in relation to identifying and implementing action to address underperformance.

Main findings

- 1 The planning for school places in Wales is complicated by the fact that, currently, pupil numbers are falling in secondary schools but rising in primaries.
- 2 Where there is a higher than necessary level of school places, resources are being deployed inefficiently that could be better used to improve the quality of education for all learners. The Audit Commission reported on this issue in 1996. It concluded that local authorities were wasting resources because excess surplus capacity ties up revenue resources rather than being more effectively deployed in teaching and learning. The problem identified by the Audit Commission still exists today.
- 3 Throughout Wales, school reorganisations have failed to keep pace with falling pupil numbers. In 2011, there were more unfilled places than in 2006 and no local authority has achieved the Welsh Government's recommended level of no more than 10% surplus places across primary and secondary schools. Although some surplus places have been removed, generally local authorities have been slow to identify and complete projects which would lead to significant savings.
- 4 Various methods have been used over time to evaluate the cost of maintaining surplus places in schools. However, local authorities have not done enough to assess the financial and educational impact of previous school rationalisation schemes. The limited data that is available does not provide enough information about the impact of surplus places on all aspects of educational provision. The lack of a standardised method at a national level creates difficulties in maintaining informed discussion about the effectiveness of strategies or performance.

A standard method to identify the cost of surplus places

- 5 Those local authorities that have calculated the cost of surplus places have found the information useful in persuading school communities and decision makers of the need to reduce surplus places. Their work would be strengthened by national use of an agreed standardised method. This would calculate a statistical average across the many complex school funding arrangements of different local authorities in Wales.
- 6 The potential savings from removing surplus places in existing schools are relatively small in comparison to the savings achievable by closing a whole school. The most effective approach to calculating such savings is to identify separately the cost of each surplus place as well as savings that would result from closing a school.
- 7 The most informed analyses show that, in the primary sector in Wales in 2011-2012, the average cost of a surplus place is £260 whilst, in addition, the average saving that results from closing a school is £63,500. The equivalent figures for the secondary sector are £510 per surplus place and £113,000 per school. Therefore, closing a primary school will yield potential savings of £63,500 plus £260 for each surplus place removed. Closing a secondary school will yield potential savings of £113,000 plus £510 for each surplus place removed.

- 8 These figures only reflect the annual savings in delegated school budgets. Any school rationalisation scheme will also impact on non-delegated budgets. Such schemes may increase the cost of home to school transport, but are likely to reduce the central budgets for school improvement, catering, maintenance and other items. In addition, the removal of school places and/or the closure of a school will incur one-off costs such as capital expenditure and severance packages for staff whose jobs are no longer required. All these costs need to be taken into account before local authority officers can determine whether a specific scheme is cost effective.
- 9 The Welsh Government has recommended that there should be no more than 10% surplus places across primary and secondary schools. This study does not address whether or not this figure represents an appropriate maximum. However, it is unreasonable to expect local authorities to fill all surplus capacity because councils have a duty to provide sufficient school places and they need to be able to manage fluctuations in demand as a result of demographic change and parental choice. Maintaining high levels of surplus capacity ties up resources unnecessarily, but the calculations of the costs of surplus places in this report should not be used simplistically. The removal of surplus places in some schools may cost far more than the revenue savings achieved by their removal. In other cases, the removal of a 'surplus' school would generate far more than the removal of the surplus places within it.
- 10 In summary, the savings available from each school reorganisation proposal must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Reducing surplus places

- 11 Currently, a wide range of strategies is being used across Wales to reduce surplus places. School closures and amalgamations secure the largest savings for re-investment to raise standards. However, these particular strategies often need quite considerable financial investment and political commitment.
- 12 Any school reorganisation strategy should set out to improve standards. School reorganisation programmes should be primarily about school improvement rather than a resource management exercise that is separate from the interests of learners. In 2007, Estyn recommended that local authorities should identify the contribution that new and refurbished school buildings make to raising standards and school improvement. This would help to inform the debate about future schemes. However, there has been little progress in implementing this recommendation. Too often, local authorities make generalisations about the benefits of reorganisation without monitoring the impact on learner outcomes from the resources released.

Title: The effectiveness of strategies for learner involvement in post-16 learning – Interim report – May 2012

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 review the requirements of the provider's annual self-assessment report to capture more fully the outcomes of learner-involvement strategies;
- R2 review the National Union of Students' further education student representation project to assess its impact for learners;
- R3 monitor the implementation of learner-involvement strategies at provider level;
- R4 implement learner-representation projects across the post-16 sector to train learners to act as learner advocates/representatives and secure the involvement of a wider body of learners; and
- R5 establish sector learner forums at a national level in order to enable learners to shape the nature and scope of their learning.

Providers in post-16 sectors should:

- R6 set up systems for recording the range of outcomes achieved by learners, including personal and social benefits, as a result of taking part in learner-involvement activities;
- R7 improve the systems for monitoring learners in order to identify the impact of taking part in learner-involvement activities on individual learners; and
- R8 support learners to get involved in learner-involvement networks at a local and national level.

Main findings

- 1 Providers in most post-16 sectors have made good use of the Welsh Government learner-involvement strategy in order to enable providers to develop and implement their own strategy or make sure that they are working to national guidelines.
- 2 Providers use a wide range of learner-involvement activities in most post-16 sectors. These include formal representative groups, questionnaires and surveys, learner advocates and consultations.

Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of learner involvement

- 3 No providers in the post-16 sector have set up systems to monitor and evaluate the benefits of learner involvement. Providers do not record how these activities improve

outcomes for learners. No provider has implemented a system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of learner involvement activities on retention or on outcomes for learners, or for tracking the impact of learner involvement for individual learners. As a result, providers do not know what benefits or improved outcomes individual learners have gained as a result of their involvement.

- 4 Nevertheless, most post-16 providers, and learners, can describe the benefits of taking part in learner-involvement activities. Learners consider that they have improved a range of skills associated with their chosen learning activity, as well as improving their participation in community activities. Providers consider that learners improve their confidence, gain a sense of belonging and ownership of their learning, and develop a greater understanding of the learning processes. Learners also recognise the value of sharing their views and opinions. They develop communication and negotiation skills, learn to build relationships and improve their ability to work with others and to be innovative and creative.

Title: The Skills Framework at key stage 3 – An evaluation of the impact of the non-statutory Skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales at key stage 3 – May 2012

Recommendations

Secondary schools should:

- R1 ensure appropriate and progressive coverage in key stage 3 to develop pupils' skills in thinking, communication, information and communication technology and numeracy skills;
- R2 work with their feeder primary schools to ensure suitable continuity and progression in the development of generic skills;
- R3 co-ordinate the approach to teaching, communication, thinking, information and communication technology and numeracy skills in key stage 3; and
- R4 develop effective systems for tracking pupils' progress in developing generic skills to inform future planning.

Local authorities should:

- R5 support to schools in:
- planning a curriculum that develops pupils' literacy and numeracy skills progressively across all subjects in key stage 3; and
 - assessing and tracking pupils' generic skills development between key stage 2 and key stage 3, and throughout key stage 3.

The Welsh Government should:

R6 review the Skills framework so that it:

- provides clear progression in developing pupils' generic skills throughout key stage 3;
- provides a simpler structure that schools can easily use to plan, assess and track pupils' progress in developing generic skills; and
- provide schools with examples of pupils' standards in generic skills across the curriculum; and

R7 review the value to schools of the Skills framework and consider including the development of pupils' generic skills within the National Curriculum Subject Orders themselves.

Main findings

- 1 The Skills framework's main effect has been to raise awareness of the need to develop pupils' skills, particularly literacy and numeracy. It does not significantly influence planning in most secondary schools in Wales. Most schools do not use the Skills framework when planning the development of skills because:
 - they place a higher priority on making sure that schemes of work match National Curriculum Orders;
 - the descriptions of progress in skills given in the framework are not precise enough, are not exemplified, and are too broad to be helpful; and
 - using the framework is not a statutory requirement.
- 2 The schools in the survey use various resources to help them plan the development of pupils' generic skills in key stage 3. Many schools use the Essential Skills Wales programmes of study. Schools use it because it is precise and provides the basis for the progressive development of skills within and beyond key stage 3. The opportunity to gain Essential Skills qualifications also improves pupils' motivation.
- 3 Most teachers see their role as developing both subject-specific skills and generic skills. Schools place the highest priority on schemes of work matching the revised National Curriculum Subject Orders, all of which require teachers to consider pupils' acquisition of both subject and certain generic skills. Teachers develop schemes of work from the subject Orders and then identify opportunities within these to use generic skills.
- 4 A majority of schools use a common approach to teaching aspects of communication skills, but most of these approaches are at an early stage of development. Very few schools have a coherent and well-planned approach to delivering the whole range of generic skills across the curriculum. Very few base their approach on the Skills framework.
- 5 There are good opportunities to develop communication skills across all subjects in key stage 3. Where subject teachers develop writing skills well, they provide pupils

with opportunities to answer open-ended questions and offer them appropriate challenge and support in the form of prompts, writing frames or relevant examples. They share and clearly explain assessment criteria agreed by the school with pupils.

- 6 A minority of schools develop pupils' generic skills in extended projects that explore various themes. However, this practice does not in itself ensure that pupils make good progress in developing generic skills. It is most effective where managers:
 - have good understanding of pupils' development needs;
 - use this to carefully plan and co-ordinate work; and
 - provide appropriate in-service training for teachers.
- 7 Nearly all schools have a member of staff with overall responsibility for the development and implementation of a strategy for the development of generic skills. In about half of schools, this is either a middle management post specifically for skills development or a role carried out by a heads of year or leaders of Welsh first language, English, information and communication technology or mathematics departments. In other schools, a senior leader has responsibility for co-ordinating generic skills development across the curriculum. In schools making the greatest progress in developing pupils' generic skills, senior managers clearly communicate a supporting philosophy for the need to develop these skills across the curriculum. They also provide staff with appropriate resources and training.
- 8 There is significant variation in the support and guidance that local authorities provide to schools. Most local authorities do not prioritise the use of the Skills framework because it is non-statutory. Instead, they have concentrated on other initiatives such as the Welsh Government's 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning'.
- 9 Most schools involved in the Welsh Government's project 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning' make good use of the techniques highlighted to develop thinking skills across the curriculum. Many of these techniques also effectively promote reading and writing skills.
- 10 Many schools have useful networks of professional practice to improve their generic skills provision. The most effective of these receive direction and guidance from a local authority and focus on the development of one particular generic skill. The Welsh Government's 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning' project exerts greater influence than the Skills framework on these groups. Most of these groups are at too early a stage to have had any impact on the development of generic skills across the curriculum.
- 11 Very few schools use the Skills framework for their monitoring processes. Even so, a majority of schools monitor provision for generic skills in schemes of work and evaluate pupils' standards in generic skills during lesson observations. A minority of schools do not monitor how teachers are developing generic skills in their quality assurance procedures.
- 12 Only a few schools work closely with their feeder primaries to plan a curriculum that suitably builds on pupils' skills when they move from key stage 2 to key stage 3.

- 13 In nearly all schools, pupils reflect on their progress in generic skills and set themselves targets for improvement in Welsh first language, English and mathematics. However, only a minority of schools give pupils opportunities to set themselves targets to develop their communication skills in subjects other than English or Welsh. Schools do not use similar practices for other generic skills.
- 14 About half of schools track pupils' progress in generic skills, but very few refer to the Skills framework in this process. Most schools track pupils' progress in generic skills through outcomes in English or Welsh, mathematics and information and communication technology. A few schools use outcomes from Essential Skills Wales qualifications.
- 15 Elaborate and complex tracking systems create too great a burden for teachers and do not produce useful targets for improvement in generic skills. Simple tracking systems have a greater success in generating meaningful targets for improvements in standards of generic skills.
- 16 Pupils have opportunities to influence what they learn in only about half of schools. Where this is a common practice across all subjects, pupils feel a greater sense of motivation, enjoy their work more and, in general, make good progress.

Title: The impact of family learning programmes on raising the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults – May 2012

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 revise the operation of the grant programme to incentivise learner progression from taster sessions to short engagement courses and then to longer accredited programmes;
- R2 stipulate a minimum number of hours for taster sessions and short engagement programmes;
- R3 require providers to set progression targets, collect data and measure outcomes;
- R4 restrict the number of times a learner can attend taster sessions and short engagement courses in order to encourage progression;
- R5 revise grant guidelines and claim forms to require family learning providers to return enough data to the Welsh Government that will allow benchmarking of outcomes; and
- R6 revise the guidelines on adult participants to allow those who have skills at level 1 to join the programme, where the school has identified that their children would benefit from parental support.

Local authorities should:

- R7 work with other partners to set recruitment targets that focus on those most in need;
- R8 analyse recruitment data in order to set challenging recruitment targets for the future;
- R9 collect data on the take-up rate among those children who are identified as eligible;
- R10 monitor the progress of children who have been identified for the family programmes but who have not taken part, as well as those who have completed them;
- R11 ensure that joint strategic planning maximises the use of all resources, including venues;
- R12 include family programmes in CYPP plans; and
- R13 quality assure family programmes at a strategic level.

Providers should:

- R14 collect learner data by gender and develop a plan to address the shortfall of men participating in family programmes;
- R15 formally assess learners' needs on entry to all courses;
- R16 track the attainment and progression of adult learners on courses and use this data to plan at a strategic level; and
- R17 set targets for learner progression from taster/engagement short courses to long programmes.

Main findings

Recruitment

- 1 Family learning programme co-ordinators use a good range of information to identify schools that would benefit from family learning programmes. When a school accepts the offer of provision, they set appropriate recruitment targets for the courses at that school. However, local authorities rely too much on co-ordinators setting targets for individual schools. They do not set an overall target for the local authority.
- 2 Nearly all providers market family programmes well and many use innovative means of targeting specific families. The most effective programmes use a facilitator from the school who has credibility with the parents, who knows the family circumstances and can build a good relationship with them.

- 3 Most providers and schools recruit parents after identifying the children who would benefit from family programmes. However, very few schools or family learning providers record or follow up the children who are identified for support but who do not take part in the programmes. No information is available about numbers involved or what, if any, support they receive.
- 4 Nearly all participants in the family learning programmes are from the target groups specified in the Local Authority Early Years Grant Programme. However, the level specified for parents taking part in the programmes is set too low. This results in the exclusion of a few children from the programmes.
- 5 Nearly all providers collaborate well with a wide range of partners such as Communities First and Health Services. However, in many authorities there are no strategic plans in place for sharing resources, such as youth centres and flying start centres, and this results in many missed opportunities.
- 6 All providers understand the barriers to learning that the majority of the target parents face and help them to overcome them. A common obstacle arises from the fear of schools that parents face because of their previous experience of failure.
- 7 Very few family learning providers collect data at gender level. This means that many have not identified the low participation rate of men. In 2010–2011, men made up just 10% of participants on short courses and 6.5% of participants on long courses in family programmes. Most providers lack clear plans and targets for recruiting them. This means that most providers miss opportunities to promote male role models for boys.

Provision

- 8 Nearly all providers use effective delivery models for courses of over 12 hours' total duration. However, delivery models for short courses of 12 hours and under vary too much between authorities.
- 9 The grant programme application form does not ask for meaningful data about course participants and progression of learners on short courses. The form does not ask for the information needed to track the impact of the grant programme or to plan for improvements.
- 10 Too many learners remain on short course provision without progression.
- 11 Teachers and providers use a good range of teaching strategies to motivate learners and help adults understand how their children learn.
- 12 Nearly all teachers and family learning teaching assistants are well qualified and experienced.
- 13 Nearly all family learning teachers work effectively with schools to establish the needs of the children taking part in programmes. Most family programmes set learning targets for the children and discuss these regularly with class teachers. Programmes meet the needs of individual children well.

Progress

- 14 On longer courses of over 12 hours in total, teachers use an appropriate range of initial assessment tools to establish the individual needs of the learners. They also use individual learning plans effectively to monitor and track how well learners achieve and progress to further learning.
- 15 Over reliance on informal self-assessment on short courses means that skills needs are often incorrectly identified by learners when they start and teachers don't have an accurate starting point from which to track progress.
- 16 Most adult learners on long courses and a minority on short courses have good opportunities to take a variety of credit based qualifications.
- 17 Very few providers collect data on progression although a few have data showing learner progression to courses at further education colleges or into support roles within schools.
- 18 Qualification attainment data is not collected nationally to create benchmarks to measure standards. This means that providers cannot compare their outcomes to national benchmarks.
- 19 Methods of tracking the progress of children and evaluating the impact of family programmes on the children taking part are inconsistent and do not make enough use of quantitative measures. Most schools rely on their own progress measures such as reading age assessments. They do not compare the progress of children on the programme with those who are not on the programme. Too many providers rely on anecdotal evidence and focus too much on the softer outcomes.
- 20 Very few schools and family programmes track the longer term impact of the family programmes on the standards achieved by children.

Monitoring the quality and impact of programmes

- 21 Most family learning co-ordinators complete evaluative self-assessment reports based on participant questionnaires, teacher assessments, head teacher evaluations and course feedback sheets. They use self-evaluation to inform operational planning and also provide useful reports for adult learners and stakeholders.
- 22 Good practice is identified and disseminated well through networks and staff meetings.
- 23 Many local authorities rely too much on co-ordinators' reports without collating the reports and learner outcome data to inform strategic planning in Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) plans.
- 24 Because of the lack of data on learner achievement at national level, it is difficult to judge overall progress on value for money. However, individual learning plans in the settings visited show that adult learners on long courses make good progress against literacy and numeracy targets. Many achieve a useful certificate that helps to move into employment or onto other courses.

Title: How well are the All-Wales Core Data Sets used to inform self-evaluation and planning for improvement? – June 2012

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 use the core data sets to challenge themselves to do as well as the best practice identified in other similar schools, including those in their family of schools;
- R2 make more effective use of 'modelled expected performance' charts;
- R3 analyse the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals more thoroughly and base improvement strategies on the findings; and
- R4 make sure that governors understand fully the school's performance data, including position in the family and the free-school-meal benchmark quarters, and that they play a key role in self-evaluation and planning for improvement.

Local authorities should:

- R5 ensure that the performance information and analyses that they provide to schools complement and do not duplicate the core data sets; and
- R6 train school leaders and governors to analyse the core data sets better and to use the findings to identify what needs to improve.

The Welsh Government should:

- R7 consider including data on non-core subjects in the key stage 4 data sets.

Main findings

- 1 The use of the All-Wales Core Data Sets ('the core data sets') is contributing to better self-evaluation and enabling better co-operation between schools, particularly those in the families² of schools. Schools are increasingly liaising with higher-performing schools in their family to discuss strategies for improvement and to share best practice.
- 2 The range of indicators, new analyses, graphs and charts contained in the core data sets is used by most schools to evaluate their performance and to identify areas for improvement. New analyses of performance data, which were not previously available to all schools in Wales, include comparisons with similar schools for pupils

² An explanation of how families of schools are created is provided in paragraph 13 in the Background section of the full report.

achieving the higher levels in the National Curriculum core subjects, and the separate attainment targets of oracy, reading and writing in English and Welsh first language in key stages 1 to 3.

- 3 However, about one in five schools do not use the core data sets well enough to identify what they need to improve. Too often, these schools use data to justify what they do currently, rather than to challenge themselves to do better. A few secondary schools do not make effective use of the 'modelled expected performance' charts, which are based on the correlation between school performance and free-school-meal data, as included in the core data sets.
- 4 The core data sets are also used by many governors to fulfil their role of holding school leaders to account. When governors are well informed about the comparative performance of their school, they are more likely to provide effective challenge and support to school leaders. However, a minority of governors are not fully aware of the information that the core data sets provide on school performance and are hardly involved at all in their school's self-evaluation processes.
- 5 Since the introduction of the core data sets, the majority of local authorities have adapted the additional performance information they provide for their schools. The most helpful of these complement rather than repeat the core data set analyses. Increasingly, local authority officers use these analyses to challenge schools to improve their performance, although there is less consistency in how local authorities use additional analyses.
- 6 Where underperformance has been identified, schools use a range of strategies for improvement. These strategies include targeted support for groups of pupils, revising curriculum content or organisation, and seeking guidance from the family of schools. Generally, the impact of these strategies has been good, with evidence of year-on-year improvement.
- 7 However, schools do not analyse the core data sets thoroughly enough to evaluate the performance of all groups of pupils, particularly pupils who receive free school meals. As a result, not enough schools take specific action to improve standards for this group of learners.
- 8 The use of the core data sets is having an increasing impact on teachers' professional learning where families of schools are identifying and sharing good practice. Across Wales, families of schools are developing new strategies to bring about improvements. These activities include holding conferences for all family schools, setting up electronic communications for a family network and appointing a part-time family co-ordinator.

Title: Literacy in key stage 3 – June 2012

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 make developing literacy skills a priority in improvement plans and schemes of work;
- R2 track and monitor the progress of all pupils, particularly those on intervention programmes and more able learners, to make sure that they make good progress across all key stages;
- R3 map opportunities for oracy, reading and writing across the curriculum, particularly in improving pupils' extended writing and the accuracy of their written work;
- R4 monitor and evaluate the impact of strategies for improving literacy; and
- R5 train teachers to plan more challenging opportunities in all subjects to develop pupils' higher-order reading and writing skills.

Local authorities should:

- R6 produce a well-developed literacy strategy and mechanisms to improve standards across the curriculum; and
- R7 support schools in training all staff to use effective literacy strategies, including sharing best practice between schools.

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 provide guidance and support for teachers to help them to implement the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework and develop literacy skills across the curriculum.

Main findings

- 1 This report is the first of a series that look at standards in literacy at key stage 3 and how schools are developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. Later reports will focus on the implementation and impact of the National Literacy Programme by revisiting the same sample of secondary schools.

Nationally

- 2 In most secondary schools inspected from September 2010, pupils listen well in lessons and respond readily to questions orally, although in about one-in-ten schools

their responses are too brief and superficial. Many pupils read with understanding, and extract and interpret information well. However, in a few schools, a minority of pupils have limited reading skills and this affects their progress. Often, in these schools, more able pupils do not have enough opportunities to analyse complex reading texts.

- 3 In about three-quarters of secondary schools inspected from September 2010, most pupils write clearly for an appropriate range of different purposes and audiences. In about a quarter of schools, standards of pupils' writing are not as good as their reading or oracy. In these cases, pupils do not produce enough extended writing across the curriculum and make basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- 4 Around 40% of learners enter secondary schools in Year 7 with reading ages significantly (at least six months) below their chronological age. Around 20% of these learners are not functionally literate, with reading ages of below nine and a half years.
- 5 The National Curriculum teacher assessments at the end of key stage 2 and the reading age tests measure progress differently. This makes it difficult to make comparisons between reading ages and pupils' reading skills. Until the introduction of a national reading test in 2013, Wales will not have robust, comparable data on learners' literacy levels. Currently, schools and local authorities use different tests and measure literacy levels in different ways.
- 6 The percentage of key stage 3 pupils achieving the expected National Curriculum level 5 or above in English in 2011 continues the steady improvement from previous years. There was a similar improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in Welsh first language. In 2011, Welsh first language is the highest performing core subject at level 5. However, at all National Curriculum levels, performance in English is lower than that in other core subjects.
- 7 As in other key stages, girls perform better than boys at the expected and higher National Curriculum levels in both English and Welsh. At key stage 3, there is over 13 percentage points' difference between girls' and boys' performance at the expected level.
- 8 An increasing number of secondary schools are planning opportunities for learners to gain Essential Skills Wales communication qualifications in key stage 3. At present, in one-in-six schools, many learners in Year 8 and Year 9 gain level 1 in communication. In a very few schools, pupils in Year 9 gain level 2 communication qualifications. However, gaining these qualifications does not necessarily mean that pupils are applying these skills consistently across the curriculum. In the best practice, a few schools ensure that pupils continue to demonstrate these skills across all subjects through skilful teaching.

In the surveyed schools:

- 9 A minority of schools have carried out an audit of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum to see whether subjects identify and provide opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. In a few schools that have conducted audits, there is a strong

emphasis on developing literacy skills in development plans and subject schemes of work. Where schools have developed whole-school training on specific literacy strategies, schemes of work across the curriculum are more consistent in highlighting the precise reading, writing and oracy skills to be taught. In a majority of schools, subject schemes of work do not have enough detail about how literacy skills are to be taught.

- 10 Many schools have well-defined procedures for assessing pupils' reading abilities and arrangements to support those with reading ages significantly below their chronological age. However, only a minority of schools record the percentage of pupils on literacy intervention programmes who achieve level 5 at the end of key stage 3. Of these schools, an average of 37% of these pupils go on to achieve level 5.
- 11 More schools use computer-based programmes to track the reading and spelling age data of key stage 3 pupils in order to monitor their progress. However, few schools monitor the progress of pupils with reading ages above their chronological age to check whether they have enough opportunities to develop their literacy skills further.
- 12 Many schools have responded well to the increased emphasis on skills in National Curriculum Subject Orders and use whole-school approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and oracy as a major focus for training.
- 13 All schools surveyed have literacy co-ordinators who are responsible for co-ordinating whole-school approaches and a senior leader who is responsible for literacy at a strategic level. A minority of these co-ordinators are new to their role and it is too early to judge the impact of their leadership on improving standards.
- 14 There are networks of professional practice with a focus on literacy in all of the schools visited but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. A few schools are developing a progressive approach to improving literacy by training teachers in literacy strategies as part of a three year plan. In these schools, working groups, in partnership with local authority advisers or independent consultants, have led to useful whole-school training for staff on reading, writing and oracy within the past year.
- 15 Improving literacy is a main priority in many school development plans. However, in a few schools surveyed, development plans do not include objectives for improving literacy standards across the school. In only a minority of schools is there a clear focus on literacy in monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Title: Supporting more able and talented pupils in secondary schools – June 2012

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 build on existing transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools to provide better continuity and progression in the education of more able and talented pupils;
- R2 improve the use of data and assessment to identify, track and monitor the progress of more able and talented pupils and share this information with all staff and relevant parents;
- R3 provide enriched opportunities and appropriately challenging provision across the curriculum for more able and talented pupils to achieve the highest standards;
- R4 ensure that more able and talented pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds receive specific support to overcome barriers to their learning;
- R5 provide mentoring for more able and talented pupils to help them make the best extra-curricular, option and career choices;
- R6 train school leaders, teachers and support staff on how to address the needs of more able and talented pupils and use networks of professional practice to share best practice; and
- R7 improve parents' understanding of how they can better support the education of their more able or talented child.

Local authorities should:

- R8 train school improvement officers on how to identify, support, track, monitor and evaluate the progress of more able and talented pupils; and
- R9 use data more effectively to evaluate trends over time in the achievement of more able and talented pupils.

Main findings

Standards achieved by more able and talented pupils

- 1 More able and talented pupils in Wales achieve less well in Wales than in England. Too few secondary school pupils in Wales achieve above the expected level for their age (level 5) in end-of-key stage 3 teacher assessments in the core subjects of English or Welsh, mathematics and science. At key stage 4, too few 16-year-old pupils achieve the higher A/A* grades in the core subjects.

- 2 The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports for 2007 and 2010, which assess the performance of students at 15 years of age in schools across more than 50 OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation) countries, suggest that Wales has few high achievers compared to the top-performing countries in the world.
- 3 In the few schools where more able and talented pupils achieve their full potential, the good or excellent teaching and learning strategies adopted for more able and talented pupils impact positively on improving examination results. It is often the case that, in these few schools, all groups of pupils are appropriately challenged across the curriculum.

Provision for more able and talented pupils

- 4 In the few schools with the best provision, more able and talented pupils are appropriately identified, supported and challenged and achieve high standards. These schools use a combination of teacher assessment, standardised testing, observation, and parental and pupil questionnaires to identify pupils' strengths and particular talents, and this information is shared with all staff. Pupils are well supported through a range of additional provision and their progress tracked and monitored carefully across all key stages. There are consistent, whole-school approaches to teaching and learning. A 'more able and talented' co-ordinator oversees the implementation of policy and practice and monitors the provision across the school and parents are fully involved. A few schools have established 'more able and talented' working parties, leadership groups or focus groups to support more able and talented pupils and to offer whole-school training to staff.
- 5 However, in the majority of secondary schools, more able and talented pupils are not identified or challenged well enough, and do not always receive appropriate support. Identification, tracking and monitoring processes are not rigorous in these schools and there is little training for staff on how to work with more able and talented pupils.
- 6 More able and talented pupils benefit from a curriculum that promotes:
 - individualised or personalised approaches to learning;
 - having access to specialist teachers;
 - control over how and what they learn; and
 - mentoring sessions to support them in making option and career choices.
- 7 Transition arrangements between the majority of primary and secondary schools do not provide enough continuity and progression in the education of more able and talented pupils. For example, only a few secondary schools ask teachers in primary schools to identify more able and talented learners in Year 5 and Year 6 using agreed criteria. Where the quality of transition between schools is good, this has a significant impact on the long-term achievement of more able and talented pupils.
- 8 More able and talented pupils benefit significantly from additional provision that is aimed specifically at developing their abilities and talents and offers opportunities to work with more able and talented pupils in other schools. If limited to the provision in only one school, the quality of support and breadth of additional opportunities may depend too much on the specialist skills and knowledge of teachers and tutors and resources in that school.

- 9 In only a very few of the schools surveyed did more able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds receive specific support to overcome barriers to their learning such as low aspiration or limited access to extra-curricular opportunities.
- 10 Effective communication with parents is a key factor in the few schools where more able pupils are successfully challenged to reach high standards. However, a significant minority of schools do not routinely inform parents that their children have been identified as more able and talented.

Local authority support and challenge for schools

- 11 There is too much variation in the support and challenge provided for schools by local authorities to address the needs of more able and talented pupils. The support and challenge are too dependent on the skills, knowledge and understanding of the officer responsible for developing more able and talented provision in each authority and the time allocated for this work.
- 12 In a few local authorities, secondary schools under their leadership have set up networks of professional practice that focus on improving provision and outcomes for more able and talented pupils. Only a few local authorities actively promote sharing best practice between schools.
- 13 Very few local authorities use the data they have available to monitor the progress of more able and talented pupils. School improvement officers rarely discuss, in detail, the provision and outcomes for more able and talented pupils as a group of pupils during their school visits.

The impact of Welsh Government strategy:

- 14 The Welsh Government strategy, along with associated funding streams, has resulted in varying degrees of improvements for more able and talented pupils by schools and local authorities. Since the publication of 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More Able and Talented Pupils' (Welsh Government/National Association for Able Children in Education, 2008), more schools and local authorities have prioritised the education of more able and talented pupils. The guidance and quality standards provide a practical way for schools and local authorities to audit and improve their provision.
- 15 The Welsh Government and the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) provide effective support through conferences and training for local authorities and schools. However, a few local authorities have not taken full advantage of this training and a significant minority of schools are not aware of the guidance that is available. This means that they have not responded as effectively as they could to the Welsh Government's strategy and guidance and have not made enough progress in improving provision and raising the attainment of more able and talented pupils.
- 16 Nearly all schools where provision for more able and talented is good use the Welsh Government/NACE quality standards effectively to support their work, usually by using them as an audit or self-assessment tool. Only a very few secondary schools use the quality standards to prepare for the NACE Challenge Award.

Title: Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification provision at level 3 in secondary schools – A good practice guide – July 2012

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 consider reviewing the structure of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, to build on its strengths and eliminate its weaknesses;
- R2 work with schools and the WJEC to plan how to introduce grading into the assessment of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification; and
- R3 review the arrangements for assessing essential skills qualifications.

Awarding organisations should:

- R4 provide further guidance and exemplar materials to support schools in the delivery and assessment of essential skills; and
- R5 develop the Welsh Baccalaureate website to include a wider range of approved resources, including Welsh-medium resources.

Secondary schools should:

- R6 monitor more closely the arrangements for delivering and assessing essential skills so that they are not overly bureaucratic;
- R7 monitor the quality of learning and teaching on the Welsh Baccalaureate as part of their normal self-evaluation procedures, with a particular focus on student progress and standards; and
- R8 gather and use students' evaluations of their experiences of the Welsh Baccalaureate to improve the provision.

Main findings

- 1 The Welsh Baccalaureate offers many benefits to students. Through studying the Welsh Baccalaureate core, the majority of students improve their essential skills and they achieve an understanding of a range of topics, including enterprise, politics and current affairs, that they would not have studied otherwise. In particular, carrying out the individual investigation helps many students to develop some of the research and analytical skills needed for higher education and employment. Students also develop their confidence and social skills by engaging in community participation and work experience.

- 2 However, the standards achieved on the Welsh Baccalaureate vary a good deal between students and between schools. For instance, standards in individual investigations can vary from level 3 pass level to a very high level. Much of the variation in standards reflects the variation in the way in which the provision is designed and delivered in different schools. It also reflects the wide ability-range of students who take the level 3 core.
- 3 Students who attain the qualification also gain qualifications in a range of essential skills such as communication and application of number, but these are not always studied at a level that is appropriate to individual students. Of all the components in the core, the lowest standards are in the 20-hour language module, which is generally not challenging enough to engage students, especially the more able.
- 4 The wide range of standards being achieved on the level 3 Welsh Baccalaureate core suggests that grading the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification would provide a fairer reflection of the range of student outcomes.
- 5 There is variability in the quality of provision too. In many schools, there is an imbalance between the time spent on completing the paperwork relating to essential skills qualifications and the time spent on improving students' actual skills and transferring these to support learning across the curriculum. However, the quality of teaching in the core is generally good in the majority of schools. In a minority of teaching sessions, students are not challenged enough because teachers do not plan well enough to meet the needs of the full ability-range of students.
- 6 The mentoring and tutorial support offered by many schools are good and this has a positive effect on students' progress and achievement not only in the Welsh Baccalaureate core but across all subjects being studied as options. A minority of schools have a manageable system for tracking and monitoring students' experiences and progress. Nearly all schools collect information about the completion of the different components of the Welsh Baccalaureate, although in most cases only the co-ordinator or administrator have access to this information. A few schools share this information with teachers, learning coaches, parents or students and use it to track underperformance and provide additional support when required.
- 7 Many schools plan extensively to provide a broad and interesting range of activities in the Welsh Baccalaureate and only in a few instances do the activities not engage students. A minority of schools make good use of information and communication technology, including interactive whiteboards, to support teaching and learning.
- 8 The Welsh Baccalaureate is at its most successful where it is planned as a compulsory part of the curriculum for all students. Schools generally allocate enough curriculum time to delivering the core, most of which is completed by the end of Year 12 in order to give students more time to focus on their other level 3 options in Year 13.
- 9 Nearly all schools have developed effective partnerships with a range of organisations to support the Welsh Baccalaureate. The links they establish with local businesses and charities are useful to facilitate the delivery of 'enterprise' and work experience and provide opportunities for students to work with others and to gain experiences beyond the classroom.

- 10 Although many schools have well-established self-evaluation processes, the Welsh Baccalaureate often sits outside these quality assurance procedures. This means that school leaders do not know enough about the quality of teaching in the Welsh Baccalaureate programme or know how much progress students are making during lessons.
- 11 Many students are positive about their Welsh Baccalaureate experiences, particularly those linked to enterprise, but they also say that there is too much paperwork to complete and too little skills-development. Students have too little input into self-evaluation procedures. While a minority of schools listen to students' views and included them in some self-evaluation activities, in the majority of schools, students' views are not used to improve the programme.
- 12 The main source of training, advice and support for staff about the Welsh Baccalaureate is the WJEC. This training has been effective and has had a positive impact. However, the support from other awarding organisations that are responsible for essential skills qualifications has been less effective. The majority of schools have not received enough guidance about the new essential skills qualifications or examples of good practice.
- 13 Many schools have sufficient resources to support their Welsh Baccalaureate programme. The range of Welsh-medium resources has improved, but there is still a general lack of Welsh-language resources, especially for personal and social education modules. Where Welsh-language resources exist, schools do not always know how to get hold of them.
- 14 A minority of schools provide a very high-quality level 3 Welsh Baccalaureate programme. Their programme is varied and puts a strong emphasis on the individual investigation and work experience as a means for developing the skills needed for higher education and employment. In these schools, students' views are listened to and they are very positive about their experiences. These schools are in favour of grading the qualification and a few have begun to develop their provision beyond the awarding organisation's current requirements.