



WALES AUDIT OFFICE

SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

**A report on the quality of local authority
education services
for children and young people**

in

**Cardiff Council
County Hall
Atlantic Wharf
Cardiff
CF10 4UW**

January 2011

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on their capacity to improve.

In these evaluations, we use a four-point scale:

Excellent

Good

Adequate

Unsatisfactory

The report was produced in accordance with section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Context

Cardiff is the capital city of Wales. It covers a geographic area of 140 square kilometres. The age profile of the population includes around 60,000 children (aged 0-16). The Council estimates that the student population represents around 10% of the total population. This has a bearing on the proportion of the population aged between 20 and 29, of about 21%, in comparison to 12% for the rest of south east Wales.

In 2009, the employment rate in Cardiff was 67.8%. This was the eighth highest amongst the 22 Welsh local authorities. Cardiff had the tenth highest rate of children living in workless households amongst the Welsh local authorities. Average weekly earnings in Cardiff were the second highest of the 22 Welsh local authorities and above the Welsh average.

In 2009, 41.7% of working age adults had qualifications at National Qualification Framework (NQF) level 4 or above. This was well above the Welsh average of 29.6%, the second highest percentage in Wales. The percentage of working age adults with no qualifications has gradually fallen since 2001 to 11.8% in 2008, below the Wales average of 14.6%.

Financial context

The Welsh Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA)¹ per head of population for Cardiff for 2010-2011 was the second lowest for local authorities in Wales. The Council has set its overall revenue budget at 100.4% of SSA, almost at the Wales average of 100.5%. In contrast, its net Education budget was set at 103.5% of its Education IBA², the third highest in Wales and above the Wales average of 99%. Over the last five years this ratio has remained consistently above the Welsh average.

The net education budget for 2010-2011 is equivalent to £4,640 per pupil compared with an average of £4,816 for Wales as a whole. The budget delegated to primary schools is £3,700 per pupil and that for secondary schools is £4,272 per pupil. Both are marginally above the Wales averages.

Structure

The Corporate Director (Social Wellbeing) has responsibility for the Schools and Lifelong Learning Service (SLLS) and Children's Services within the authority. The authority is implementing a strategic transformation programme, which is driving changes to the Schools and Lifelong Learning Service (SLLS). These changes focus on the improvement of strategic partnership working between the SLLS and services within the Social Wellbeing directorate. The chief education Officer is supported by three Heads of Achievement and a Head of Performance, Resources and Services.

¹ SSA is the means by which the Welsh Government distributes Revenue Grant to local authorities.

² Education IBA is that part of SSA relating to the delivery of education services.

Cardiff has an established Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP), together with a current Children and Young people's Plan (2008-2011). The CYPP sets out the key priorities and challenges in improving outcomes for young people through focused collaborative and partnership work.

Issues from the previous inspections are detailed in the post-inspection action plans which are planned and delivered through the CYPP. The six key objectives in the post-inspection plan link to the related overarching strategies and targets in the authority's Children and Young People's Plan and the Schools and Lifelong Learning Business Plan 2008-11.

Summary

Overall judgement: Adequate

Current performance is adequate because the authority:

- has met or exceeded all of the Welsh Government benchmark expectations for the last 4 years;
- has effective arrangements to support and challenge schools; and
- has made good progress in developing and rationalising provision of school places.

However:

- progress is too slow in areas such as attendance, exclusion, key stage 4 outcomes, and for those not in education, employment or training (NEETs); and
- the strategic leadership of joint working between the authority and the Children and Young People's Partnership is not effective enough.

Capacity to improve: Adequate

Prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- elected members have shown strong leadership and consistent support for education services, and the chief education officer and heads of service provide good leadership to the schools' service; and
- strategic plans reflect both national and local priorities well. There are clear links between most plans across the authority.

However:

- self-evaluation and improvement are not consistent, rigorous or robust enough; and
- self-evaluation processes did not evidence how the work of the CYPP contributes to improving outcomes for all learners

Recommendations

In order to improve, the City and County of Cardiff needs to:

- R1 improve the strategic leadership of joint working between the authority and the Children's and Young People's Partnership;
- R2 improve the effectiveness of partnership planning for outcomes in priority areas;
- R3 improve the scrutiny of partnership working;
- R4 continue to raise standards at key stage 4, improve attendance, reduce exclusions and reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training;
- R5 improve performance management processes to ensure a consistent approach in delivering objectives; and
- R6 improve the information, advice and support for all parents of learners requiring the statutory assessment of pupils' special educational needs.

What happens next?

Cardiff County Council will produce an action plan to show how it will address these recommendations within 70 days (50 working days) of receipt of the report. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

Estyn is of the opinion that the authority falls into the category of follow-up and will require an Estyn monitoring visit. The date and focus of this monitoring visit will be determined by Estyn in due course.

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the local authority needs any follow-up activity.

There are five types of follow-up activity:

1. good practice case study;
2. link inspector monitoring;
3. Estyn monitoring visit;
4. significant improvement; and
5. special measures.

Any follow-up inspection work will be planned in consideration of other inspection and regulatory activity within an authority. All follow-up inspections will be fed into the Local Authority Regulatory Calendar to avoid duplication and take advantage of any opportunities to work more closely with the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW).

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes? Good

Standards: Good

Standards have improved since the previous inspection, but the rate of improvement is not consistent in all areas. The authority's performance against attainment indicators at all key stages is improving, being at or above expected levels. The upward trend in the percentage of learners gaining the core subject indicator (CSI – the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum) at all key stages over the past three years is in line with the trends for Wales. At key stage 1, performance is particularly good.

Performance against benchmarks based on free school meals entitlement at key stages 3 and 4 has exceeded expectations for the last three years. The rate of improvement in the core subject indicator at key stage 3 has exceeded the improvement rate across Wales. Girls outperform boys at all key stages, particularly at key stages 1 and 2. The gap in performance between boys and girls is smaller than the average for Wales at key stages 1 and 2, and much smaller than the average for Wales at key stages 3 and 4. Performance at key stage 4 is improving steadily but the percentage of pupils gaining the core subject indicator is below the average for Wales.

The performance of minority ethnic learners is improving and the gap in performance between them and white UK learners is narrowing. The percentage of ethnic minority learners achieving the level 2 threshold (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grade A* to C) has increased and the gap in attainment between them and white UK learners has reduced considerably. The percentage of learners achieving higher grades at GCSE and AS/A2 levels is higher than the average for Wales.

Learners make good progress in developing Welsh second language skills. The percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in Welsh as a first language in Welsh-medium schools is well above the average for Wales.

The percentage of young people not in education, training or employment remains one of the highest in Wales. The percentage of pupils leaving full-time education without a recognised qualification is reducing, but remains relatively high compared to other areas of Wales.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Standards of wellbeing in aspects such as health, healthy eating, physical education and listening to learners are good. Learners participate well in school councils and in the Youth Council. The impact of listening to learners' views is good. For example, learner feedback to the school catering service has had a positive influence on catering decisions for schools.

The authority has a wide range of good initiatives and strategies that promote participation in and enjoyment of learning. These initiatives include the physical education and school sports (PESS) programme, the appetite for life programme and the healthy schools scheme. The promotion of Sex and relationships education (SRE) is good. However, the impact of SRE on learners' knowledge and behaviour is yet to be evaluated by the authority.

Successful counselling interventions have enabled learners who have been referred by schools to gain prompt access to support when needed. This support helps to raise awareness of the need for learners to focus on improving their emotional wellbeing and participation in learning.

The PESS programme is embedded well in nearly all of Cardiff's schools. The authority offers a good range of physical activities in education, leisure and community settings. Boys' and girls' participation in physical activities is increasing.

Attendance rates are improving in secondary schools but they remain below the all-Wales average. Attendance in primary schools is close to the all-Wales average. The rate of permanent exclusions has reduced significantly in secondary schools. It is also low in primary and special schools.

The number of fixed term exclusions of six days or more is reducing in secondary schools, but is above the average for Wales. The number of fixed term exclusions of five days or less in secondary schools remains high. Currently, the rate of young people continuing with education after Year 11 is low and the rate of young people becoming NEET after Year 11 is high in comparison to the rest of Wales.

Key Question 2: How good is provision? Adequate

Support for School Improvement: Good

Support for school improvement is good. The authority has effective arrangements to support and challenge schools. It has strengthened school improvement processes well since the last inspection, and these actions are helping to drive improvement. Increasing collaborative work across education services is helping to improve the achievement of all learners.

Link officers work closely with their schools and provide detailed and comprehensive annual evaluations. These evaluations identify areas for improvement clearly and together with the mid-cycle reviews of school progress are particular strengths of the authority's work with schools.

The authority has improved its Partnership Agreements with schools. The agreements set out clear criteria and processes that help to identify and support schools causing concern. This means that issues are identified at an early stage and additional support is directed where it is needed most. As a result, there has been a significant and appropriate increase in the number of schools identified as needing additional support, and a general steady improvement in standards.

Education services appropriately focus initiatives to raise standards in priority areas, such as literacy. These interventions are successful in improving learners' functional literacy in targeted primary schools. Interventions to raise standards in mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) also have a positive impact. Support to underperforming secondary subject departments is good.

Successful mechanisms for improving leadership and management contribute well to improving quality and standards in schools. These mechanisms include support and training for middle and senior managers to strengthen data analysis, self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Support for Additional Learning Needs: Adequate

Support for additional learning needs is adequate. The authority meets all statutory requirements regarding the provision of support of learners with additional learning needs. Cardiff has the highest number of learners with statements of special educational needs in Wales, and this number has remained static over the last three years. The authority has introduced new strategies to reduce the number of statements, such as delegating more funds to schools. For example, this allows each secondary school to have one teacher with specialist knowledge. It is too early for the authority to judge the impact of this delegation of funds. However, the recent restructure in education services gives a strong focus on learners who have special educational needs. The service has a clear vision for improvement, and the authority is building the capacity of schools to meet learners' additional learning needs.

Schools and support services track and monitor the progress of individual and groups of learners well. However, they do not always use this information consistently enough to enable them to evaluate the needs of all groups of learners and to plan provision more strategically.

The authority is developing helpful ways to consult with and listen to learners with additional learning needs. The Home School Links Project is also helping to improve parental engagement in similar feedback processes. However, strategies to communicate and engage with parents of children who have special educational needs are not effective enough.

Staff use their specialist knowledge, to ensure that children's needs are met in out-of-county school placements. An Out-of-Area panel for all pupils placed out-of-county is in place. The authority has recently appointed an out-of-county transition worker to develop a staged approach to identifying and supporting learners' needs.

However, the authority does not monitor learner progress in these placements well enough. This means that it does not know how well all learners are progressing, it doesn't plan for appropriate action, and staff do not know if the placements are offering the best value for money.

Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Adequate

Progress in this area is adequate. Education services have introduced a number of good, targeted initiatives that give a positive foundation for further improvements. The new strategy for managing attendance aims to provide a more consistent approach to behaviour and exclusion issues. This strategy plans for schools to access a broader range of alternative provision instead of excluding learners. However, it is too early to judge the success of this strategy.

Education services have reported to the Scrutiny Committee that a few schools exclude pupils without reporting this. This means that the actual number of days lost through exclusion is likely to be slightly higher than has been reported.

Schools appropriately record racist incidents and have well-written anti bullying policies, but there is no effective system for the authority to ensure that reporting is consistent across all schools. Monitoring the effectiveness of these policies and procedures and their impact is neither consistent nor robust enough.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy is helping to improve the performance of services for looked-after children, and the attainment of those pupils is improving. The authority's Ethnic Minority Achievement Service provides good support to learners whose first language is not English or Welsh.

The authority's youth service has a wide range of projects and activities that meet young people's needs well. The Keeping In Touch (KIT) initiative gives helpful analyses of learners receiving support. The new Youth Engagement Strategy provides an improved focus for supporting young people who are NEET.

Staff in schools have access to a good range of training and advice from the local authority about safeguarding. However, this training is not yet available to all adults who have daily contact with learners, such as taxi drivers providing school transport. The local authority has a clear policy and procedures for safeguarding, and all education staff receive appropriate Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks.

Access and school places: Good

The local authority has made good progress in developing and rationalising the provision of school places since the last inspection. It has good up-to-date knowledge of the capacity of all schools and uses accurate information for forecasting future requirements in all sectors. The authority is now also working more closely with the NHS to collect additional data on births that will further inform the forecasting of need.

The authority has accurate, up-to-date information regarding the condition, sufficiency and suitability of all school buildings. The asset management plan contains clearly stated objectives. Officers manage education building projects well so that they run to schedule and within budget.

Implementation of the school organisation proposals, which were at the planning stage at the time of the last inspection, is proceeding well. Politicians and senior

officers, together with the support of headteachers and trades unions, have taken forward difficult decisions to deliver organisational change for improvement. This has led to school amalgamations and closures, and the building of new schools. The process is yet to be completed.

Information for parents on school admissions is in line with the Code of Practice. However, the appeals process is sometimes too slow.

The new collaborative arrangements across a number of partnerships for post-14 learners gives a better foundation than currently exists for young people to be able to access learning routes that meet their individual needs.

The authority provides enough early years places. It monitors funded places well in both maintained and non-maintained settings. The authority provides a good range of training for these settings and the evaluation of these is used effectively to inform future training needs.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management? Adequate

Leadership: Adequate

Elected members have shown strong leadership and consistent support for education services. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is developing its role well to focus more on monitoring learner outcomes. It has challenged performance across a range of areas. However, it does not consistently scrutinise wider services outside the statutory service.

Elected members and senior officers receive regular, useful reports to help them to know how well services and schools are performing. However, officers do not present a strategic overview of provision between the authority and the CYPP.

The leadership of education services by officers including the chief education officer and heads of service is good. Roles and responsibilities focus appropriately on the needs of learners. The new leadership team for education receives good support from the Chief Executive and elected members.

Strategic plans reflect both national and local priorities well. There are clear links between most plans across the authority. However, these are not linked well enough to wider youth support services. The strategic and operational plans display the authority's strong commitment to education. However, the links to the targets and activities of individual staff across the service are not always linked clearly enough to the plans and priorities. This has been recognised by the authority.

The newly appointed Chief Executive supports the authority's very clear vision of the benefits of education to individuals and communities. He has very quickly put in place improved performance management systems to develop and improve services, and to hold staff, including headteachers, to account. However, it is too early to judge the outcomes.

Improving quality: Unsatisfactory

The authority did not address all of the areas that it is expected to in its self-evaluation for this inspection. This means that the local authority has not demonstrated how well it is delivering its role in developing shared priorities and programmes for the children and young people of Cardiff. This is an important area for improvement.

Because of this shortcoming, the inspection focused mainly on the progress that the local authority's education services have made since previous inspections.

In education services, quality improvement is adequate. Standards are improving, but progress is too slow in areas such as attendance, exclusion, key stage 4 outcomes and NEETs. The scrutiny committee and the board of the CYPP receive regular progress reports. The annual report on the performance of schools is a good example of this. However, not all reports are evaluative and analytical enough and nor are they wide-ranging in scope. They are not joined up enough to allow leaders and managers to provide effective levels of challenge to all agencies and departments involved in delivering services to children and young people to drive improvements.

Officers receive useful data that provides a good overview of progress and is used well to monitor performance against local and national indicators and benchmarks. However, there is not enough analysis of the data to plan effectively for measurable improvements. The authority is implementing an outcome-based model to demonstrate the impact of provision on learners. However, this system is too new to show how it will improve planning for improvements needed.

Performance management is routine across the authority but it is not always effective enough in securing improvements. Target-setting and reviewing of progress against targets are not robust enough.

The authority uses its statutory powers appropriately to support improvements. It has a strong commitment to professional learning communities and works well within the South East Wales regional consortium for continuous professional development.

Partnership working: Adequate

Overall, partnership working is adequate. At the highest strategic level, the Local Service Board (LSB) in Cardiff has embarked upon an ambitious programme to reform planning and partnership arrangements, and the authority has contributed well to this. The new Integrated Partnership Strategy is intended to align all overarching strategic plans in one single plan with a common set of high-level objectives. The LSB is currently consulting on this initiative.

There are appropriate partnership arrangements to address the statutory requirements for the local authority's education services to work together with others. These include youth justice, early years provision, young people's health and wellbeing, the 14-19 learning pathways network, and the youth support services.

The Children and Young People's Partnership is not effective as the key driver to achieving improvements in services and outcomes for learners.

Relationships and communication between the local authority and its headteachers are good. Partnership working within the 14-19 Network is good, with shared responsibility for improving access to courses and work-based learning opportunities.

Progress is too slow in developing more integrated services through joint work with partners in education, children's social services and health services. For example, pupils attending independent residential special schools receive regular reviews of their care arrangements, although in a few cases their educational placement needs are considered only once a year, through the annual review of statement of special educational needs. These separate arrangements are not efficient and do not provide the authority with an holistic view of all pupils' progress.

The regional South East Wales Consortium is exploring radical ways of integrating and improving education services across a wide region, but this work is still at a developmental stage.

Resource management: Adequate

The quality of resource management for shared services is adequate.

The allocation of financial resources to education is good and reflects the high priority given to it by the Council.

Education services have successfully obtained additional funding for the priorities in the post-inspection action plan. However, the reduction in the Council's overall budget means that the service must make efficiency savings. Its strategy is to focus on areas that will have the least impact on learners, and the authority has protected schools' delegated budgets from financial cutbacks.

The education service is reconfiguring aspects of its functions to achieve better outcomes and to link resources better to priorities. This reconfiguration is part of the phased departmental restructuring within the authority. The work of the developing South East Wales consortia will further inform this reconfiguration.

The authority does not have a complete overview of how effectively all resources for partnership activities are managed across education and the CYPP. It does not know whether all of its services are delivering good value for money. This means that it does not know how successfully all partners are contributing to the better linking of resources to priorities. There is still further work to do to demonstrate that the use of resources is having the best possible impact on outcomes or provision.

The authority manages the education services budget well. The link between financial planning, spending decisions and improvement planning is developing well. The Council has committed significant funding to the schools modernising plan, including its 21st Century Schools application. It has used savings from the delegated schools budget to raise additional capital for school buildings.

The service level agreements for support services to schools are now in a consistent format. They provide clarity about the extent, cost and quality of the service provided. The service uses customer satisfaction surveys to review the performance of its strategic management services.

Funding decisions are producing good outcomes such as sustained and improved performance against many of the education indicators. The authority has well-developed plans in place to allocate resources to priority areas such as special educational needs and attendance.

The wider education services for children and young people overall provide adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

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Copies of the report

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