

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

in

**Pembrokeshire County Council
County Hall
Haverfordwest
SA611TP**

June 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.

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Context

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Pembrokeshire is a peninsula situated at the extreme south west of Wales, sharing land boundaries with Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. It is the fifth largest county in Wales, covering approximately 1,650 square kilometres. It is mainly rural in character, with a population density of 72 people per square kilometre. Just under half the total population of 117,400 lives in the six main towns of Fishguard, Haverfordwest, Milford Haven, Pembroke, Pembroke Dock and Tenby.

In January 2011, the total pupil population was nearly 17,940 full time equivalent. The local authority maintains 70 schools including 61 primary schools, eight secondary schools, one special school and one pupil referral unit.

Pembrokeshire has a relatively small minority ethnic population compared to the rest of Wales. In January 2011, the school population included 928 pupils recorded as minority ethnic and 115 pupils as Gypsy Traveller.

In 2010, the employment rate in Pembrokeshire was 65.9%. This was the ninth lowest amongst the 22 Welsh local authorities. Average weekly earnings in Pembrokeshire are the highest in Wales. Of the working age population in 2010, 13.8% had no qualifications, which is above the Welsh average of 12.1%.

The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals is 17% which is the eighth lowest in Wales. Pembrokeshire is a relatively prosperous county but there are pockets of deprivation, particularly in the Pembroke Dock area. According to the 2001 Census, just over a fifth (21.5%) of the population can speak Welsh. Most Welsh speakers live in the north of the county, with the population in the south of the county being predominantly English-speaking.

Financial Context

The Welsh Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per head of population for Pembrokeshire for 2010-2011 was slightly above the average for Wales. The council set its overall budget at 94.7% of SSA, the lowest ratio in Wales. In contrast, the council set the education budget at a level of 98.8% of its indicative budget allocation (IBA), close to the Wales average. It should be noted that the IBA is not a spending target, but a mechanism for determining the allocation of Welsh Government support for individual authorities. The net education budget per pupil was £4,942 compared with an average of £4,800 for Wales as a whole. The budget delegated to primary schools (£4,027 per pupil) was the fourth highest in Wales and that for secondary schools (£4,426 per pupil) was the fifth highest.

Summary

Overall judgement: Unsatisfactory

The local authority's education services for children and young people are unsatisfactory because:

- the local authority's policies and systems for safeguarding children and young people are not fit for purpose;
- the authority has met or exceeded only 7 of the 12 Welsh Government benchmark expectations for the last 4 years;
- learners do not generally perform at expected levels at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 4; and
- attendance rates in primary and secondary schools are only adequate and they have declined over the last 4 years.

However:

- learners achieve generally good standards at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 3 as do learners aged 17 taking external examinations;
- support for additional learning needs and provision for access and school places are good; and
- overall the rates of pupil exclusion from schools are low and there are good systems in place for consulting learners.

Capacity to improve: Unsatisfactory

The local authority has unsatisfactory prospects for improvement because:

- there has been a systemic corporate failure to respond sufficiently to safeguarding issues;
- the quality of the information that officers share with elected members does not enable them to challenge the performance of services and schools sufficiently;
- performance management in the past has not been effective enough in securing improvements against certain key indicators; and
- value for money is adequate.

However:

- the local authority has taken difficult decisions in reducing surplus places in its schools. Since the last inspection in 2008, it has closed six primary schools and opened two community primary schools and invested £13.5 million in new and refurbished schools; and
- the authority has responded well to most of the recommendations from the 2008 Estyn reports on education and youth support services.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Pembrokeshire County Council needs to:

- R1 undertake a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of all safeguarding work within the education department and its schools, including taking urgent steps to remedy deficiencies in the governance and management of safeguarding, including associated functions in human resources;
- R2 raise standards in schools particularly at the end of key stage 4;
- R3 increase attendance rates in primary and secondary schools by the end of the academic year 2011-2012;
- R4 improve the working of the overview and scrutiny committee through:
 - the provision of full, relevant and transparent information from officers to inform elected members; and
 - training for elected members to ensure that they can be more effective in challenging the performance of the authority's services and its schools and safeguarding arrangements in order to hold officers to account.
- R5 improve the accuracy and rigour of the authority's own evaluations of how well the council and its partners perform, in relation to how services and partnership working are impacting on outcomes for learners; and
- R6 improve the 'access to mediation' services for parents and carers.

What happens next?

Pembrokeshire 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 is in need of significant improvement specifically due to shortcomings in the important areas of safeguarding and in associated failures in corporate culture and systems. The authority will require re-inspection. The date and focus of the re-inspection will be determined by Estyn in due course.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training (HMCI) will notify the Minister for Education and Skills that the authority is in need of significant improvement.

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? Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Since 2008, performance in Pembrokeshire schools has improved at a faster rate than Wales in key stages 2 and 3. However, performance in key stage 1 and on most indicators in key stage 4 has not improved at the same rate.

In 2010 performance in external examinations in key stage 4 in Pembrokeshire secondary schools declined compared to the Wales average and compared to other authorities across Wales. Only the average wider points score was above the Wales average score.

When compared to similar schools across Wales, using the free-school-meal benchmarks, performance is average in key stage 1 and above average in key stages 2 and 3. However, at key stage 4 there have been too many schools in the bottom 25% over the last three years and too few schools in the top 25%. In 2010, there were no schools in the top quarter for three of the five main indicators.

There is a declining trend against the Welsh Government's benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal entitlement. In 2007 Pembrokeshire met all three of these benchmarks, in 2008 it met two but in both 2009 and 2010 it only met one.

Performance of pupils aged 17 has improved since 2008 and was above the average for Wales and better than expected levels, taking account of free-school-meals percentages in 2010.

In 2010, the percentage of learners leaving full-time education without any recognised qualification improved and is better than the Wales average. The percentage of Year 11 learners not in education, training or employment (NEETs) is also better than the average across Wales. However the percentage continuing in full-time education declined in 2010 and does not compare well enough to other authorities across Wales.

In key stages 1, 2 and 3 the gap in performance between boys and girls is similar to, or less than, the average for Wales. However, in key stage 4 the gap increases. This is because boys' performance compares less well to that of boys nationally than is the case for girls.

Particular groups of learners, including vulnerable groups and those with additional learning needs, generally attain their expected levels. Gypsy traveller children improve their literacy skills and many make good progress into work.

Learners make adequate progress in gaining skills in first and second language Welsh. Overall, the standards they achieve in both subjects are generally good.

Young people achieve a high number of accreditations across a good range of formal, informal and non-formal opportunities provided by Pembrokeshire's Youth Support Services.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Standards of wellbeing are generally adequate. The authority has a satisfactory range of initiatives and strategies that encourage learners to participate in and enjoy learning.

Attendance has generally declined in primary and secondary schools over the last four years. Rates of attendance in Pembrokeshire do not compare well to its free school meal figure and to other authorities across Wales. Most learners from vulnerable groups attend relatively well.

Overall the rates of exclusion are low. There have been no permanent exclusions over the last four years and the number of days lost to exclusions of six days or more is well below the Wales average. However the rate of exclusion lasting five days or less has increased and does not compare well to other authorities. The number of days lost to exclusions overall is below the Wales average.

Learners have a good understanding of the importance of eating and living healthily. They have influenced the provision of schools menus through good consultation and through participation in youth councils. A few learners in out-of-hours clubs learn to prepare healthy food. However, a clear strategy to measure changes in learners' dietary choices and behaviour is yet to be developed. Learners' participation in physical activities is good and they understand how well this helps them to develop their levels of fitness.

Learners can access counselling services easily. Those who do so benefit from the support they get and this leads to an improvement in their school attendance and performance, behaviour and emotional wellbeing.

The authority consults learners well, for example through conferences and meetings. Learners have been involved well in making Individual Education Plans more user-friendly and developing the local authority's Welsh language strategy. The authority takes good account of learners from vulnerable groups in consultation processes.

Key Question 2: How good is provision? Adequate
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Support for School Improvement: Adequate

Appropriate plans and arrangements exist for offering support, challenge and intervene in schools. The authority sets out clear criteria in the Partnership Agreement and most schools understand well what support they should receive.

However, the authority has not addressed underperformance in around a half of secondary schools well enough. The authority has identified too few schools causing concern. However, since the last inspection there is now greater clarity in the way in

which the authority allocates support to schools in proportion to need and through more systematic analysis of data. The authority has placed particular emphasis on supporting schools and governing bodies to analyse performance data more robustly.

Officers carry out an appropriate programme of targeted school reviews. There is a clear focus in these reviews on provision and outcomes for pupils with additional learning needs. Officers provide schools with helpful written feedback that indicates areas for development. However, judgements about the quality of leadership and management do not always take enough account of the standards pupils achieve.

The authority supports a range of useful initiatives that address local and national priorities well. However, the authority does not evaluate the impact of these initiatives on outcomes well enough. There are effective initiatives to improve pupils' basic skills, in particular their functional literacy. There is good support to implement the Foundation Phase.

The authority has a good online networking facility, called the Pembrokeshire portal, to share information, provide a wide range of learning resources and promote good practice.

The authority provides good training opportunities for leaders in schools and for governing bodies. The attendance of a representative of the Director of Education at all governing body meetings is an useful way of ensuring governors are well informed about the authority's key priorities.

Support for Additional Learning Needs: Good

The Pembrokeshire Inclusion Strategy promotes a helpful vision for all learners. The additional learning needs service is implementing this vision through the provision of good quality information, guidance and support.

The service makes effective use of early identification, screening and assessment processes. It tracks progress and targets resources appropriately.

In partnership with schools, the service has improved resource allocation, training and self-review well. As a result, out-of-county placements and statements of special educational need have been significantly reduced. This partnership work has been very effective in building the capacity of schools to meet the additional needs of learners in-house.

The service provides a wide range of high quality training to schools. The specialist teachers routinely evaluate the use made of training and monitor the impact on learner outcomes effectively. An example of this is the dyslexia training, which has contributed to improvement in the attainment of the learners concerned. There are effective links between school development advisers and local authority specialist staff. This enables a fully integrated approach to monitoring and supporting schools, which has had a positive impact on learning and teaching. The greatest impact has been an improvement in the ability of schools to focus the teaching so that it meets the needs of these learners better.

Generally multi-agency working to support these pupils is effective. In particular, partnership working with the speech and language therapy team is sector-leading. An excellent range of targeted support is provided for schools, learners and parents, which contributes to better learner outcomes.

Overall the local authority provides effective support for parents of pupils with additional learning needs. However, there are difficulties in accessing mediation services. As a result, a few parents do not receive the level of support they need.

Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Unsatisfactory

Education

The authority has a clear wellbeing strategy and action plan that inform service planning well. Leaders are reviewing the structure of inclusion services in order to further strengthen provision.

The 'team-around-the-child' approach has enabled learners to access support effectively and has improved communication between support services.

The authority monitors and follows up its few racist incidents effectively. Although schools have anti-bullying policies, the authority does not gather information about incidents of bullying or racism so as to analyse the impact of these policies.

The authority looks after vulnerable groups well. Looked-after children receive good, individualised support. The recently restructured English as an additional language (EAL) service helps teachers develop useful strategies to support learners.

The authority has recently introduced a variety of initiatives to improve pupil attendance rates. The pupil support service is involving school nurses well to strengthen its challenge to schools' interpretation of medical absence. The authority has introduced electronic registration into primary schools to improve the collation of attendance data. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these initiatives in identifying patterns of non-attendance so that staff can use the information to address the underlying reasons.

The behaviour support service facilitates the use of a wide range of strategies, including nurture groups and vocational activities, to help learners to improve their behaviour and avoid exclusion. The service works well with local youth offending teams and this has helped to reduce offending rates.

The children and young people's partnership (CYPP) engages well with a wide range of partners, which has enabled learners to gain accredited units or qualifications in a broad range of informal and non formal settings.

The authority tracks and supports learners who are not in education, employment and training (NEET) well. It has engaged effectively with key partners to improve the range of appropriate progression opportunities available to education leavers.

Safeguarding

The local authority has some satisfactory safeguarding policies and procedures in place, but these are not applied consistently across its education services. Some policies and procedures do not reflect the All Wales Child Protection Procedures.

Through the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), the local authority has delivered the basic-awareness-level Tier 1 training in safeguarding to approximately 4,700 people since 2008. The training has received a very positive response from those trained, but its impact has not been evaluated by the LSCB and managers.

However, despite this training, the local authority's systems for safe recruitment, and for the risk assessment of activities and of individuals who may pose a threat to children and young people, are not fit for purpose. Therefore this aspect of the work of Pembrokeshire's education service is judged to be unsatisfactory.

The local authority does not do enough to ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is well informed about the safeguarding issues in Pembrokeshire. As a consequence the LSCB is not able to hold partners effectively to account. The leadership of the LSCB has acknowledged this in their self-assessment. However they in turn have not done enough to challenge the local authority on this.

This aspect of the inspection has resulted in further investigations led by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and involving inspectors from Estyn and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). Reports on these investigations will be published in due course.

Access and school places: Good

The authority has a good track record of reducing surplus places in its schools. It currently has the lowest percentage of surplus places for primary schools in Wales and the sixth lowest for secondary schools. It has reorganised its primary schools successfully. Since the last inspection in 2008, it has closed six primary schools, opened two community primary schools and invested £13.5 million in new and refurbished schools.

Pembrokeshire invests in its schools well. It is in the top quarter of Welsh authorities for the amount per pupil spent on improving school buildings. There has also been substantial investment in secondary schools and further refurbishments are planned.

The good close working relationship between the north federation of schools and the further education college is supported well by formal governance arrangements. These arrangements secure access for learners to a wide range of courses.

The authority has an effective methodology for forecasting pupil numbers. Staff have responded well to the recommendation about this in the last Estyn inspection report. The admissions team has worked well with the authority's policy unit to improve forecasting. Pupil number predictions are now generally accurate for both primary and secondary schools. The authority manages admissions well and officers deal with the few appeals speedily.

The early years team has good knowledge of the capacity and demand for childcare in Pembrokeshire. It uses training appropriately to develop additional provision as well as working effectively with a range of agencies to meet demand where it is needed.

Pembrokeshire has a comprehensive range of youth support services. These are co-ordinated well by the children and young people's partnership (CYPP). Young people enjoy good access to their entitlements. A large number of organisations deliver services either wholly or partly in Welsh. The volume of this Welsh-medium provision has more than doubled since the last inspection.

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

Leadership: Unsatisfactory

Elected members have been willing to make difficult decisions about closing schools in the wider interests of all children and young people. However, they have not addressed safeguarding issues systematically and thoroughly enough.

Senior officers in education work well together, and have good relationships with schools. The corporate ethos of 'customer focus', 'value for money' and 'one team', is fundamental to the way they work. However, many important discussions and decisions take place at informal meetings that have not always been minuted.

The information that is shared with elected members, including cabinet and the overview and scrutiny committee has too frequently been 'managed' by officers, with more challenging aspects being omitted from published reports. This represents a significant risk to the transparency of communication and the robustness of decision-making. It has undermined the ability of elected members to challenge and hold officers to account.

Officers do not routinely share information fully with elected members. This compromises the ability of elected members to challenge the performance of services and the fulfilling of safeguarding duties. For example, over recent years, education officers have not provided elected members and senior staff with a wide enough range of information about pupil performance. As a result, schools and the school improvement service have not been robustly challenged about learner outcomes and trends in performance.

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets only five times a year and only occasionally has it appointed a sub- group to address a specific issue. This does not give the committee sufficient time to be proactive in challenging the performance of schools.

The education department is appropriately structured so as to support a dual focus on school improvement and partnership working. As a result, provision for additional learning needs and inclusion is split between two service heads. This approach works effectively due to good communication and team working between the service heads.

The authority has an appropriate strategic vision for education that is well understood by members, schools and partners. There are clear links between the key strategic plans. The Annual Improvement Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan link well with the Community Strategy. All appropriately reflect national and local priorities. Service improvement plans provide an effective link between corporate plans and the necessary service actions. They contain a robust review of the previous year's performance and actions for the coming year. Although service improvement plans are produced by each head of service, and are subject to rigorous challenge by the Chief Officers Management Board, these are not routinely shared with elected members.

There has been a systemic corporate failure to respond to safeguarding issues. There have been failings in relation to recruitment, in risk management and in relation to how specific cases have been dealt with. Both the leadership and management of the local authority's safeguarding duties, as delivered by the education service, are unsatisfactory as a result.

Quality improvement: Adequate

The authority has comprehensive self-evaluation arrangements for education. It embeds these well in most areas and involves staff at all levels. This helps staff to 'own' the processes of change and development. The authority takes good account of the views of learners, including in the areas of teaching and learning. There is good use of first-hand evidence. However, self-evaluation depends too much to judgements made in previous inspection reports.

In many areas, the authority identifies accurately where it needs to improve. However, the authority's self-evaluation report does not recognise well enough all of the areas where it underperforms, in particular in the way it manages its safeguarding duties in education and in its judgment on standards, which is too high.

There is useful, ongoing work to develop common outcome measures and data sharing across a wide range of agencies. However, not all staff make clear judgements on the impact of services on learners or outcomes.

The authority has appropriately addressed most of the recommendations from the Estyn inspection report of 2008 on education and youth support services. However, recommendations to ensure more consistent and appropriate challenge to schools and to improve self-assessment have not been effective enough to raise standards.

The authority's planning for improvement is adequate. Performance management in the past has not been effective enough in securing improvements in certain key indicators such as the underperformance at key stage 4. The authority has recently appointed a new education senior management team. They have appropriately focused attention on areas where performance is slow to improve or declining.

Working within the new regional framework, the authority has identified a series of actions to improve services. The actions are appropriately prioritised and have suitable success measures. They have a sharp focus on improving the use of performance data and on improving outcomes. However, it is too early to report the effects of these initiatives on raising standards.

The development of professional learning communities is at an early stage, with all schools carrying out data analysis to identify priorities. A few professional learning communities have already identified impacts on improving literacy standards and teaching. The authority is committed to continuing professional development, based on organisational needs and the need to impact on raising standards.

Partnership working: Adequate

Generally strategic partnership planning in Pembrokeshire works well.

The Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) has developed joint-working well. Partnership work provides good additional support to young people and their families, in particular those learners who are at risk of underperforming in school or college, or disengaging from education. It has increased the range of formal and non-formal learning opportunities for young people aged up to 25.

CYPP performance reports clearly map progress against actions and identify where there may be slow progress. However, progress reports do not focus enough on the impact on formal education attainment or the difference that partnership work makes in order to target support more effectively. This is beginning to change as the CYPP makes more use of outcome-focused reporting.

The 14-19 partnership has extended the range of good learning opportunities for pupils through its federated school and further education provision. Where appropriate, the partnership has removed poor performing courses from the curriculum offer. Achievements for post-16 learners across 14-19 partnership provision are good.

Although the college and the local authority have different long-term visions for the organisation of post-16 education, both parties maintain an effective joint working relationship to deliver the agreed arrangements for course options. However discussions to agree a common way forward for the long-term future direction for post-16 learning are slow to progress.

The local authority engages well with neighbouring local authorities, other education and training providers and employers, to develop learning opportunities and improve quality. Through their involvement in South West and Mid Wales Consortium (SWAMWAC), the local authority is fully involved in the new regional system for school improvement, which has helped it to improve its school improvement service through using common benchmarking criteria. The local authority also works well with other education and training providers, and employers through the Pembrokeshire Learning Network (which develops lifelong learning in the area) to increase learning opportunities and individual support for learners aged under 25.

The local authority does not do enough to ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is well informed about the safeguarding issues in Pembrokeshire. As a consequence the LSCB is not able to hold partners effectively to account.

Resource management: Adequate

The council has given a high priority to providing generous funding to schools. As a result delegated school budgets are the third highest in Wales, even though Pembrokeshire has the lowest Band D council tax rate in Wales. The council spends well above the Wales average in supporting pupils with additional learning needs. A high proportion of the funding is delegated to schools leading to improved outcomes for pupils with additional learning needs.

Over several years the council has invested heavily in its school buildings. This has helped facilitate several school rationalisations, which have resulted in reductions in surplus places and less money being wasted in maintaining unnecessary buildings.

Financial management is adequate, and the education department consistently contains spending pressures within its overall annual budget. There is a strong desire to provide value for money and to compare financial performance against other authorities. As a result, recent service reviews within catering and school transport have identified savings, which have helped the department achieve its cost reduction targets with minimal impact on its frontline services.

The council provides adequate support services to schools. Primary schools particularly value the support service relating to financial management. It includes financial benchmarking, which helps schools identify possible areas of inefficiency.

No schools had a significant financial deficit at March 2011. However, the average school surpluses were above the Wales average, depriving current pupils of the resources provided for their benefit. The council has taken appropriate action to reduce surpluses. The council requires those schools with the highest surpluses to indicate how surpluses will be spent, or to explain the reason for carrying them forward. Also the council has withdrawn additional financial support from a few schools with high surpluses.

The overall value for money of education services is adequate.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

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