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

Learner support services for pupils aged 14 - 16

May 2014

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ⅄ 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;
- ⅄ Welsh for adults;
- ⅄ work-based learning; and
- ⅄ learning in the justice sector.

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.

Contents	Page

Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit to Estyn for 2013-2014. The report looks at the quality, consistency and impartiality of learner support services provided by schools to pupils before, during and at the end of key stage 4. Learner support services include learning coaching, personal support, and careers information and guidance. This report is the first of two. The second, to be published in 2015, will consider learner support services provided by colleges and work-based learning providers.

The report is based on visits to 20 secondary schools, which represent a broadly representative sample of secondary schools. Additional evidence was drawn from inspection outcomes and data on key stage 4 performance, attendance and destinations (see Appendix 1 for further details).

Case studies of good practice appear in Appendix 2.

Background

Secondary schools, colleges and work-based learning providers have a statutory duty under the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 to widen choice and provide learner support services for young people aged 14 to 19. A learning pathway[1] framework was made statutory by the Measure. This framework consists of six key elements arranged under the two distinct aspects of learner provision and learner support.

The three elements of learner provision are:

- Individual Learning Pathway – to meet the needs of each individual, including formal, non-formal and informal strands;
- Wider Choice and Flexibility of courses – leading to qualifications from a local curriculum; and
- Wider learning from the Learning Core – including skills, knowledge, attitudes values and experiences that all 14-19 year olds will need whatever their pathway.

The three elements of learner support are:

- Access to Learning Coach;
- Access to Personal Support; and
- Impartial Careers Advice and Guidance.

This report is concerned with the three elements of learner support.

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[1] A Learning Pathway is the learning experience of each individual 14-19 year old. It consists of a Learning Core and the choice of options from which the learner selects, with informed support and guidance.

The Welsh Government published guidance[2] in February 2011 on the provision of learner support services. The guidance sets out the objectives for learner support services. It also defined the separate elements of learning coaching, personal support and careers advice and guidance.

The learning coach is intended to guide, coach and mentor pupils so that they can make informed decisions, identify goals and become independent learners. Coaching should take account of the needs of the individual young person and provision should be tailored to their needs.

The purpose of personal support is to help pupils develop solutions to and overcome personal, social, emotional and physical situations that are barriers to their learning and prevent them from realising their potential.

Careers information, advice and guidance should comprise a combination of careers education and information provided as part of the curriculum and impartial careers advice and guidance provided in schools and institutions and by Careers Wales.

In May 2012, there was a Public Inquiry into the implementation of the Learning and Skills Measure[3]. As a result, the Children and Young People Committee recommended that the Welsh Government should commission a review of learner support services and pastoral care, including an evaluation of the consistency of provision of learning coaches and clarification of the roles of those providing learning support services. The Minister requested that Estyn carry out this thematic review of learning support services.

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[2] Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009: Learner Support Services and Learning Pathway Document Guidance
[3] Inquiry into Implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009, published May 2012

Main findings

Outcomes

1   Pupil outcomes have generally improved since the introduction of Learning Pathways 14-19, which has led to wider subject choices and more learning support at key stage 4.

2   It is pupils who face the greatest barriers to learning that have benefited most from the Learning Pathways 14-19 policy developments. They are more engaged and their attendance rates have improved as a result. The numbers remaining in education and training after the age of 16 have increased and attendance rates have improved over the last three years, particularly in schools where there are higher levels of pupils eligible for free school meals. The number of key stage 4 pupils who are excluded from secondary schools has fallen considerably since 2009.

3   Even so, around half of pupils still do not attain a good GCSE (grade A*-C) or equivalent in English / Welsh first language or in mathematics. The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals has improved at a slower rate at the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics than at the level 2 threshold. The proportion of young people not engaged in education, employment and training at 19 has not reduced recently.

Provision

4   In most schools, the learning coaching provided by designated learning coaches for targeted pupils or by support staff for pupils with special educational needs, is generally effective and helps pupils to improve their attendance, behaviour and performance. Learning coaching for other pupils is more variable in its impact.

5   The provision of personal support is the strongest aspect of learner support. Many of the survey schools have effective systems to deliver personal support and staff work well with other agencies to help pupils overcome barriers presented by home circumstances or by physical and mental health problems. Many schools have tracking systems to monitor the progress of pupils. A majority use these tracking systems well to identify those in need of additional support. The minority of schools that do not have effective tracking systems do not target learner support services and interventions well enough.

6   The provision of careers advice and guidance is the weakest feature of learner support. Careers advice and guidance do not start early enough or take enough account of individual pupils' needs and potential when helping them plan their future learning pathways. Only a minority of schools offer all pupils the opportunity to discuss their career aspirations and plans when they are choosing their key stage 4 courses in Year 9 or planning their next steps in Year 11.

7   In a majority of schools, the information on courses, career opportunities and progression routes provided to pupils is not up-to-date. As a result of this and of a bias towards retaining pupils in sixth forms where they exist, pupils are not always

given accurate or impartial information when choosing their options. Most careers advice and guidance for pupils and parents are provided at options events, which provide generic information, but do not involve specific conversations about individuals.

8   Schools have not considered carefully enough how they should replace the services previously carried out by Careers Wales, including making use of Careers Online and other sources of information about further and higher education, training, apprenticeships and careers.

Leadership and management

9   Only a minority of schools take a strategic approach to co-ordinating learner support services. These schools target learning coaching and personal support well for the learners that most need them and can demonstrate impact in outcomes. They ensure that staff are well trained, and make use of external partners and collaborative arrangements to provide successful learning coaching and personal support.

10   In a majority of schools, the different elements of learner support are not well co-ordinated and they do not work together effectively. In particular, careers advice and guidance are not co-ordinated well enough. The advice on subject choices and options for future study at Year 7 and Year 11 are approached as separate events and only in a few schools is there an overall plan.

11   Most schools have an appropriate range of staff providing learner support services. A minority of schools do not have contingency plans to manage further reduction in the extent of external support or to enable them to retain the additional staff that provide learner support services.

12   The majority of schools evaluate headline performance data and make more limited use of data on the progress made by vulnerable individuals and groups of learners. However, the majority of schools do not use data to evaluate the impact of learning support strategies well enough to know how to improve that provision.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1   focus learner support services on improving pupils' attainment of high grades in GCSE English or Welsh first language and in mathematics;

R2   take a more strategic approach to learner support services and co-ordinate the delivery of learning coaching, personal support, and careers advice and guidance;

R3   improve the scope and quality of careers advice and guidance;

R4   make sure that all pupils have regular discussions with the most appropriate support staff about their progress, aspirations and learning pathway, especially at key points in Year 9 and Year 11;

R5   provide all staff involved in giving advice and guidance with regular and up-to-date training and information;

R6   evaluate the impact of learner support services on outcomes; and

R7   plan for possible reductions in funding for external support so as to sustain current levels of learner support.

Local authorities should:

R8   lead and co-ordinate partnerships to support schools with external support services.

The Welsh Government should:

R9   update its guidance to schools on careers advice and guidance to reflect the recent changes to the role of Careers Wales.

1 Outcomes

Standards

13   The proportion of young people remaining in education and training after Year 11 has generally improved since the introduction of Learning Pathways 14-19, which has resulted in wider subject choices and the support structures that schools have put in place to reduce barriers to learning. The proportion remaining in full-time education or training after Year 11 has increased from around 82% in 2004 to around 85% in 2012[4]. However, the proportion going straight into employment has gone down and the proportion not engaged in education, employment and training aged 16-18 has remained between 10% and 12%[5].

14   Standards in a range of performance indicators at key stage 4 have improved. The most significant improvement has been in the proportions of pupils attaining the level 2 threshold. The proportion achieving this indicator increased by around 17 percentage points between 2009 and 2013. The impact on the attainment of the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics and on the level 1 threshold has been less marked. The proportion attaining the level 2 threshold has improved by around five percentage points during this period.

15   Too many pupils who attain the level 2 threshold do not attain the level 2 including English, Welsh first language and mathematics. In 2013, 78% of pupils in Wales attained the level 2 threshold, but only 53% attained the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics.

16   The proportion attaining a level 2 qualification in either English or Welsh first language has remained consistently around 64% over the last three years. The proportion attaining a level 2 qualification in mathematics has improved from 57% in 2011 to 60% in 2013. However, too many pupils do not attain level 2 qualifications in one or both of these core subjects. Pupils eligible for free school meals do not attain as well as their peers in these core subjects. If pupils do not have level 2 qualifications in English, Welsh first language and mathematics, it is more difficult for them to progress to higher-level qualifications or to secure employment.

17   Vocational qualifications constitute an increasing proportion of qualifications achieved. An increasing number of pupils are gaining level 2 and level 3 vocational qualifications rather than entry level and level 1 qualifications.

18   The impact of wider choice has been most significant for pupils eligible for free schools meals. They are gaining more qualifications at higher levels. Between 2006 and 2009, the gap in attainment widened between pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are not, but it has been narrowing since then for the level 1 and level 2 threshold. The gap has not narrowed overall for the level 2 threshold including English, Welsh first language and mathematics.

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[4] http://destinations.careerswales.com/year11.html
[5] http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2014/140116-young-people-not-education-employment-training-year-30-september-2013-en.pdf

19 Figure 1 shows that between 2009 and 2013 the gap in performance in the level 1 threshold reduced by around seven percentage points and the gap in performance in level 2 reduced by around nine percentage points. However, the gap in performance in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics has increased by nearly one percentage point since 2009.

Figure 1: Attainment of pupils eligible / not eligible for free school meals (FSM) in a selection of key stage 4 indicators
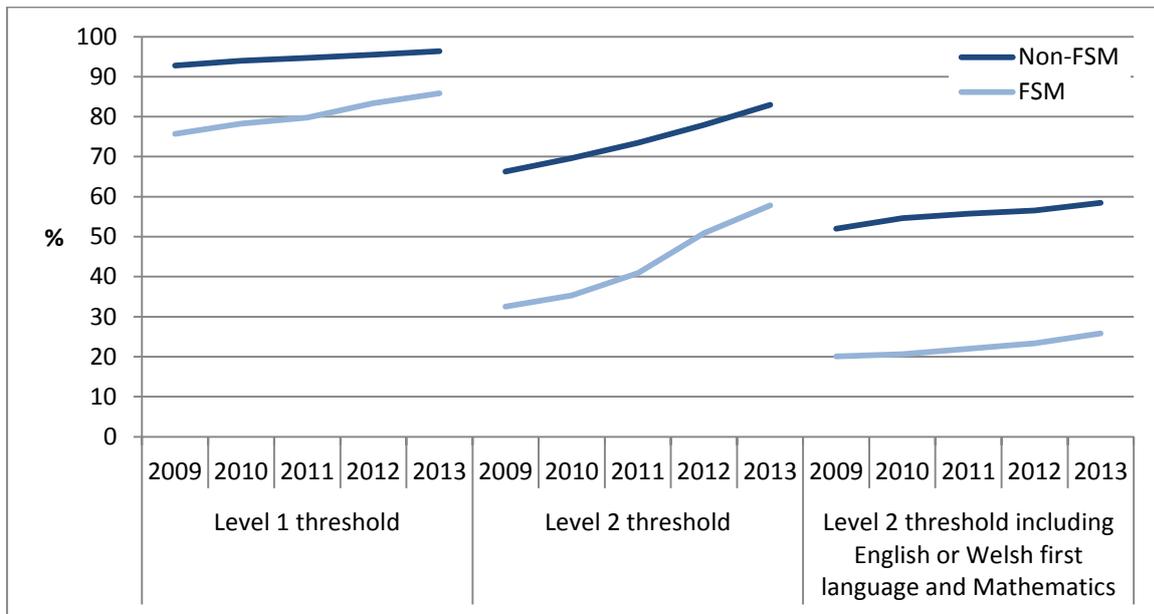
<div align="right">Source: Welsh Government[6]</div>

Wellbeing

20 Overall, the attendance rates of 11 to 16-year-olds have improved slightly in secondary schools over the past three years. Attendance in the schools with the highest proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals has improved by more than attendance in schools with the lowest proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals.

21 Figure 2 shows that attendance in schools with the highest levels (over 30%) of free-school-meal eligibility has improved by 2.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2013, while attendance in the schools with the lowest levels (10% or less) of free-school-meal eligibility has improved by just over one percentage point. The gap in attendance between schools with the highest levels (over 30%) of free school meals and the Wales average has reduced from 3.2 percentage points in 2011 to 2.1 percentage points in 2013; in the same period, the gap between attendance in the schools with the lowest levels (10% or less) of free school meals and the Wales average has remained around the same.

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[6] http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/academic-achievement-free-school-meals/?lang=en

Figure 2: Attendance by pupils of compulsory school age in maintained secondary schools in Wales, 2011-2013

Proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals	Percentage attendance			Percentage increase 2011-2013
	2011	2012	2013	
10% or less	92.9	93.7	94	1.1
10%-15%	91.8	92.8	93.2	1.4
15%-25%	91.4	92	92.6	1.2
25%-30%	90.6	91.1	91.6	1.0
Over 30%	88.2	89.3	90.5	2.3
All Wales	**91.4**	**92.1**	**92.6**	**1.2**

Source: Welsh Government[7]

22   This data does not show the change in attendance patterns of key stage 4 pupils. However, in the schools visited for the survey, the attendance of key stage 4 pupils has improved and suggests that the provision of wider choice and learner support services may have contributed to improving attendance rates for these pupils.

23   The number of pupils in key stage 4 who have been excluded from school, either permanently or for a fixed term, has reduced since 2007[8]. In 2007, 130 pupils in key stage 4 were permanently excluded from their school, with key stage 4 pupils accounting for just over half of permanent exclusions from schools. By 2013, this number had fallen to 49 and was just under half of all permanent exclusions.

24   Most pupils interviewed during school visits considered that the school helps them to be ready to progress to their next school, college or to start their working life. The pupils interviewed who receive additional learning coach support from staff specifically employed and trained for this role said this support helped them to improve their performance. These were usually pupils who were at risk of not progressing to further education, training or employment. Pupils having personal support to deal with particular issues caused by home circumstances, and for emotional and social problems, are also very positive about its impact on their attendance and attitudes towards learning.

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[7] http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-secondary-schools/?lang=en
[8] http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/exclusions-schools/?lang=en

2 Provision

Learning coaching

25   In most schools, the learning coaching provided by designated learning coaches for targeted pupils or by support staff for pupils with special educational needs is effective and helps pupils to improve their attendance, behaviour and performance.

26   Learning coaching for other pupils is more variable in its incidence and impact. In many schools, the general guiding and coaching provided through personal and social education, in subject lessons and through examination preparation work, is appropriate and meets the needs of most pupils. Many schools also provide one-to-one coaching, often called mentoring. Only in a few schools is this approach to learning coaching highly effective.

27   Nearly all surveyed schools use a combination of staff to deliver learning coaching. Many schools allocate their designated learning coaches (who have completed the formal learning coach training provided by the Welsh Government) appropriately to the pupils most at risk. Learning support staff also coach pupils with special educational needs. Other groups of pupils are coached by pastoral leaders, form tutors and their subject teachers.

28   In nearly all survey schools, designated learning coaches support specific groups. In around half of schools, the target group comprises pupils at risk of failing to achieve the level 2 threshold or level 1 threshold. In a few schools, the focus is on pupils who are looked after or eligible for free school meals, while a further few schools target pupils who are struggling with English, Welsh first language or mathematics. However, a further very few schools do not have a clear approach to targeting specific groups or individuals.

29   Designated learning coaches are effective, well trained and appropriately used in most surveyed schools. Designated learning coaches have regular meetings with their target group, assess their individual needs, and either provide the support themselves or arrange for other appropriate support. They develop positive working relationships with the pupils and evaluate the impact of their support well. In a very few schools the use of designated learning coaches is not well planned, the criteria for identifying a target groups are unclear, and progress is not tracked. This makes it difficult for schools to demonstrate the impact of the work of the learning coaches.

30   In most schools, learning support staff fulfil the learning coach function effectively for those pupils with special educational needs. These staff work well with pupils in lessons, meet with the pupils to help them to organise their work and support them in their preparation for assessments. In many schools, learning support staff also provide support for the transition to college or into the sixth form. They assist with college applications and ensure that the arrangements for additional support are in place for the next stage of learning.

31   In most of the survey schools, a range of other staff contribute to the learning coach function for those pupils not supported by designated learning coaches or pupils with

special educational needs coached by learning support staff. Many schools have a range of beneficial arrangements for learning coaching by subject teachers and form tutors. They hold additional lessons and revision sessions, often after-school and in school holidays. In the majority of schools, form tutors meet pupils to review their progress and help them to set targets and goals. Further learning coaching is provided through the school's personal and social education programme.

32 Many schools also provide additional one-to-one coaching, often referred to as mentoring, to the pupils who are not supported by the designated learning coaches or learning support staff. This mentoring aspect of coaching is usually provided by teachers, including senior staff. In the majority of schools, mentoring is available to targeted pupils. In a very few schools, all pupils have a designated mentor. The effectiveness of this mentoring is highly variable. The benefits of mentoring programmes do not depend on whether they are targeted or universal. The most important factors are timing and the expertise of the mentor, as explained below.

33 Schools use a range of criteria to decide which pupils should have additional mentoring. Many schools select pupils who are at risk of underperformance in English, Welsh first language and mathematics. The majority choose pupils who are predicted to be on the borderline between a GCSE grade C and grade D. A very few schools target this extra provision on addressing the needs and aspirations of individual pupils, such as those who are at risk of not achieving the grades required for their planned next step.

34 In the very few schools where additional mentoring is consistently highly effective, there are a number of common features. These include:

- a clear strategic approach to mentoring based on a careful consideration of who should have a mentor and why;
- clear success criteria;
- regular tracking and early identification of underperformance;
- careful preparation and training of mentors;
- provision of information about the mentoring to pupils and parents at the start of, and regular dialogue during, the period of the mentoring; and
- honest evaluation of the impact of mentoring.

35 Where mentoring is ineffective, whether for a few targeted pupils or all, there are a number of important shortcomings. These include:

- mentoring schemes that start too late to make a difference, for example starting after half term in autumn of Year 11;
- insufficient guidance and training for staff, which leads to inconsistent approaches to mentoring within a school;
- unclear objectives and arrangements for the mentoring; and
- no evaluation of the impact of the mentoring.

Personal support

36 The provision of personal support is the strongest aspect of learner support. Many of the survey schools have effective personal support systems implemented by

dedicated support staff who work well with other agencies to help pupils to overcome the barriers presented by home circumstances, or by physical and mental health problems. These schools also support pupils who are at risk of bullying or harm. Many of the schools have effective partnerships with outside agencies that provide therapies and community support programmes. Surveyed schools rely significantly on the expertise of such agencies, for example the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, those supporting traveller communities, and ethnic minority support services.

37   Most schools have useful tracking systems that allow them to monitor pupils' academic progress. A minority of schools also collect data on aspects of wellbeing, such as attendance, behaviour and pupil attitudes. In these schools, this information is used to identify signs of pupils struggling with personal problems. There are clear lines of communication to raise and discuss these issues, and to organise follow-up activities that address the identified needs. In the few most effective examples, tracking and evaluation of the personal support activities are extensive. This allows schools to evaluate fully the impact of their personal support strategy.

38   In a very few schools, the co-ordination of personal support provision is unclear. In these schools, although staff responsible for year groups, tutor forms and subject teaching may notice that a pupil is experiencing personal problems, they do not know the procedure for passing on these concerns. As a result, pupils do not receive timely or appropriate support. Information about the support provided is not made available to other staff who teach the pupil. A further shortcoming is that these schools have no way of evaluating the impact of support activities or to demonstrate that the personal support offered has made a difference.

Careers information, advice and guidance

39   Nearly all the survey schools provide a useful range of general careers advice and guidance activities for pupils. These include careers education as part of the personal and social education programme and work experience opportunities. Many schools hold beneficial 'careers and the world of work' events. Nearly all hold options events in Year 9 and Year 11 and many host careers fairs. Those with sixth forms also hold events about higher education. However, careers advice and guidance are the aspect of learner support services with most shortcomings.

40   Careers advice and guidance are not co-ordinated well enough in a majority of schools. The advice on options and choices in Year 9 and Year 11 (at ages 14 and 16) are approached as separate events. Only in a few schools is each stage treated as part of an overall plan based on the potential, achievement and ambitions of individual pupils. In addition, most advice and guidance for pupils and parents provided at options events are generic and do not involve specific conversations with individuals.

41   Only a minority of schools offer all pupils the opportunity to discuss their aspirations and plans when they are choosing their courses in Year 9 or planning their next steps at 16. Nearly all pupils interviewed as part of this survey were positive about the advice they received when choosing their options for key stage 4 and post 16. However, many pupils did not have a clear understanding of the consequences of their choices and examination results for their progression to the next stage of education, training and employment. For example, pupils who wished to study

sciences at university were unaware of the limiting impact of their key stage 4 choices on which university science courses they could apply for. Many pupils did not have sufficient up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the entry requirements of the courses and careers to which they aspired.

42   In a majority of schools, the information provided is not consistently accurate or appropriate. Most staff have insufficient knowledge and understanding of the sources of information available. For example, staff know little about what is available on the Careers Online website. Only a very few of the survey schools make use of labour market information. As a result, pupils are not always given full, accurate or impartial information.

43   A few schools do not know enough about the recent changes in the service offered by Careers Wales. Careers Wales no longer supports the setting up of work experience placements[9] and one-to-one careers interviews are now mainly targeted at pupils who might leave education or training at 16 (potentially young people not in education, employment or training). Most schools understand the implications of the changes for the organisation of work experience and many of them already take responsibility for this aspect. However, they are less clear about what these changes mean for pupils' careers interviews. A very few schools assumed that Careers Wales will continue to offer interviews to all pupils. As a result, they have not considered what changes are needed to their current careers and advice programmes.

44   Despite the development of local area curricula and collaborative arrangements at post 16, schools with sixth forms continue to focus on retaining pupils who were in the school in key stage 4. In a minority of the schools surveyed, pupils are often encouraged to return to school for sixth form, even when a more appropriate course would be to progress to training or further education college.

45   Most schools wish to raise the aspirations of pupils and many have a strong focus on progression to higher education. However, schools do not do enough to help pupils to plan their education and training in the long term from key stage 3 to the world of work. Each stage tends to be treated separately without regard to the progression to the next. As a result, a few pupils in sixth forms have restricted options because of choices they made earlier on. Also a few pupils who had returned to sixth form and stated that their intention was to go to university did not have the qualifications at key stage 4 that would enable them to do so.

46   Only a very few schools use labour market information purposefully to provide relevant advice and to amend their curriculum. A similar proportion develops beneficial partnerships with local business and employers to provide additional advice and work-based opportunities. Only a very few schools are responsive and innovative enough to offer courses that provide direct progression routes to employment.

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[9] Careers Wales do offer and maintain the national work experience database a list of placements that are available for work experience in years 10,11 or 12. Young people can log in and find out what places are available in their local area and they can make their choices on line. The database is only available to students in years 10,11 or 12. There is no absolute requirement for a school to use the Careers Wales website and the work experience database. If the school does not it is responsible for all elements of the work experience placement including health and safety requirements for the placement of the young person.

3 Leadership and management

Leadership and management of learner support

47   In a majority of schools, the main weaknesses of leadership and management of learner support is that different elements of learner support are not well co-ordinated.

48   In most schools different members of staff are responsible for managing the three elements of learner support services. Learning coaching is generally overseen by a middle manager responsible for pupils within a key stage. Personal support is generally organised by an additional learning needs co-ordinator. The arrangements for career advice and guidance are usually overseen by the middle manager responsible for pupils within a key stage or schools often have a designated careers teacher. In most schools, the leaders responsible for different elements of learner support are effective in managing their own area of responsibility.

49   In a minority of schools, senior leaders coordinate this work well. There are regular joint meetings of those responsible for different elements of learner support to discuss individual pupils, the support needed and progress made. However, in a majority of schools the different aspects of learner support services do not work together in a sufficiently co-ordinated way. As a result, schools do not have a clear picture of what additional targeted support is needed or where it is needed and this limits their ability to evaluate the impact of learner support services. A further shortcoming is that leaders in these schools are not in a position to be able to ensure that all staff providing learner support, with the exception of designated learning coaches, have the necessary skills.

Evaluation and improvement planning

50   Only a few schools evaluate all aspects of their learner support services carefully and thoroughly enough. A very few schools make outstanding use of attendance, performance and survey or attitudinal data to assess the impact of their provision. These schools identify success criteria and start and end dates for the support provided, monitor the implementation and evaluate outcomes carefully. They make extensive use of this information to improve the quality of their services.

51   The aspect of learner support that is best evaluated in most of the survey schools is the work of designated learning coaches. Learning coaches usually keep very detailed records of their work and can demonstrate its impact. The impact of personal support provision is also well evaluated in most of the survey schools. These schools evaluate the quality and impact of partnership working well through regular discussion with outside agencies. Also, many pupils who receive personal support often have attendance and behaviour issues and schools can demonstrate impact using attendance and behaviour data.

52   Many of the schools do not evaluate carefully the quality of the learning coaching provided by teachers and form tutors through personal social education and additional mentoring. There is also little evaluation of the careers advice and guidance provided.

53   Many schools use performance data to assess the impact of additional provision or interventions for pupils with identified underperformance in the core subjects. However, the evaluation often lacks rigour. Only a few schools investigate carefully what worked, what did not work and why. A further shortcoming is that additional mentoring is often used when pupils are already struggling and the majority of schools do not fully evaluate the effect of the curriculum and teaching on underachievement and poor progress. The minority of successful schools ensure that the curriculum is appropriate and teaching is of consistently high quality.

Training and support for tutors and coaches

54   Nearly all designated learning coaches are well trained for their role. They have benefited from the accredited training provided by the Welsh Government. The additional learning needs staff providing personal support services for the most vulnerable pupils are also well trained and are able to call on the services of specialist help when necessary.

55   In the majority of schools, the other staff who provide learning coaching, advice and guidance for a majority of pupils are less well prepared for these roles. They have received little training on how to help pupils develop study skills or how to effectively mentor pupils. In addition, there is insufficient training based on up-to-date information about careers, further and higher education, and training opportunities. This is a particular issue now that less specialist careers advice is directly available to schools. In the majority of schools, staff and pupils have limited knowledge and understanding of the online resources available to them.

Resource management

56   As a result of the requirement to provide learner support services, most schools have employed additional non-teaching staff and made changes to the accommodation. Most schools have established learning support resource areas where pupils can receive additional help with their skills and coaching. Many schools have bases in the school, often known as 'inclusion rooms', where pupils with behavioural problems or other needs are well supported. In addition, a majority of schools also have 'nurture rooms' that provide valuable support for pupils with social and emotional problems. In most schools, these support areas are staffed by learning support teachers, learning support assistants and dedicated learning coaches. Youth workers, education welfare officers, careers advisers and occasionally nurses are also usefully attached to these support areas.

57   Grants have been provided to schools by the Welsh Government to support the implementation of the Learning Pathways 14-19 Framework, improve literacy and numeracy, and reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The14-19 funding, the School Effectiveness Grant[10] and the Pupil Deprivation Grant[11] have allowed schools to increase staffing and resources. A majority of schools are reliant

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[10] School Effectiveness Grant is provided to support the priorities for literacy, numeracy and reduce the impact of poverty.

[11] The Pupil Deprivation Grant is for schools to use to improve attainment for pupils eligible for free school meals and for looked after children. It is intended to overcome the additional barriers that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds face, which prevent them from attaining as well as their peers, whatever their ability.

on these grants to continue the provision of learner support services. They have enabled schools to accommodate specialist areas, provide specialist training, employ additional support staff and make possible effective partnership working with specialist agencies.

58   Most schools have beneficial partnerships with outside agencies that provide specialist support, such as Careers Wales, youth services, and child and mental health services. As many of these agencies are reducing their service, this has led to the need for more precise targeting of support to specific groups of pupils, such as those eligible for free school meals and looked-after children. For example, youth workers attached to schools and Careers Wales advisers are now required to work with only the most vulnerable.

59   A minority of schools do not have contingency plans to manage any further reduction in external support or to enable them to retain the additional staff that provide learner support services.

Appendix 1 – Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on visits to 20 secondary schools. The schools were randomly selected for this survey.

The sample takes account of geographical location, socio-economic background, size of school and linguistic contexts. In these visits, inspectors:

- met representative groups of pupils;
- held discussions with middle and senior leaders; and
- met with those providing learner support services.

Additional evidence was drawn from:

- key stage 4 performance data;
- inspection outcomes;
- attendance data;
- data on percentages remaining in education and training after key stage 4; and
- data on the percentages not in education and training from age 16.

List of schools visited

Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, Gwynedd
Ysgol Glan Clwyd, Denbighshire
Ysgol Brynhyfred, Denbighshire
Ysgol David Hughes, Anglesey
Ysgol Morgan Llwyd, Wrexham
Blessed Edward Jones, Denbighshire
Ysgol Bryn Alyn, Wrexham
Elfed High School, Flintshire
Monmouth High School, Monmouthshire
Bishopston High School, Swansea
Llangatwg High School, Neath Port Talbot
Cwmtawe Community School, Neath Port Talbot
St John Lloyd, Carmarthenshire
Lewis School Pengam, Caerphilly
St Cenydd, Caerphilly
Cardinal Newman RC High School, RCT
Chepstow High School, Monmouthshire
St Joseph's RC High School, Newport
Caerleon Comprehensive School, Newport
Maesteg School, Bridgend

Appendix 2 – Case studies

Each of these case studies is based on schools where there is a clear strategic approach to the provision of learner support. They face different challenges, but their provision has some common features:

- data is well used to track, identify needs and monitor progress;
- teams are well co-ordinated;
- staff are well trained for their roles in the process;
- impact is carefully evaluated; and
- the process starts early and involves pupils well.

Case study 1: Caerleon Comprehensive School, Newport

Context

Caerleon Comprehensive School is an 11-18 English-medium comprehensive school. Around 4% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average of 17.7%. Around 3% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs compared with the national average of 2.5%. Around a further 11% have non-statemented special educational needs, which is lower than the national average of 19.2%

Strategy

The school identified 10 potential barriers that prevent pupils from succeeding whatever their background. These include underachievement (identified through careful tracking), late entry to school, health issues, attitude, attendance, lack of appropriate home environment for private study, and unrealistic or inappropriate aspirations.

Action

A range of support is managed by two teams. One team is focused on the most vulnerable and the other on the rest of the pupils. There is effective communication between the teams and their work is well co-ordinated by senior staff responsible for standards and wellbeing.

When pupils are in Year 9, a target group, known as the 'advisory group' is identified by a team that includes the heads of year, a learning support officer (who oversees the progress of pupils with English as an additional language, looked after pupils and pupils eligible for free school meals), and a raising standards officer (who leads a team of learning support staff and learning coaches). They put in place appropriate interventions, such as additional English language teaching. These are regularly reviewed and the advisory group changes according to need. In addition, a panel concerned with the most vulnerable and those with additional learning needs meet fortnightly to identify and plan additional coaching, personal support and advice and guidance. This panel includes the learning support base manager, deputy head, a youth worker, learning support officer and raising standards officer.

Outcomes

Performance at key stage 4 consistently places the school in the upper half of similar schools based on levels of entitlement to free schools meals. Standards at key stage 4 are consistently above expectations. Attendance rates are also above expectations.

Case study 2: Maesteg School, Bridgend

Context

Maesteg School is an 11-18 English-medium comprehensive school. Around 27% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average of 17.7% for secondary schools in Wales. Around 55% of the pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Pupils at the school represent the full range of ability. In line with local authority policy, there are no pupils with a statement of educational needs. Around 28% of pupils have a special educational need compared with 19.2% nationally.

Strategy

To raise aspirations and help pupils progress to further and higher education, employment or training, the school provides support to remove barriers and a curriculum that meets individual pupil needs.

Action

The school has an extensive and detailed tracking system that includes collecting wellbeing data. This is used to monitor a pupil's progress from entry to the school. Any interventions, curriculum adaptations and additional support are logged and the information forms the basis for half-termly one-to-one progress interviews. These are known as 'Pit Stops' and they are valued highly by pupils. These interviews are high profile events and staff have been carefully trained in how to conduct them. All additional support is carefully evaluated for its impact on individual pupils. In addition, the school has introduced a useful range of vocational level 2 and 3 courses for the sixth form. These include teaching assistant qualifications. Pupils carry out their work experience in the school supporting teachers with pupils in key stages 3 and 4 and they also work in local primary schools.

Outcomes

Standards in key stage 4 and attendance are above expectations. The proportion of pupils achieving no qualifications and not progressing to further education, employment or training has fallen from around 2% in 2009 to 0% in 2013. The gap in attainment of the level 2 threshold between those eligible for free school meals and those who are not in the level 2 threshold has fallen. Between 2009 and 2013 the gap fell by around 20 percentage points. Nationally, this gap increased by around one percentage point during this period. Attendance has improved by around two percentage points since 2009.

Case study 3: Cwmtawe Community School, Neath Port Talbot

Context

Cwmtawe Community School is an 11-16 English-medium comprehensive school. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 19%, which is just above the average of 17.7% for Wales. The school has 23% of pupils on the special educational needs register, compared with the national average of 19.2% for secondary schools.

Strategy

The needs of individual pupils are well identified and effective weekly mentoring takes place. Staff are well trained to support pupil progress.

Action

At the start of the academic year, internal case conferences are held to review every pupil's performance, targets and any issues that may affect their progress. This approach means that the teachers are well informed about the circumstances of each pupil they teach. Case conferences are repeated termly to review individual performance, with a view to identifying any support individuals that need to improve further. These conferences are held more regularly at critical stages of development, such as during key stage 4.

The school uses its management information system extremely well to record learners' progress and to target support needs. Learners' progress is colour coded, which helps to highlight emerging needs. Weekly monitoring of this enables the staff to respond to emerging issues and put interventions in place quickly. This is a vital feature of the schools effectiveness in monitoring and supporting pupil progress.

Pupils in key stage 4 are seen individually each week to review performance and set new targets, identifying any required support if needed. Originally the school targeted pupils who might not attain at the level 2 threshold, but the approach was found to be valuable in improving performance more generally and has been developed into a wider support strategy. The quality of data tracking and its regular, systematic, practical use to inform teaching and supporting pupils results in high standards. Staff use data with confidence and this improves the support they provide. Pupils are very comfortable with the concept of personal targets and being measured against these. They are positive about how the process helps them to improve performance. This prepares them well for the world of work.

Outcomes

Over the last five years, the school has been in the top quarter of similar schools for nearly all the key indicators in key stage 4 and there has been a constant trend of improvement. Performance is well above modelled expectations. Attendance rates are also above modelled expectations and have placed the school in the top quarter of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals for the past five years.

Glossary

Level 2 qualification
A qualification equivalent to grades A*-C at GCSE

Level 2 threshold, including English or Welsh first language and mathematics
A volume of qualifications at level 2 equivalent to the volume of five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English, or Welsh first language and mathematics

Level 2 threshold
A volume of qualifications at level 2 equivalent to the volume of five GCSEs at grades A*-C but not including English, or Welsh first language and mathematics

Level 1
A qualification equivalent to grades D-G at GSCE

Level 1 threshold
A volume of qualifications at level 1 equivalent to the volume of five GCSEs at grades D-G

NEET
Not in Education, Employment or Training

EAL
Pupils who have English as an additional language

LAC
Looked after children

Explanation of words and phrases used to describe our evaluations

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

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

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