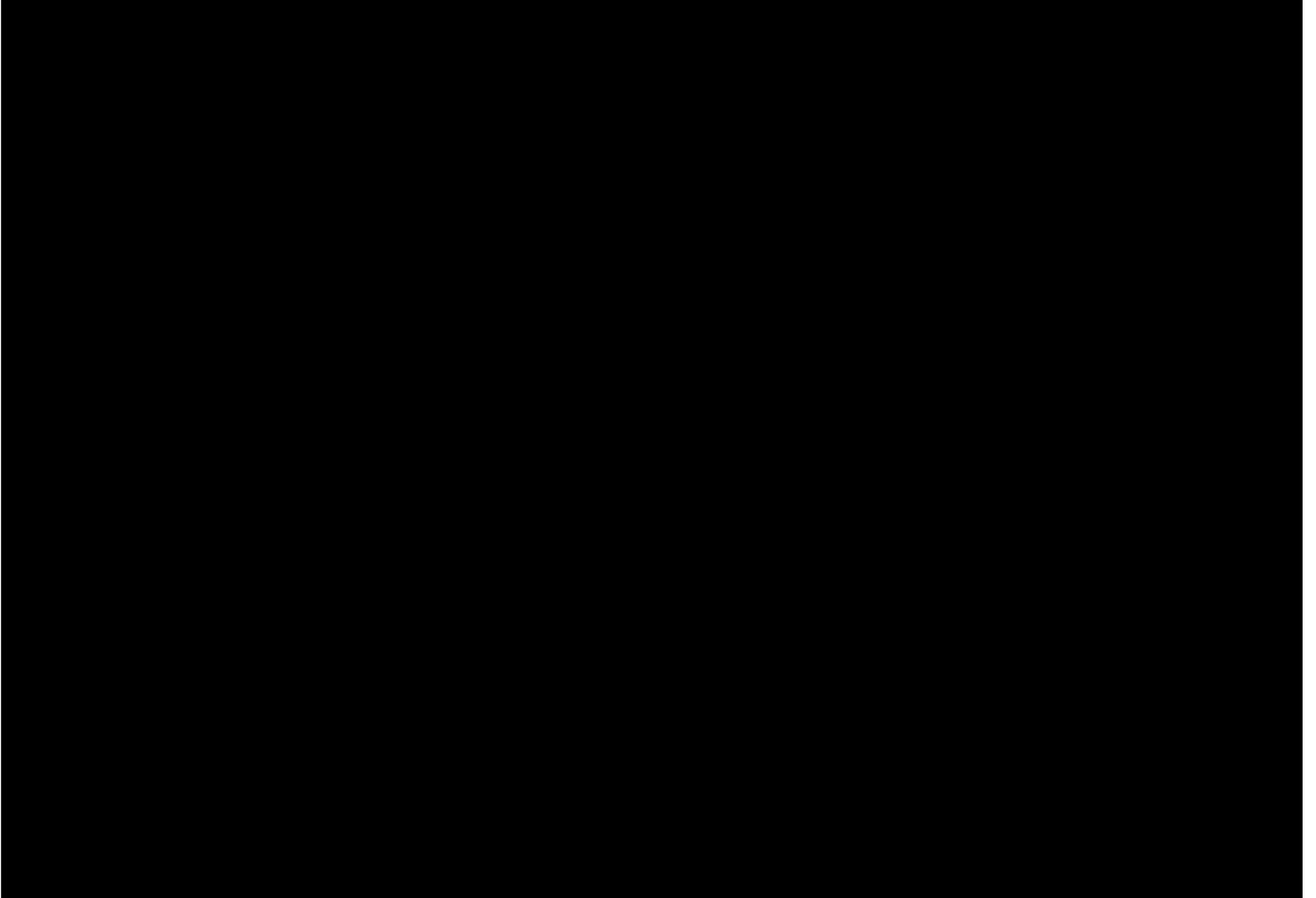

Summary of findings from our national thematic reviews

for 2015

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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
- ▲ 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
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to wales publications@estyn.gov.wales

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Foreword

I hope that you will find this compendium, and the full set of reports on which it is based, informative and relevant. Estyn's thematic reports in 2015 cover a range of important aspects of education and training in Wales. They report on standards and provision across a range of education sectors and themes, including the role of the 10% advisory teacher in non-maintained settings, creative arts in primary schools, regional support for school improvement, and the effectiveness of teaching and learning observations in further education colleges.

Estyn works closely with Welsh Government officials to plan the programme of thematic reports that is requested in the annual remit letter to HMCI from the Minister for Education and Skills. This programme takes into account the key priorities of the Welsh Government and this year included surveys of effective practice in improving attendance in primary schools, educating learners other than at school, and mathematics at key stage 3.

Estyn's thematic reports address matters that are of central concern to policy-makers, such as the quality of leadership and management in schools. In 2015, we published three surveys relating to leadership: best practice in leadership development in schools, school to school support and collaboration, and the statutory use of leadership standards in the performance management of headteachers.

Our reports are intended to contribute to wider thinking and to current debates in policy areas such as the design of the new 3-16 curriculum, as well as sharing best practice across all sectors. The forthcoming programme of thematic reports for 2016 promises to be equally relevant with reviews underway into topics as diverse as healthy relationships, financial education, the impact of the Learning and Skills Measure on vulnerable learners, and play and active learning in Year 1 and Year 2.

We hope that our thematic reports are being used widely by providers to improve their practice and enhance outcomes for learners in Wales. This compendium of all the thematic reports published so far this year brings together main findings and recommendations from each report for easy reference. The full reports, including case studies, are available on our website: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/thematic-reports>

Meilyr Rowlands

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

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Title: Literacy in key stage 3: An interim report

Main findings

Outcomes

- 1 In the last two years, standards in general were judged excellent in about one-in-nine secondary schools inspected, and good in close to two-in-five, which is similar to the previous two years. Pupils use their literacy skills well in these schools.
- 2 Although standards in English and Welsh first language at level 5 and above continue to rise, the standards of pupils' literacy remain much as they were two years ago at the time of the baseline survey. In the majority of schools inspected, and visited as part of the survey, the overall standard of pupils' literacy is adequate.
- 3 In a majority of the schools visited as part of the survey, the provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills is only adequate. Since the baseline survey, many schools have increased opportunities, across the curriculum, for pupils to produce extended writing. In most schools, there is an improved awareness among teachers of the need to develop pupils' reading and oral skills. However, the shape of provision overall remains similar to that reported in the baseline survey.
 - The LNF was introduced quickly, but progress in implementing the framework has been slower than expected for several reasons, including:
 - the short lead-in period not allowing schools time to prepare well enough;
 - the difficulties in accessing support due to a website that is not user-friendly;
 - insufficient access to training places;
 - a majority of schools not having a clear understanding of progression in standards of pupils' literacy; and
 - insufficient guidance on assessment including exemplification of standards of literacy and of test materials.
- 4 Nearly all the schools visited have made some progress in planning for the development of pupils' literacy skills since the baseline survey. These schools identify literacy as a whole-school priority and see the value of the LNF. In a minority of schools, literacy is included appropriately in subject development plans. Where there is still work to do, not all subjects include literacy in their plans and success criteria are vague and relate mainly to provision rather than to measureable outcomes (R1).
- 5 The assessment and tracking of pupils' literacy skills remain under-developed in most schools, other than for pupils who take part in specific intervention programmes, although most schools have suitable tracking systems to monitor progress in subjects (R2).
- 6 Many schools have mapped cross-curricular opportunities for the development of pupils' literacy skills, but few have made enough progress in quality assuring those opportunities, or in planning for progression in the development of pupils' skills.

- 7 A majority of schools have increased the expectation for pupils to complete more extended writing. However, the approaches to improving the quality and technical accuracy of pupils' writing are not applied consistently across the curriculum. The teaching of writing remains underdeveloped in a minority of schools. The most frequent whole-school focus is on introducing a consistent approach to the marking of literacy. Having a whole-school approach to marking pupils' work has introduced greater consistency in practice, although it remains variable in many schools. (R3).
- 8 In a few schools, the development of pupils' literacy is better in subjects other than English or Welsh. In these schools, English and Welsh teachers take an overly literary approach to their subjects and focus too much on pupils' understanding and appreciation of the literary text rather than on developing specific literacy skills.
- 9 Many schools identify lesson observations and book scrutiny as the means to monitor and evaluate strategies for improving literacy. However, in many cases, these activities do not focus sharply enough on the impact of the provision. Teachers generally do not understand how to judge standards of literacy across the curriculum (R4).
- 10 A minority of schools have made good progress in developing pupils' higher-order reading skills, such as synthesis, inference, deduction and prediction. Usually, pupils make this progress in English, Welsh and humanities lessons. However, the majority of schools do not plan activities that consistently challenge more able pupils. A majority of staff continue to support the development of pupils' higher-order reading and writing skills through existing curriculum provision rather than in response to the LNF. This means that the provision for the development of reading and writing skills is not progressive and does not build on what pupils already know and understand (R5).
- 11 The quality and extent of the support for schools to develop pupils' literacy have been variable and have had limited impact. In a minority of schools, the local authority or consortium has provided training on reading behaviours, tactical teaching and the use of the LNF diagnostic tools. However, in a majority of schools, this support has not been available and there have been limited opportunities to share best practice with other schools. Many of the schools visited were dissatisfied with the support offered to them by the local authority and the regional consortium (R6 and R7).
- 12 Nearly all schools have a literacy co-ordinator, with a teaching background in English or Welsh and with suitable literacy skills. This is a higher proportion than reported in the baseline survey. Staff turnover is a challenge for schools and over half of the schools appointed their literacy co-ordinators within the last year. Many of these new co-ordinators are still settling into the post.
- 13 Annual national reading test results are available to schools to monitor the reading progress of all pupils. However, schools make limited use of these test results to plan learning experiences across the curriculum. In many schools, the information is available, but viewed as the property of the English or Welsh department rather than as a whole-school resource.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 implement a progressive and well co-ordinated cross-curricular approach to developing pupils' literacy skills, in line with the expectations in the LNF;
- R2 track and monitor the progression in pupils' literacy skills against the end-of-year expectations of the LNF;
- R3 encourage English and Welsh subject experts to take the lead in improving links between subjects to support a consistent, progressive approach to developing pupils' literacy skills;
- R4 provide good opportunities and support across the curriculum for pupils to improve their writing, including its technical accuracy; and
- R5 monitor and evaluate the impact of strategies for improving pupils' literacy skills.

Local authorities / regional consortia should:

- R6 clarify the roles of local authorities, consortia and the national support partners for training and supporting schools in the implementation of the LNF; and
- R7 improve the use of transition cluster meetings to establish a consistent approach to the teaching of literacy skills.

Welsh Government should:

- R8 make support materials for schools available in advance of further developments of the framework;
- R9 make sure that all schools can access support materials easily; and
- R10 provide schools with clear guidance on assessment and offer exemplification of expected literacy standards across all subjects.

Title: Good practice in mathematics at key stage 3

Main findings

- 1 In 2014, teachers assessed that 86.5% of pupils achieved the expected level 5 or above in mathematics at the end of key stage 3. This is an improvement of 13 percentage points since 2009. Pupils who are eligible for free schools meals are significantly less likely to achieve the expected level 5 or above at the end of key stage 3 (71%) when compared with those who are not eligible (90%).
- 2 In 2013, the percentage of pupils in Wales attaining level 5 or above in mathematics was the same as in England. However, the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels does not compare favourably, with 21% of pupils in Wales achieving level 7 or above compared with 32% in England.
- 3 The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported in 2012 that boys in Wales significantly outperformed girls in mathematics. This seems at odds with key stage 3 teacher assessment and key stage 4 examination results, where girls consistently outperform boys. There is no generally agreed explanation for this discrepancy and it requires further investigation.
- 4 The schools visited for the purpose of this survey are 'good practice' schools. Pupils' standards of achievement are good or better in the majority of the mathematics lessons observed in the survey. In the minority of lessons, where standards were adequate, pupils were slow to recall prior learning, unable to make connections between different mathematical topics, and did not receive work that was suitable for their needs or stretch them enough.
- 5 Teaching is good or better in the majority of the lessons observed. In these lessons, many teachers display secure subject knowledge and plan lessons with clear objectives. In a few lessons, pupils do not make enough progress because the lesson content does not build on previous learning or tackle the difficulties they have with mathematics. Conversely, more able pupils are not challenged enough because there is too much repetition of simple topics or they do not have enough opportunity to explore mathematics through independent learning.
- 6 Even in strong mathematics departments, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply or extend their knowledge skills and understanding in a wide range of problem-solving contexts. In the few lessons where pupils were involved in problem-solving activities, a majority interpret real-life contexts thoughtfully and choose appropriate strategies to solve increasingly complex problems.
- 7 Many of the mathematics departments visited have developed a network for sharing good practice with their local primary schools. The arrangements include the sharing of data on progress and the development of agreed methods for teaching mathematics topics. However, in a minority of schools, transition arrangements are restricted to the exchange of electronic performance data.

- 8 In the majority of the schools visited, teachers' marking is consistent in terms of frequency and quality. Challenging targets are set for pupils and groups of pupils and monitored through well-structured assessment and pupil tracking systems. In a few schools, there are important shortcomings in assessment and tracking, particularly in tracking the progress of pupils who participate in mathematics intervention lessons after they return to mainstream lessons.
- 9 The key stage 3 mathematics curriculum in many of the schools visited provides pupils with an appropriate foundation to prepare them for the next stage of learning. However, in a few cases, a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced mathematics teachers is restricting arrangements for delivering the curriculum. This is most notable in Year 7, where, in a few schools, pupils have more than one teacher for their mathematics lessons and the staff concerned have limited or no recent experience of teaching mathematics. This affects the standards that Year 7 pupils achieve in a few schools.
- 10 In the majority of schools visited, the leadership of mathematics departments is good or better. In these schools, heads of the mathematics departments work closely with their staff, communicating high expectations for pupil outcomes and ensuring all staff have a secure understanding of effective teaching methods in mathematics. In a minority of schools, departmental self-evaluation and improvement planning are not robust enough and do not provide a suitable basis to secure improvement.
- 11 In a majority of schools visited, mathematics teaching staff benefit from a range of varied professional development opportunities to improve their teaching and pupils' learning experiences. In a few schools, there are not enough opportunities for staff to share best practice within the department or school, or with other local or family schools.
- 12 Overall, the degree of support and challenge for mathematics departments is not consistent across local authorities and the regional consortia. Only a few mathematics departments receive support to network with other schools to share and develop good practice. In these schools, there is challenge to improve their practice from experienced subject specialist advisers, to complement the support of the school leadership team.

Recommendations

To improve standards of mathematics at key stage 3:

Mathematics departments should:

- R1 monitor the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals and offer targeted interventions as necessary
- R2 meet the needs of pupils who experience difficulties or are more able
- R3 increase the level of challenge for all pupils by making sure that:
 - lessons are structured to engage, motivate and stretch all pupils

- mathematical problem-solving skills are developed and applied to a wide range of real-life contexts

R4 ensure that assessment and tracking procedures are robust

R5 improve departmental self-evaluation and improvement planning

R6 share best practice across the school and evaluate new ways of working

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R7 facilitate networks for sharing best practice between mathematics departments

R8 provide support, challenge and professional development opportunities for mathematics departments and individual teachers

The Welsh Government should:

R9 investigate the difference in outcomes between boys and girls in mathematics

R10 address shortages in the supply of qualified mathematics teachers

Title: The impact of advisory teachers on funded non-maintained settings

Main findings

- 1 The role of the advisory teacher in the non-maintained sector has changed over time. At first, advisory teachers mainly modelled good practice. Now, advisory teachers provide more support for management and administration, but less for teaching and learning. However, the non-maintained sector has a high turn-over of staff and many settings need more support in the form of modelling good practice.
- 2 In a few non-maintained settings where the advisory teacher regularly models good teaching, practitioners are more confident in finding ways to improve outcomes for children and in judging children's standards. Modelling story-telling or how to interest children in mark-making have a positive impact on the standards children achieve.
- 3 A minority of settings do not receive enough advice about how to improve the standards that children achieve or how to present activities in varied and interesting ways. Only a minority of advisory teachers provide guidance on activities to help more able children or children experiencing difficulties. In most settings, the advisory teacher provides effective support in developing practitioners' understanding of aspects of the Foundation Phase, such as making better use of outdoor areas.
- 4 Where advisory teachers focus on the quality of practitioners' interaction with children, this has a significant impact on the standards children achieve.
- 5 In many English-medium settings, the support of the advisory teacher has helped to raise the standards of children's Welsh. For example, they work with practitioners conscientiously to develop basic vocabulary to use in daily routines and encourage the use of song to embed simple language patterns.
- 6 In a majority of advisory teacher visits, there is an over-emphasis on helping the setting to produce policy documents, such as a development plan or a self-evaluation report. Advisory teachers are beginning to provide a greater level of challenge with regard to the standards children achieve, but in a majority of settings they still focus too much on the bureaucracy of management and planning, and not enough on teaching and learning.
- 7 Across Wales, there are many different models of advisory-teacher support. The most successful model is one in which settings receive the full allocation of advisory teacher time on site, additional training is provided, and there is an expectation that settings attend a minimum amount of training each year.
- 8 A majority of local authorities allocate the amount of time each setting receives according to their assessment of need. This means that they do not necessarily comply with the requirements of the Foundation Phase Grant to provide each setting with the support of a qualified teacher for 10% of the time. Many good settings receive less than their allocation and do not receive enough support to become excellent.

- 9 Nearly all settings report receiving additional visits and increased support once Estyn notify them of an inspection. Many settings say that they miss scheduled visits when a setting elsewhere is due an inspection. Focusing advisory teacher time on preparing settings for inspection is not a good use of time and does not provide the best service.
- 10 The extent to which the work of advisory teachers is monitored varies across Wales. In many local authorities and regional consortia, line managers scrutinise notes of visit, evaluate inspection data and occasionally attend training provided by the advisory teacher. Nearly all local authorities and regional consortia have procedures for performance management linked to teachers' pay and conditions, but very few observe advisory teachers at work in a setting. This means that they do not have relevant first-hand information about the effectiveness of their advisory teachers in supporting settings.
- 11 A majority of local authorities maintain and improve the skills and expertise of their advisory teachers appropriately. In a few local authorities, particularly where advisory teachers do not also work in schools, they do not always receive information about changes affecting the sector routinely in the way that school staff do.
- 12 Local authorities and regional consortia are not always able to provide training in the main language of a setting. Many local authorities in south Wales offer training in English only for Welsh-medium settings. A very few local authorities train through the medium of Welsh only and practitioners who are not fluent in Welsh find it difficult to follow and understand the training fully.
- 13 There are challenges for local authorities and regional consortia in timing training events so that practitioners from all settings can attend. Settings often find it difficult to release staff for training as they cannot provide adequate cover. A few local authorities are aware of this and vary the time of training accordingly.
- 14 In many local authorities, the lack of close working between the advisory teachers and the voluntary sector agencies means that practitioners sometimes receive conflicting advice. In a few instances, there are important gaps in the advice and support that practitioners receive, for example in relation to safeguarding procedures or how to support children identified as having additional learning needs.
- 15 Local authorities do not always take overall responsibility for monitoring the support that settings receive from voluntary sector organisations, even when paying for the service. This means that the local authority is unsure about the quality of the advice provided or whether the advice, on child protection for example, is up-to-date.
- 16 The way best practice is shared between the school and non-maintained sectors varies across different local authorities and consortia, and does not always make the best use of the expertise in either sector. For example, nursery practitioners in schools are experienced in planning children's next steps, which is often an issue for settings, and they could benefit from sharing this practice. Similarly, practitioners in settings often make effective use of activities, such as at snacktime, to develop children's personal and social skills, and this good practice could be shared more widely with schools.

- 17 Local authorities and regional consortia fund advisory teacher time from the Foundation Phase Grant. The very different amounts of money allocated mean considerable differences across Wales in the amount of support provided. A few local authorities are considering devolving the management of the Foundation Phase Grant to consortia, although the differences between local authorities in the way they fund settings, advisory teachers and training are a barrier to this. When allocating Foundation Phase Grant funding, many local authorities and regional consortia make meeting Foundation Phase ratios for staff in schools their priority, followed by providing training and support for schools. As a result, a majority of settings do not receive the recommended 10% of advisory teacher time, because there is not enough resource left to fund this.
- 18 Local authorities do not always plan systematically to ensure that a child's entitlement to funded education is met equally well in both schools and settings, because of variability in how they deploy support and funding across Wales and between the sectors.

Recommendations

Advisory teachers should:

- R1 provide settings with a suitable level of challenge and ensure that visits and training are focused on improving children's standards
- R2 continue supporting leadership and management but do more to model effective practice in the classroom and share new ideas with practitioners
- R3 keep up-to-date with changes in education that affect settings

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- R4 provide all settings with 10% of advisory teacher time and ensure that advisory teachers visit settings regularly
- R5 make sure that both Welsh and English-medium settings receive support and training in the language in which they operate
- R6 monitor the work of advisory teachers and ensure that their training needs are identified and met
- R7 work together and with voluntary organisations to ensure that settings receive comprehensive, joined-up support, particularly in relation to additional learning needs and safeguarding
- R8 hold funded voluntary organisations to account for the quality of their advice and guidance
- R9 ensure that as many non-maintained practitioners as possible can attend training

R10 consider appointing advisory teachers for a fixed term to refresh the service they can offer

The Welsh Government should:

R11 consider ring-fencing funding to ensure that all settings receive 10% support from a qualified teacher and regular training in addition to this

R12 create a network for advisory teachers to share information and best practice

Title: Best practice in teaching and learning in the creative arts at key stage 2

Main findings

Standards in the creative arts

- 1 In most of the best practice schools visited, standards are at least good in two or more of the creative art forms (art and design, dance, drama and music). In a minority of these schools, standards in one or other of the creative art forms are well above those expected. However, it is rare for standards to be high in all four creative arts in any one school.
- 2 Pupils' standards of wellbeing in nearly all of the best practice schools visited are good or excellent. Pupils and staff in these schools say that the creative arts have a very positive impact on improving pupils' wellbeing.
- 3 Many schools have good evidence of the impact of the creative arts in improving pupils' standards in oracy. This is partly because worthwhile engagement in the creative arts gives pupils exciting experiences to talk about. The arts often provide a stimulating context for pupils to use and to develop their literacy skills, but there is not enough evidence to show that the arts directly improve pupils' performance in reading and writing.

Provision for the creative arts

- 4 Overall, the quality of the curriculum for the creative arts relies too much on chance rather than on secure curriculum planning. In most schools, the provision for the creative arts depends too much on whether there is an enthusiastic teacher on the staff with specialist skills and knowledge. While this often secures high standards in one area of the creative arts, it often does not secure high standards in all.
- 5 Pupils' standards are best when their teachers are knowledgeable and confident creative artists, as well as good classroom practitioners. Many teachers who are not specialists lack the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver the creative arts to the highest level, especially by Year 6. There is too little training and support available to help teachers develop their teaching in the creative arts.
- 6 In many of the schools visited, planning for the creative arts takes good account of what pupils can already do to ensure that pupils develop their skills progressively. In a few of the schools visited, although teachers' planning generally provides an appropriate breadth of experiences across the creative arts, the experiences do not build on pupils' existing skills well enough. As a result, pupils complete activities that are undemanding and lack challenge.
- 7 In the most successful lessons, teachers have a thorough and comprehensive subject knowledge which they use to set high expectations of pupils. They teach with energy, pace and enthusiasm, knowing when it is appropriate to intervene or to challenge and are not afraid to allow time for pupils to consolidate their learning.

Teachers encourage pupils to make their own decisions and to take risks, so that sometimes they learn from their mistakes. They use a wide range of well-chosen resources, including information and communication technology (ICT). Where teaching is less successful, planned activities do not challenge pupils well enough, especially the more able. Often in these weaker lessons, teachers direct and constrain the learning too much and pupils are afraid to experiment for fear of getting things wrong.

Leadership and the creative arts

- 8 In the best practice schools visited, senior leaders share a passion and vision for the creative arts. They believe that the creative arts inspire, stimulate and motivate pupils to think imaginatively, to persevere and to respond positively to challenges. In these schools, leaders find imaginative ways to maintain a high profile for the creative arts, despite the limitations of the national curriculum and pressures on financial resources. In nearly all of the schools visited, leaders identify that it is possible to teach the creative arts well within the primary curriculum. However, in around half of the schools surveyed, leaders have recently reduced the time assigned to the creative arts. In many cases, this is because they believe that devoting resources to the arts detracts from improving measureable outcomes in literacy and numeracy.
- 9 In many of the schools, subject leaders provide comprehensive plans to support colleagues to deliver lessons in the creative arts. These schemes of work often pay good attention to a breadth of engaging creative experiences, but in the weaker examples the schemes pay too little attention to the progressive development of pupils' skills. In particular, many schemes of work do not refer to the materials which exemplify the expected standards in the creative arts. Subject leaders for the creative arts often monitor the provision within their subjects carefully and produce annual reports for governors and senior leaders. While monitoring reports and evaluates pupil engagement and participation, too often it does not evaluate the standards that pupils achieve or say how they could be improved.
- 10 A very few of the schools visited share best practice in the creative arts and pool resources. Often these schools provide model lessons for others to observe, and they host or deliver training sessions for colleagues from their own and other schools. However, too many schools work in isolation and do not benefit from working with other schools.
- 11 Nearly all of the schools visited or surveyed offer instrumental music lessons, although in a quarter of the schools only a very few pupils take up the lessons. Around half of the schools visited do not charge pupils for instrumental lessons, but in a very few schools all pupils are expected to pay the full cost of instrumental tuition. In these schools pupils from poorer families do not choose to learn to play a musical instrument, because the cost is prohibitive.
- 12 Visits to heritage sites and theatres have a very significant impact on pupils' learning. In the most effective practice, teachers plan and prepare carefully for the visits so the pupils get the most from the experience and they follow up pupils' learning quickly once back at school. Nearly all schools surveyed take pupils on trips and visits, or

receive visitors in school, related to the creative arts. In most of the best practice schools, leaders ensure that all pupils, including those from poorer families, take part in trips and visits by reducing or waiving costs. However, responses from schools participating in the survey show that this is not always the case.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision and to raise standards in the creative arts:

Schools should:

- R1 Plan a sequence of learning opportunities for pupils to experience the breadth of the creative arts and develop their creative skills as they move through school
- R2 Support teachers to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to teach the creative arts well
- R3 Monitor pupils' achievements in the creative arts
- R4 Work more closely with other schools to share best practice and resources in the creative arts

Local authorities and the regional consortia should:

- R5 Offer opportunities for teachers to develop their skills and confidence in teaching one or more creative arts subjects
- R6 Provide training for schools to help them to identify, develop and share best practice in teaching and assessment in the creative arts

The Welsh Government should:

- R7 Continue to support schools to make use of dedicated funding to enable pupils from poorer families to learn to play musical instruments and to take a full part in the creative arts
- R8 Publicise materials that exemplify the expected standards in the creative arts

Title: How well do further education institutions manage learner complaints?

Main findings

- 1 Overall, every institution has a policy and procedures in place to aid a learner in making a complaint. In most cases, these are generally clear and comprehensive. Institutions provide information about how to complain directly to students at induction, and through the institution's publications and their websites. However, inspectors found this information on only 66% of institutions' websites.
- 2 Most institutions make their policy and procedures available through the medium of Welsh. However, a few do not. All institutions report that learners may present their complaint through the medium of Welsh.
- 3 Although many learners are understandably not familiar with the details in the policy, they know they can complain to their course tutor or learner representative. However, many learners are not aware that there is an appeals procedure and that they can appeal if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. Most learners feel that their personal and/or course tutor supports them well. They feel listened to and that the institution takes their issues seriously.
- 4 In all institutions, the definitions used for what makes a complaint lacked clarity. No definition distinguishes clearly between serious and non-serious complaints. This means that it is difficult to identify which matters an institution's staff or students should accelerate to a more formal complaint. The lack of clarity in the definition also means that it is unclear as to which complaint outcome a complainant can legitimately appeal, if the institution fails to treat a complaint seriously enough.
- 5 In many cases, the difference between informal and formal complaints is based upon the route taken by the complainant and not by the nature or seriousness of the complaint itself. In the first instance, most, if not all, procedures appropriately point the complainant to the informal route. However, as most institutions do not consistently record informal complaints, this means that there may be serious issues missed or hidden, and complaints about poor quality service or provision, which are addressed informally, may not be identified or assessed by managers.
- 6 All institutions say that they welcome learners' complaints and that they use the information these generate in management reports. However, institutions do not use the information well enough to inform improvement. Most reports focus too much on counting the number of complaints rather than exploring what may lie behind the complaints or looking for trends or patterns.
- 7 All institutions have useful tracking systems in place to manage formal complaints, which monitor the progress and eventual outcomes. However, none of the institutions surveyed has a system that makes sure that all complaints are handled to a consistent standard, especially where the investigation of the complaint is delegated to a manager on another campus in the institution.

- 8 Institutions use their learner representative systems well to gather views about issues from learners including complaints. However, they do not use these systems to best effect to evaluate the rigour of their policy and procedures in addressing learner complaints. These systems, and in particular the Welsh Government's Learner Voice Wales survey, are generally not used well enough to evaluate a learner's experience of and their confidence in the complaints system.
- 9 There is not enough training for an institution's staff and learner representatives to ensure that they are adequately informed about how to address complaints using the correct procedures.
- 10 Around half of the institutions report that they would welcome the appointment of an external appeals body. However, many institutions, including a proportion of those who would welcome an appeals body, question whether such a body would add any extra value. In general, students 'trust' the institutions to resolve any issues and consider that an appeals body may be of limited use.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 publish further guidance to help institutions develop their learner complaints procedures, including definitions of particular types of complaints
- R2 ensure that the annual Learner Voice Wales survey adequately captures learners' experiences of making complaints and their satisfaction with the process
- R3 work with the sector to consider the feasibility of an external appeals body for post-16 FE learners in Wales, with powers to review student complaints and their outcomes

Institutions should:

- R4 take forward the issues identified by the NUS in their 2011 report on student complaints
- R5 make sure that all materials about how to make a complaint are easily available through the public-facing sections of their websites, and are also available through the medium of Welsh
- R6 require senior managers to check on how consistently and rigorously investigations of complaints are carried out by all their staff, and across all campus sites
- R7 train all staff and learner representatives in the management of the institution's complaints procedures
- R8 make sure that mechanisms are in place to differentiate between low-level and more serious complaints, and record all complaints, whether made orally or in writing

R9 use all the evidence available, including learner feedback, to inform the in-depth analysis of the quality of the complaints policy and procedures, as well as the patterns, trends and underlying reasons for complaints to inform quality systems and strategic planning

Title: Improving schools through regional education consortia

Main findings

- 1 Although the general improvements in standards of pupil attainment over the past three years cannot be solely attributed to the development of regional consortia, the published data reflects a gradual improvement in pupil attainment across all four regions. At key stage 2 pupils attain at similar levels across all regions but at key stage 4 there is greater variation in levels of pupil outcomes. Performance is consistently higher in GWE and ERW than in CSC and EAS, the latter two regions having comparatively greater levels of social deprivation.
- 2 School inspection outcomes are broadly similar across the four regions, although there has been a notably higher proportion of schools causing concern in EAS in recent years.
- 3 The regional consortia have been slow to fully implement governance arrangements in line with the Welsh Government's National Model for Regional Working. All the regional consortia struggled to fill senior posts, which adversely affected their capacity to direct and manage work and highlights the lack of a national strategic approach to develop senior leaders. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the governance arrangements and senior leadership and management of the consortia.
- 4 All the consortia prepared business plans for 2014-2015 that focus appropriately on the most important areas for improvement. However, all the plans have important weaknesses in them. In particular, the plans do not identify well enough what impact is expected from actions taken and how and when this will be measured. This is particularly the case for the sections that set out how the consortia tailor their work to meet the needs of individual local authorities. None of the consortia has a medium-term plan in place to guide a strategic approach to school improvement.
- 5 While there are examples of robust scrutiny by elected members of how a regional consortium is working with individual schools at a local authority level, scrutiny committees do not hold their senior officers and representatives to account well enough for their role in ensuring that the consortium meets the needs of the authority's schools. In addition there is no joint approach to scrutinising the effectiveness of the consortium as a whole in any region.
- 6 The self-evaluation reports produced by the regional consortia are in the main overly positive. These reports identify strengths more accurately and convincingly than shortcomings.
- 7 Most of the regional consortia have engaged effectively with local authority officers, school leaders and trade unions in developing their regional priorities and policies for school improvement. However, none of the consortia has engaged enough with diocesan authorities.
- 8 The regional consortia have strengthened their quality assurance arrangements for challenge advisers, particularly since September 2014, and there is greater

consistency in the work of challenge advisers as a result. However, the arrangements are not always implemented rigorously enough and pre-inspection reports for schools still do not always match the outcome of inspections closely enough.

- 9 The EAS and CSC have more than twice as many schools involved in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme as the other two regions. In these regions, the consortia are unclear about their working relationship with the schools in the programme. The consortia are also unclear about how they will evaluate their specific role in improvements in these schools and the implications this has for any wider evaluation of school improvement across Wales.
- 10 None of the regional consortia has a coherent strategic approach to reduce the impact of deprivation on attainment. The regional consortia have not monitored closely enough how well schools are using the Pupil Deprivation Grant.
- 11 All the consortia have suitable arrangements in place with local authorities for sharing useful information from many service areas relevant to their work, such as additional learning needs, social inclusion and wellbeing, finance and complaints. However, none of the consortia has a fully developed and consistently used system to collate, analyse and share information about the progress of pupils and schools.
- 12 Regional consortia generally know how well many of their schools are currently performing through the work of challenge advisers, supported by their analysis of attainment data. Most headteachers and chairs of governing bodies report that the performance of their school is scrutinised closely and fairly by challenge advisers.
- 13 Although challenge advisers generally know what assessment data indicates about a school's performance, this does not always mean that they know the school well enough. Challenge advisers are not always diagnostic enough in understanding why a school is performing well or not. Challenge advisers are not always involved enough in moderating teacher assessment and they are less effective at evaluating teaching and leadership than standards. However, weaknesses in challenge adviser work are not as prevalent as they were when consortia began to formalise in 2012.
- 14 Overall, regional consortia are better at challenging schools about their current performance than supporting them to improve. All the consortia have an appropriately strong focus on supporting improvement in literacy and numeracy. However, support for schools in many other areas of learning, such as non-core subjects, is either weak, inconsistent or unavailable. In the EAS and CSC, there is not enough support for Welsh-medium schools. The consortia are developing strategies to facilitate schools to support each other, although only CSC involves all schools in their strategy. The consortia do not monitor and evaluate well enough the impact of their support to improve schools, whether this support is provided directly or brokered or is school-to-school support that they facilitate.
- 15 Regional consortia usually provide appropriate and timely information to local authorities about schools causing concern. Although local authorities are using their statutory powers of intervention more readily, a minority are still reluctant to intervene even when their regional consortium provides a clear mandate for action.

Once a local authority issues a statutory warning notice to improve to a school, the regional consortium usually works well with both the school and the local authority to agree a suitable plan and monitor progress.

- 16 Estyn and the Wales Audit Office staff provided verbal feedback to the regional consortia following visits to gather evidence for this survey. The consortia have responded positively to their feedback and have already begun to address many of the issues raised in this report.

Recommendations

Regional consortia should:

- R1 Improve performance management arrangements by:
- planning for the medium term to ensure a strategic approach to school improvement
 - ensuring that plans contain actions that are specific and measurable, with appropriate targets, costings and milestones for delivery
 - capturing, sharing and using data (from pupil level up) efficiently and effectively
 - monitoring the progress of pupils and schools regularly
 - taking a more robust approach to identifying and managing risks
 - realistically self-evaluating their strengths and shortcomings
 - tightly managing the individual performance of their staff
- R2 Secure greater consistency in the quality of challenge advisers' evaluations of schools, particularly in relation to teaching and leadership
- R3 Develop clearer strategies to address the impact of deprivation upon education outcomes and ensure that all actions are coherent in this purpose
- R4 Improve the quality and range of support for schools and in particular:
- develop clearer strategies for maximising the potential of school-to-school support
 - provide or broker better support for teaching and learning in non-core subject areas
- R5 Involve diocesan authorities effectively in the strategic planning and evaluation of regional services

Local authorities should:

- R6 Support their regional consortium to develop medium-term business plans and ensure that all plans take account of the needs of their local schools
- R7 Develop formal working arrangements between scrutiny committees in their consortium in order to scrutinise the work and impact of their regional consortium

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 Improve its strategy to develop senior leaders and managers for education at local authority and regional consortia level
- R9 Work more collaboratively with consortia and local authorities to agree short and medium-term business plans and reduce requests to change and add to plans mid-year
- R10 Ensure that school categorisation is rigorously moderated across the consortia
- R11 Develop an agreed understanding between teachers, schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Welsh Government about the purpose and use of attainment targets
- R12 Engage more effectively with diocesan authorities in developing its strategy for school improvement
- R13 Ensure that consortia, local authorities and diocesan authorities are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities for schools in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme

Title: Best practice in leadership development in schools

Main findings

- 1 In successful schools, staff at different levels show strong leadership behaviours as classroom practitioners, departmental leaders, leaders of whole-school initiatives, and as senior managers ('distributed leadership'). These schools develop the leadership skills of all their staff as part of their professional and career development.
- 2 In schools where there is a strong culture of professional learning, staff work as a team to ensure that pupils achieve well. An important part of this culture is clear communication between leaders and all members of staff to ensure that there is a common understanding and an agreed language about learning and professional development.
- 3 Succession planning at all levels is often a significant strength in schools with a strong professional learning culture. In these schools, senior leaders evaluate the school's staffing situation and try to predict potential future vacancies. This is particularly important at senior and middle leadership level and allows posts to be filled internally if necessary when vacancies arise. One effective strategy is to arrange for experienced staff to transfer their knowledge to less experienced staff before they retire or change jobs, for example through shadowing and mentoring.
- 4 The most successful school leaders employ strategies for identifying and nurturing the leadership potential of all their staff, particularly early in their careers, and for supporting them to develop the skills they need to become the school leaders of the future. These leaders undertake detailed analyses of the knowledge, skills and attributes required for each leadership role within their school. They use this information to identify staff with leadership potential.
- 5 Where schools are not successful in developing a strong leadership culture, headteachers do not focus well enough on improving the quality of teaching and do not provide appropriate professional development activities to help staff build on their existing skills and knowledge. Many local authorities and regional consortia have often been too slow in identifying this as a weakness in schools and have not provided effective guidance to headteachers to help them improve in these important areas.
- 6 The more effective schools have performance management procedures in place where senior leaders have objectives that relate specifically to developing staff as potential leaders. In these schools, the governors challenge leaders and hold them to account on leadership development.
- 7 Almost all the senior leaders in the schools visited know about and understand the leadership standards. However, less than half use the standards regularly to evaluate their own leadership skills or as a focus for the leadership development of others. Only a very few senior leaders use the individual leadership review to evaluate their own leadership skills. In the few schools that use them, the leadership standards form the basis for effective leadership development and performance management.

- 8 The revised standards clarify the expectations for higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and teachers, but they do not explicitly identify the steps that teachers and HLTAs need to take to develop professionally, make good progress in their career and become the potential leaders of the future.
- 9 Successful senior leaders ensure that they provide staff with appropriate learning opportunities and training to support their career development. Many provide a package of professional learning activities that includes specific activities to develop leadership skills. This works well when the package is planned carefully to meet individuals' developmental needs. The training package usually consists of a menu of in-school professional development opportunities and some external training.
- 10 Leaders in the effective schools visited use expertise from both within their schools and from other schools to enhance professional learning for staff. They encourage their staff to take advantage of internal acting or temporary leadership posts and to take up secondments elsewhere to enhance their leadership experience.
- 11 There has not been enough support at a national and local level to develop the leadership skills of aspiring and experienced senior leaders. There are too few opportunities for aspiring and experienced school leaders to develop their skills in key areas such as improving teaching, implementing new initiatives, challenging underperformance, and understanding human resources issues.
- 12 In a very few schools, headteachers new to post have been mentored well by an experienced, effective headteacher within the local authority. However, this is not always the case nationally. In a few local authorities, headteachers, often in challenging schools are not supported well enough.
- 13 There is a particular shortage of training provision for leaders through the medium of Welsh.

Recommendations

School leaders should:

- R1 develop a strong culture of professional learning for all staff at all levels in their school
- R2 improve succession planning and the transfer of corporate knowledge
- R3 identify the leadership potential of staff early and support their career development
- R4 ensure that performance management structures pay proper attention to developing potential future leaders
- R5 use the leadership standards as the basis for evaluating their own leadership skills and for developing staff as future leaders

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- R6 provide guidance for experienced school leaders on developing their staff as future leaders

- R7 provide opportunities for senior leaders to develop their skills in key areas such as challenging underperformance, deploying strategies to improve teaching, and implementing new initiatives
- R8 provide or source effective Welsh and English medium training for leaders at all levels
- R9 promote the use of the leadership standards and the individual leadership review to all school leaders
- R10 **The Welsh Government should:**
- R11 implement a strategy for the development of leadership skills for aspiring and experienced senior leaders
- R12 include the development of leadership skills as a strand in the professional standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants, teachers and middle leaders

Title: Effective practice in improving attendance in primary schools

Main findings

- 1 Schools that maintain good attendance or improve attendance often employ common strategies. In these schools, it is the consistent attention given to attendance and the variety of strategies employed that has led to good attendance and not the implementation of one particular strategy. Schools with consistently good or improved attendance:
 - create an environment that welcomes pupils and plan learning opportunities that encourages them to attend
 - have a clear attendance policy that pupils, parents and staff understand
 - raise the profile of attendance with pupils and parents, so that they understand the impact of poor attendance on pupils' work and life chances
 - provide a strong message to parents that the school has a high expectation of pupil attendance, and responds quickly and consistently to absence
 - understand the reasons for individual pupil absence and provide targeted challenge and support for these pupils and their families
 - involve parents in school life and in strategies to improve attendance
 - have strong links with support services including community groups, social services and the education welfare service that can assist in engaging and supporting vulnerable families
 - have staff with a clearly defined responsibility for monitoring and improving attendance
 - have a robust first-day and on-going contact system in place
 - use all the data available to identify and act on attendance issues quickly and consistently
 - use appropriate rewards and incentives to encourage good attendance
 - include attendance in school improvement planning and ensure that strategies are implemented in a timely manner
 - have senior staff and a governing body that monitor and evaluate the impact of attendance strategies

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 implement the strategies identified in this report to make sure that all pupils attend school regularly

Local authorities and consortia should:

- R2 facilitate the sharing of best practice between schools, local authorities and regional consortia
- R3 make sure that challenge advisers challenge and support school leaders in relation to action on pupil attendance

The Welsh Government should:

- R4 publicise the 'Strategies for schools to improve attendance and manage lateness' portion of the 'All Wales Attendance Framework'

Title: Education other than at school: a good practice survey

Main findings

Strategic partnerships between local authorities, mainstream schools and PRUs

- 1 Provision for pupils at risk of exclusion or disengagement is most effective where local authorities, schools and PRUs work together to meet the needs of these pupils and to ensure that they remain in full-time education. Two examples of this are Ceredigion Council and Newport City Council. These local authorities have a clear strategy for support and reintegration and a continuum of provision to meet these pupils' needs. PRUs and other forms of EOTAS play an important part in this continuum of provision. In the best practice, these settings have well-established referral processes and clear entry and exit criteria and stakeholders have a clear understanding of the role of PRUs.
- 2 Where pupils are reintegrated into school successfully, pupils, parents, PRU and school staff have a clear understanding that placement at a PRU is a short-term targeted intervention. However, for many pupils at key stage 4, a return to mainstream education is not an appropriate option.

PRUs

- 3 Where local authorities recognise the importance of PRUs, they ensure that they are well resourced in terms of staffing, accommodation and equipment. Most of the PRUs visited as part of this survey take part in local authority initiatives and access the professional development opportunities available to mainstream school colleagues. This enables them to keep up-to-date with important developments such as curriculum changes and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. However, where PRU staff do not have these opportunities, they feel isolated and unsupported. Across the regional consortia, there are no consistent arrangements to involve PRUs in support and challenge activities.
- 4 In the best cases, the PRU is a centre for excellence for educating pupils with challenging behaviour. Local authorities use the expertise of PRU staff to provide support for individual pupils in mainstream schools as well as advice and training for mainstream staff.
- 5 The use of managed moves as a strategy to keep pupils in full-time education varies from one local authority to another. Only a few local authorities have a well-established managed moves panel involving local authority, school and PRU staff.
- 6 In the most effective PRUs, teachers-in-charge and headteachers are skilled leaders and managers, and staff have appropriate expertise and experience in teaching and learning as well as behaviour management.
- 7 Where the management committees of PRUs are effective, they have representation from a broad range of stakeholders, with relevant knowledge and expertise. In these committees, members have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the PRU and provide robust support and challenge.

- 8 The quality of education provided by PRUs varies significantly. Where there is effective practice, staff have high expectations for achievement and behaviour. They implement clear behaviour policies with a focus on praising and rewarding good behaviour. Pupils have a clear understanding of the PRU's policy for rewards and sanctions and all staff apply the policy consistently.
- 9 Where PRUs help pupils to manage their behaviour effectively, pupils have clear individual behaviour plans (IBPs) with appropriate targets. Staff involve pupils in setting and reviewing these targets, which helps pupils to understand their behaviour and to take responsibility for their actions. In these PRUs, staff encourage pupils to express their feelings and discuss their behaviour with each other and with staff.
- 10 At key stages 3 and 4, the range of subjects offered in the curriculum varies considerably between PRUs. Where there is good practice, PRUs offer a wide range of National Curriculum subjects and learning opportunities. They also offer vocational subjects such as construction, bicycle maintenance, carpentry, hair and beauty and food and hygiene. The range of options and an element of choice are important factors in engaging pupils who have previously lost interest in education and helps them to move on to further education, employment or training.
- 11 On their own, PRUs are unlikely to be able to provide as many options as schools. To increase the range of options available, a few PRUs liaise well with other providers, for example schools, further education (FE) colleges and training providers and ensure that pupils have well-planned learning pathways that meet their individual needs and keep them engaged. In a few cases, local authorities work together to extend the curriculum opportunities for PRU pupils.
- 12 In the PRUs where pupils make most progress, staff have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the pupils' literacy and numeracy levels and their additional learning needs. In these PRUs, staff plan appropriate interventions that improve pupils' standards. The Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) is at an early stage of development in many of the PRUs visited, partly because not all PRUs were included in local authority training or support when the LNF was first introduced. More recently, PRU staff have had opportunities to take part in literacy and numeracy initiatives and training.
- 13 The level of staff expertise to support pupils' additional learning needs varies between PRUs. In the best cases, staff receive regular, high-quality training that helps them to support pupils with, speech and language difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder, dyslexia and other learning needs

Good practice in schools

- 14 Schools use a range of different strategies to reduce exclusions and prevent pupils from going into EOTAS. These include having:
 - bespoke learning programmes that are tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils
 - a whole-school approach to behaviour management

- systems for identifying pupils at risk of disengagement and putting in place appropriate and timely intervention
 - close working with other agencies to provide support for pupils and their families
- 15 All of the secondary schools visited as part of the survey recognise the importance of developing a curriculum that engages pupils at risk of disengagement. These schools develop programmes to meet the needs of individual pupils. These programmes generally include a focus on vocational options and relevant qualifications that prepare pupils for life after school. They also include a combination of in-school and off-site activities.
- 16 Nationally, the rate of exclusions has reduced over the past 10 years. Where schools are most effective at reducing exclusions and addressing the needs of pupils within school, they adopt a consistent whole-school approach to managing pupils' behaviour, for example by using restorative approaches.
- 17 Many pupils who are unable to maintain mainstream placements and spend time in EOTAS have a range of difficulties, including challenging family situations and personal issues. Others have underdeveloped literacy and numeracy skills or other additional learning needs. When schools have effective systems for monitoring and tracking pupil progress, which identify pupils who are at risk of disengagement at an early stage, they can put in place appropriate intervention that keeps pupils in the mainstream.
- 18 Close working between schools and other agencies, for example health, social services and voluntary agencies, helps ensure that pupils at risk of disengagement and their families receive appropriate, timely support.

Recommendations

Local authorities, schools and PRUs should:

- R1 have a locally agreed strategy to support all vulnerable pupils so that they remain in full-time education
- R2 identify pupils who are at risk of disengagement early and put in place appropriate, timely interventions
- R3 work together to increase the range of learning options and experiences available to EOTAS pupils

Local authorities should:

- R4 ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the role of PRUs and other forms of EOTAS within a continuum of provision, and that these provisions have clear entry and exit criteria
- R5 appoint PRU staff who have appropriate experience and expertise in leadership, teaching and learning as well as behaviour management

R6 ensure that all PRU staff have access to the same training and development opportunities as staff in mainstream schools

R7 work with regional consortia to provide robust support and challenge for PRU managers and management committees

The Welsh Government should:

R8 provide framework guidance on the role of PRUs as part of a continuum of provision

R9 consider introducing a national professional qualification for teachers-in-charge of PRUs

R10 ensure that PRU staff benefit from national strategies to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in education

Title: School-to-school support and collaboration

Main findings

- 1 Nearly all schools are involved in some form of partnership working with other schools. In most schools in Wales there is collaborative work with other schools within a primary/secondary cluster. In a minority of schools, all additional school-to-school work is the result of brokering (by the local authority, consortia, or the Welsh Government). Around half of schools have other school-to-school working arrangements that are self-generated.
- 2 Successful school-to-school working arrangements require the genuine commitment of school leaders and attitudes of openness, trust and transparency. It is also essential that those working together have clearly identified strategic objectives and precise success criteria for such collaboration. Most crucially the focus must be on the impact for pupils.
- 3 Only a minority of schools with self-generated school-to-school support are able to identify its impact on standards. This is generally because they do not set clear success criteria or evaluate the impact of the work.
- 4 For school-to-school support to be successful, school leaders must commit a significant investment of staff time for research, development and collaboration.
- 5 School-to-school support works best when:
 - it arises from a clear identification of need, has a clear rationale and is based on a strategic objective
 - the focus is on improving outcomes for pupils
 - the participants experience it as mutually beneficial
 - the schools are at similar stages of their journey of improvement because, if one is good or very good and the other is weak, it is less likely that the support is effective as the distance between the schools involved is too great
 - the relationships between schools are equal, trusting, open and transparent
- 6 The barriers identified to effective school-to-school working include:
 - lack of commitment by the school leadership
 - lack of shared interests
 - lack of trust and openness
 - a belief that others have nothing useful to offer
- 7 In around half of schools visited the brokered school-to-school activity (apart from 14-19 collaboration) is recent and it is too early to see its impact on standards.
- 8 In practice, nearly all existing federation arrangements originated from a need to save money or save schools from closure.
- 9 Most federation arrangements are relatively new. There is evidence that outcomes for pupils in relation to wellbeing, such as attendance and behaviour, improve as a result of federation. It is too early to evaluate fully their impact on standards.

- 10 Federated schools seek to improve the learning experiences of pupils by planning schemes of work jointly in regular meetings of the staff from the federated schools. Joint extra-curricular activities contribute well to pupils' wellbeing. Teachers develop a greater range of teaching skills as a result of working together and sharing professional development activities.
- 11 In nearly all federations there have been financial benefits. These derive from:
- sharing and pooling staff and expertise
 - achieving consistency of approach, for example to assessment practice, developing skills and managing behaviour
 - being able to negotiate better deals for services and resources
 - rationalising the staffing structure (for example having one head of department rather than two)
- 12 Federated schools are registered as separate schools, which means that for audit and inspection purposes they are treated separately. This duplication of effort wastes time and resources.

Recommendations

School leaders should:

- R1 be very clear about what they want to achieve from taking part in school-to-school support activity
- R2 identify specific success criteria for the activity
- R3 Make sure that the focus is on raising standards and improving outcomes
- R4 evaluate the impact, costs and benefits

Local authorities and consortia should:

- R5 have a clear strategy for matching schools to work together
- R6 set expectations about how groupings will operate
- R7 make sure that resources are available to support school-to-school work
- R8 identify and disseminate information about practice worthy of emulation

The Welsh Government should:

- R9 consider ways of allowing federations to register as a single school
- R10 co-ordinate a national database of practice worthy of emulation that brings together Estyn best-practice case studies and those identified by consortia and local authorities

Title: Review of educational visits policies in the further education sector

Main findings

- 1 All colleges in Wales have generally appropriate and relevant policies, procedures and guidance for educational visits. Overall, they meet legislative requirements. All colleges have suitable general arrangements for assessing levels of risk. While all policies meet requirements, a few do not set out clearly enough what is included in each policy or to whom the policy applies. The policies are very varied and highly individual to each college. Nearly all policies set out the rationale and purposes of educational visits, with a strong emphasis on the value of learning outside of the classroom.
- 2 Usually, a college policy sets out the principles of the policy and gives an oversight of the context. Nearly all policies identify the respective roles of a group leader and other staff on educational visits. Most policies refer usefully to the skills and competencies that group leaders and other accompanying staff need to have.
- 3 Nearly all colleges use their health and safety staff well in every aspect of the planning of educational visits. The health and safety professionals provide staff with guidance and support as well as training in assessing risk.
- 4 Most of the college policies make good reference to assessing levels of risk and the need to plan carefully to take this into account when planning visits. A few policies refer specifically to the National Guidance on educational visits drawn up by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel, although nearly all follow only the broad principles of the guidance.
- 5 All colleges have sound procedures on risk assessments accompanied by useful guidance. Nearly all colleges require that these together with operational plans are scrutinised by a manager or staff member responsible for managing health and safety.
- 6 All colleges have detailed requirements for the assessment of risk in proportion to need. Many colleges require that health and safety officers guide and support group leaders when planning risk assessments. This is good practice. In order to minimise bureaucracy, most colleges identify the level of risk inherent in different types of activity and use systems of 'blanket consent' and generic management within the context of the college policy for activities that are straightforward.
- 7 All policies set out the expectations of the college in ensuring that educational visits are staffed appropriately. Nearly all assume that the visit organiser is the group leader, but this is not always explicit enough. Most policies make reference to the need for all accompanying staff and volunteers to have appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service clearance.

- 8 Most policies make useful references to the distinction between direct and indirect supervision when third party organisations are responsible for delivering and supervising activities.
- 9 Many colleges provide useful flow charts and checklists of the actions that group leaders should take in planning and managing educational visits. These set out the actions that staff need to take at every stage of the planning. Nearly all colleges refer to the need for group leaders to be acquainted with the current guidance on educational visits. However, very few colleges require the group leader to sign a declaration that they have done this. Many colleges have useful guidance on the training that staff need prior to taking on the role of group leader.
- 10 A minority of colleges make explicit reference to the management and supervision of learners during evenings on residential visits. Most colleges require that group leaders assess the risks associated with 'periods when the learners are not engaged in formal learning' in their detailed plans for the visit. However, this information does not always provide group leaders and accompanying staff with enough guidance to ensure that the levels of supervision are sufficient. Most colleges provide useful guidelines for checking the suitability of accommodation. However, the guidance does not always make it explicit enough that staff and learners should normally be accommodated in the same residence. Not all colleges have enough guidance on the roles and responsibilities of all accompanying adults with supervisory responsibilities.
- 11 Only a minority of colleges make explicit references to the risks associated with alcohol consumption by learners or staff during educational visits. This is often covered in the codes of conduct for staff and learners. Nearly all colleges require that supervisory staff should always be alcohol free, as should any learners under the age of 18. Colleges have varying rules for the consumption of alcohol for learners over the age of 18, although they all refer to the college's code of conduct and the consequences of failure to abide by the code. Not all colleges make it clear what action the college will take if any learners or staff fail to adhere to the code of conduct.
- 12 Nearly all colleges have good arrangements for collecting emergency contact information on all learners and staff involved in planned educational visits. Most colleges have clear information on college contact points should an emergency occur. Where emergency arrangements are described they provide useful information about how group leaders and staff should act, including on contacting the agreed college contact. In a few cases, the college's emergency procedures do not provide enough clear guidance about contact information at all times of the day and night.
- 13 All colleges provide useful references to their insurance policies and the potential use of these for covering educational visits. In a few cases, they do not provide enough information on exactly what the college insurance policy covers and when learners need to take out additional insurance cover.

- 14 All colleges provide detailed information on the additional requirements for overseas visits. Nearly all colleges require that the college principal authorises any overseas visit.
- 15 Most colleges provide useful guidance on the use of third party providers and the actions that group leaders should take in relation to these at the planning stage. However, a few colleges do not make this explicit enough.

Recommendations

Further education colleges in Wales should review their educational visits policies and guidance to ensure that they conform to best practice. They should:

- R1 review their policies and supporting guidance for educational visits to ensure that they set out clear and straightforward procedures for planning visits and that plans and risk assessments are proportionate to need and the level of risk
- R2 require that group leaders have the knowledge, competence and experience to organise and lead the visit and that they have signed a declaration that they have used the current guidance when planning the visit
- R3 make sure that on residential visits all accommodation is checked for suitability and that supervisory staff stay in the same accommodation as learners
- R4 require that on residential visits there are appropriate arrangements for the supervision of downtime¹ and that all staff in a supervisory role are alcohol free
- R5 always require that all learners and parents are aware of the need to comply with the college's codes of conduct on behaviour and of the consequences of not doing so
- R6 make sure that any assistant leader and/or voluntary leaders have clearly understood roles and responsibilities and that they have up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance when leading groups, which include any learners who are either aged under 18 years or vulnerable adults
- R7 provide clear information to learners and parents of the scope and limitations of their insurance policies in relation to educational visits and clarify the responsibilities and expectations of third party providers
- R8 take account of the advice in the National Guidance on educational visits provided by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel when reviewing their policies and guidance on educational visits

The Department of Education and Skills should:

- R9 require that all colleges take account of these recommendations when reviewing and updating their policies and guidance on educational visits

Title: Effective teaching and learning observation in further education colleges

Main findings

- 1 Teaching and learning observation works best in colleges that have a clear strategic vision of how to achieve high-quality teaching and learning, a strong culture of improvement, self-evaluation and continuous professional development, and work as a team. In these colleges, lesson observation is principally a method for helping teachers to improve their own practice rather than being used as a tool for internal inspection or college self-assessment.
- 2 While all colleges involved in this survey have a teaching and learning policy document in place, only a minority have a policy that sets out explicitly the purposes, procedures and expectations for teaching and learning observations. This means that, in a few cases, staff being observed and observers alike are unclear about what is expected of them as part of the observation process.
- 3 Many colleges have worked hard to develop a culture of innovation in teaching and learning. In particular they have made good use of the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF) project. This project, co-ordinated by CollegesWales, involved colleges developing a range of 'supported experiments' where teachers practise innovative teaching methods with the support of mentors and consultants.
- 4 Across the sector, managers meet regularly to network and share fresh ideas and practice. However, too few teaching staff participate in professional learning communities within or outside their colleges. As a result, they do not use peer observations enough to share good practice with colleagues or to identify and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching. Only a few colleges plan time for peer observations in their staff development programmes.
- 5 Learners take part in formal lesson observations in only a very few colleges. However, colleges account of learners' views through other mechanisms, including:
 - speaking with learners at the end of teaching and learning observations
 - 'learning walks' around the college where learners are asked about their experiences questioning learner representatives, forums and focus groups
 - evaluation forms and surveys carried out at course level
 - college surveys carried out to gain information about learners' experiences
 - the Welsh Government Learner Voice survey
- 6 All the colleges visited as part of this survey use observation as part of a planned process of mentoring and coaching. In most cases, colleges use mentors well to support teachers to develop their skills. Staff reported that they found mentoring to be helpful and developmental.
- 7 Only a few colleges observe learning support assistants formally. By not doing so, colleges miss an important opportunity to develop the skills of learning support

assistants and share good practice. It also means that colleges are unable to assess the impact of learning support assistants on learners' progress.

- 8 On the whole, FE teachers feel that the process of observation combined with support and mentoring has been beneficial. They report that these processes have helped them to improve their teaching skills, their professional competence, and their confidence, and that these changes have a positive impact on learners' outcomes.
- 9 However, in a minority of colleges there can be too much focus in formal lesson observations on a grade, either by the observer or the teacher being observed. This over-focus can cause observations to be stressful and less effective at improving teaching. In contrast, clear feedback and dialogue over the good features and areas to develop help the teacher to move their practice forward.
- 10 All the colleges in the survey moderate graded observation forms to help ensure consistency and reliability. In the most effective cases, a panel of moderators, including representatives external to the college, check the forms to ensure that they are properly completed and that the observer's evaluative commentary matches any grade given. As a result, forms are more evaluative and identify strengths and areas for improvement more clearly, and the grades awarded are more reliable.
- 11 Recently merged colleges in Wales have focused, in the immediate post-merger period, on evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in their provision. This has contributed to a few staff feeling 'over observed'. These colleges are now moving towards observation programmes that focus constructively on developing their staff's teaching skills.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

R1 promote opportunities, such as the QIF project, to support colleges as they develop their approaches to observing teaching and learning and encourage them to share innovative and effective practice

CollegesWales should:

R2 work with colleges and the Welsh Government to promote professional learning communities that focus on the development of teaching and learning

Colleges should:

R3 establish a culture of improvement, self-evaluation and professional learning so that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities

R4 establish self-evaluation practices that take account of a wide range of evidence, including classroom observation that focuses on learners' standards of achievement and on the quality of teaching and learning

R5 develop clear, explicit teaching and learning observation policies and practices

that all staff understand and apply, and ensure that all staff who have responsibility for learning, including learning support assistants, benefit from regular observations

- R6 arrange opportunities for the professional development of staff, based on evidence that includes teaching and learning observation, that are matched to college and individual staff members' priorities
- R7 consider the benefits of accrediting observers with an internal 'licence to observe' or an external accreditation framework in order to improve the quality and consistency of observer training
- R8 work in collaboration with other colleges to improve cross-college consistency of graded observation and to share good practice
- R9 develop the use of ungraded observations to help teachers develop their teaching skills
- R10 encourage teachers' ownership of their own professional practice by giving them opportunities to reflect on practice, using ungraded peer observations, membership of professional networks, mentoring and peer support

Title: Breaking down barriers to apprenticeships

Main findings

- 1 The Minister for Education and Skills, in his annual remit letter for 2013-2014, asked Estyn to carry out a two-year review into barriers to apprenticeships, arising from any difficulties experienced by learners from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and those with disabilities, when entering apprenticeship programmes.
- 2 Estyn published the first of two reports in November 2014. The report identifies the barriers that prevent learners from BME communities and those with disabilities from engaging in apprenticeship programmes. The barriers include:
 - lack of awareness of apprenticeships by parents, employers and learners themselves
 - few apprenticeship role models from the BME communities or from disabled groups
 - difficulties in finding suitable work placements, especially where employers believe there will be a need to provide additional support for learners
 - real or perceived discrimination
 - language difficulties for students for whom English is an additional language and cultural differences
 - available support for learners not being accessed or fully utilised
 - parental anxiety that the young people may not be able to cope
 - insufficient co-ordination between schools, employers, work-based learning (WBL) providers and local community organisations to promote apprenticeships
- 3 The report also identified that, although the majority of providers have good arrangements to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010, they are unable to show that this translates into measurable improvement in reducing barriers or stereotyping.
- 4 This second report builds on the work undertaken in the first report. It identifies examples of good practice in promoting diversity in apprenticeships, with a focus on young people from BME communities and young people with disabilities, as well as identifying good practice examples of joint working between providers, employers and communities to achieve diversity in apprenticeships.
- 5 As part of this review, inspectors collected and evaluated a range of information. They sought information from WBL providers, employers and learners, and attended a number of national conferences to gain the views of as many interested parties as possible. The case studies within this report are used with the agreement of the individuals involved.
- 6 The intention of this report is to inform the further development of the Welsh Government's equality and diversity guidance for WBL providers and to disseminate good practice case studies across the WBL network.

Title: Statutory use of leadership standards in the performance management of headteachers

Main findings

- 1 All headteachers visited as part of this survey have performance management arrangements in place relating to their own performance management objectives. In most cases, the headteacher's performance management cycle is timed appropriately to start in the second half of the autumn term to allow the appraisal panel to take the school's previous year's performance into consideration. In many cases, the headteacher's performance management cycle usefully includes an interim review point, allowing new objectives to be set if one or more have been achieved.
- 2 All headteachers interviewed who had been in post over two years, keep appropriate records. In many cases, headteachers record their outcomes in an overview document. They provide a statistical analysis of the school's outcomes and evidence against the objectives set. However, while headteachers pay good attention to 'what' is to be achieved (the performance management objectives), in most cases, only a very few reflect fully in writing on 'how' the objectives should be achieved (application of the leadership standards). Overall, the documentation provides a suitable starting point for the appraisal panel's discussion of the headteacher's performance.
- 3 A very few appraising panels use the leadership standards effectively to evaluate the performance of the headteacher. In these schools, governors ask headteachers to reflect in writing on how they have led the school in the previous year. This enables the appraisal panel to gain a more rounded understanding of the headteacher's work during the school year.
- 4 In nearly all the schools visited, headteachers identify their own professional development needs accurately in relation to their performance management objectives. However, most headteachers report that finding suitable professional development is time-consuming and guaranteeing the quality difficult. Most headteachers in substantive posts report that support following their first appointments to headship to be poor.
- 5 Most governors who sit on headteachers' appraisal panels have previous experience of performance management processes. Most governors who have received the training to sit on the appraisal panel judge that the training has provided them with a good understanding of how to carry out the appraisal. However, many governors are less confident about their understanding of the leadership skills.
- 6 In many cases currently, the local authority representative on the appraisal panel is a recently appointed challenge advisor and does not have an in-depth knowledge of the school.
- 7 In most schools visited, headteachers apply a form of distributed leadership with senior staff and a few teachers holding responsibilities for the school's work. In the majority of schools, headteachers do not plan well for distributed leadership and this does not extend overtly beyond middle leaders.

- 8 In a few schools, headteachers take a wide view when developing leadership skills in their staff. They expect staff not only to perform well in their current leadership posts to the benefit of the school and pupils, but to develop as future leaders. In these schools, headteachers chose senior leaders and middle leaders initially for the strengths and skills they exhibit in a leadership area. They ensure that senior and middle leaders reflect on their performance management objectives and on the leadership standards. They help them to define the leadership standards they exhibit, and offer opportunities for staff to progress through professional development linked to leadership standards staff have yet to demonstrate.
- 9 In many schools, senior staff have roles well suited to their strengths and abilities. However, leaders who remain in the same leadership role for a long time do not always see the need to progress to higher leadership roles or to further develop their own leadership skills and knowledge.
- 10 Most headteachers and appraisal panels are mindful of the leadership standards when undertaking performance appraisals. However, most headteachers do not use the leadership skills robustly enough to help develop their leadership skills and behaviours. As a result, only a few leaders challenge themselves or their colleagues effectively enough.
- 11 While the key themes of the leadership standards remain mostly relevant, there are too many indicators overall to be useful. Additionally, important indicators are not included. For example, creating the vision for the school requires leaders to engage in 'horizon scanning' to keep abreast of the changes in local, regional and national contexts and to review the vision for the school regularly and adjust when necessary. This is a very important skill if schools are to provide pupils with an education that prepares them effectively for the future. Horizon scanning precedes creating the strategic direction. However, this skill, which is one many headteachers find difficult, is not clearly articulated in the leadership standards.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

R1 Revise the leadership standards to convey higher expectations of leaders and to focus more sharply on the leadership skills and behaviours needed to drive change

Appraisal panels should:

R2 Set appropriate objectives that address leadership behaviours and how leaders undertake their role, as well as quantifiable outcomes

R3 Record in detail, using the full range of the leadership standards, how well the headteacher has carried out their role, as well as reporting what the headteacher has achieved

Local authorities / regional consortia should:

R4 Encourage headteachers to reflect holistically on the quality of their leadership using the themes set out in the leadership standards, and in line with the

[Individual Leadership Review guidance](#) provided on the 'Learning Wales' website

R5 Challenge the headteacher and governing body to ensure that there are appropriate opportunities for all staff to develop their leadership skills

Headteachers should:

R6 Reflect in writing on how well they meet the wider range of leadership standards, as well as on whether they have met performance management objectives

R7 Ensure there are opportunities for all staff in their school to develop their leadership roles and skills throughout their careers

R8 Coach and mentor staff who show the behaviours and skills that would enable them to become future leaders

Title: Learner support services in further education for learners aged 16-19

Main findings

- 1 Most colleges have a good range of support in place for their learners. In most colleges, senior managers monitor the performance of learning support staff well. Support staff use a wide range of interventions to make sure that learners improve their basic and essential skills. Most colleges have well-developed management information systems that track learners' attendance, progress and performance. Tutors and individual learners discuss their performance and use the data to agree improvement targets. They also use tutorials to help learners develop their career planning skills. Managers are kept well informed of learners' progress.
- 2 Learning support services include learning coaches, mentors, counsellors, chaplaincy services, and welfare advisers who support learners with financial issues. A minority of colleges also employ dedicated careers guidance specialists. Most colleges set clear performance targets for these learning support staff. Most colleges have well-structured tutorial systems. Tutors use learning support services to help learners who are considering leaving and improve learners' prospects of remaining in education.
- 3 Colleges assess and advise learners on entry to help them choose the most appropriate course and identify what support, if any, learners need to improve their basic skills. Across Wales, colleges report that between 20% and 35% of learners need support with their literacy or numeracy skills in order to cope with the demands of their chosen courses. Nearly all learners with additional learning needs receive good, well-planned support as they progress from school to a further education institution. This is achieved through effective, close partnership working between the school, institution and Careers Wales.
- 4 For prospective learners who do not have additional learning needs, further education colleges generally liaise well with schools and Careers Wales to promote their provision. However, Careers Wales advisers are now required to work with only the most vulnerable learners and a minority of colleges say that this restructuring of Careers Wales services has reduced the extent to which learners receive impartial [face-to-face] guidance and advice.
- 5 In nearly all colleges, leaders plan the curriculum well and offer a broad range of courses at levels that provide learners with flexibility and choice. They monitor learners and identify and support those who are in danger of dropping out of courses. Learners usually have the flexibility to adjust their course choices early on and tutors encourage learners to stay engaged in education. Retention rates are good.
- 6 Most colleges have good arrangements to support post-16 learners who join late during the year. They have identified that learners who start late tend to drop out before completing their studies and have introduced initiatives such as structured January intakes or targeted mentoring support for learners who start later in the

autumn term. Many of these initiatives have been introduced recently and it is too early to judge their impact.

- 7 Leaders and managers use data systems to keep informed of learners' performance and progress, and they access learner feedback to improve provision and support. A few colleges are developing systems to measure the progress or 'distance travelled' by learners during their courses, but there is no common approach across Wales. Only a very few colleges have a system that uses data to monitor how effectively learners make progress towards the objectives laid out in the Welsh Government's Careers and World of Work Framework, (2008) (see Appendix 2).
- 8 Generally, colleges give learners appropriate support to make the transition to their next destination. Tutors and lecturing staff use their technical and vocational knowledge to help learners make appropriate progression decisions. Many learners have a good awareness of the progression opportunities available to them and feel that staff prepare them well for their next step.
- 9 Colleges gather information on learners' intended destinations when they leave, but this data is not gathered reliably enough to enable a useful evaluation of the impact of learners' career planning or to compare progress with school leavers. Most colleges use destination data as a basis for evaluating the success of their provision. However, there is no common method used by colleges across Wales. Whereas school destination data is based on tracking learners to verify their destinations once they have left school, further education institution leavers' destination data is based on declared intentions. Only a minority of colleges make systematic efforts to follow up leavers to confirm their destinations.

Recommendations

Further education colleges should:

- R1 develop a common method to measure learners' achievements, including their progress against the objectives set out in the Welsh Government's Careers and the World of Work Framework (2008) (see Appendix 2) Local authorities should:
- R2 make sure all learners are aware of the full range of post-16 options available to them
- R3 make sure that colleges receive timely information about the achievements and support needs of learners progressing to further education

The Welsh Government should:

- R4 work with schools, colleges, Careers Wales and local authorities to develop a national system for collecting data on the destinations of 18-year-olds