

Local government

Summary

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 **Estyn**
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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

National school survey results 2007

Schools' views of their council's services and the services provided locally for children and young people (Wales)

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Introduction to the school survey

- 1 The Audit Commission's School Survey is conducted in Wales on behalf of the Wales Audit Office and Estyn. The survey captures schools' perceptions of their council's services and the services provided locally for children and young people. The school survey is completed by the headteacher who is encouraged to consult other staff and governors.
- 2 The survey offers schools the opportunity to influence the work of their council as well as the opportunity to feed into the inspection of their council. The detailed results of the survey are used by councils in order to assess and improve their services. The results are also used to inform local education authority inspection and performance work conducted by the Wales Audit Office and Estyn.
- 3 The survey has been running in Wales as an annual, national, online exercise since summer 2003^I. All councils in Wales have participated at least once.
- 4 Twenty councils in Wales opted to take part in this year's survey, resulting in the survey being available to 1,623 schools; 777 chose to respond, an overall response rate of 48 per cent^{II}. The survey was open for six weeks during June/July 2007.
- 5 This summary report examines the responses from schools across the 20 councils in Wales to the questions in the survey, which cover six areas: council strategy; support for school improvement; facilitating access to services; access; promoting social inclusion; and additional learning needs.
- 6 Schools answered each question in the survey using one of six possible responses: (1) Very good; (2) Good; (3) Satisfactory; (4) Poor; (5) Very poor; or (X) Unable to comment.

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- ^I Originally created as a paper-based data collection tool for a national study in 1998 (which led to the publication of the report *Held in Trust* in 1999), the survey was then developed to enable schools' views to feed into the local education authority inspection process in England and Wales (1998-2001). The first national survey was held in England in 2002; it was extended to cover Wales in 2003. All but two local councils in England have participated at least once – both councils maintain only one school each.
- ^{II} This report includes comparisons with the 2005 survey (650 schools responded from 14 council areas), rather than the 2006 survey, due to a low participation rate in 2006 (248 schools responded from 6 council areas). The participation rate in 2006 reflects the agreement by local authorities in Wales that they will take part in larger numbers every two years.

The views of schools overall

- 7 Of the 80 questions in the survey, all but one received an average rating of satisfactory or above. This indicates that schools in the participating authorities are generally content with the support and services provided by their council.
- 8 However, 84 per cent of questions received a more negative rating from schools this year than in the previous survey.
- 9 The overall results mask large variation in the views of schools maintained by different councils. Councils have been provided with their individual results so they can see how the views of their schools compare with others nationally.
- 10 The most positively rated areas covered the support for school improvement. Councils' promotion of healthy eating was also rated highly.
- 11 The most negatively rated area was council support for gifted and talented pupils, followed by a series of questions on the rationale for the allocation of money and resources.
- 12 Schools gave, on the whole, a more negative response to the 2007 survey than to the 2005 survey. The areas which received the largest deterioration in ratings concerned the support for minority groups and welsh-medium education, as well as the general connections between schools and their councils; strategy, understanding, communication and the ability of schools to influence the work of the council.

Areas on which schools gave their most positive ratings

- 13 Listed below, in order, are the highest-rated items (all were, on average, rated satisfactory and above).
 - (Q B6) Your council's support for literacy – rated overall between good to very good. Ninety-seven per cent of responding schools rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (Q E9) The effectiveness of your council's promotion of healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating and drinking, for children and young people – 97 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.

- (Q C8) The quality of technical support for Information and Communication Technology [ICT] – 93 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (Q B8) Your council's support for ICT in the curriculum – 93 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (B18) Your council's support to schools for using pupil performance data to secure school improvement – 96 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (Q B7) Your council's support for numeracy – 94 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (Q B3) Your council's effectiveness in challenging your school to perform – 95 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (Q A1) The effectiveness of the leadership provided by senior officers – 94 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (Q B17) The quality of your council's financial information, including comparative data for schools – 93 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
 - (Q E6) The effectiveness of the training, advice and support on child protection provided or commissioned by the council for designated members of staff and governors – 95 per cent rated this as satisfactory or better.
- 14** Schools in Wales have acknowledged councils' support for literacy as good. Other traditional school improvement areas also feature in the top-rated items: support for numeracy; challenge to perform better; and a prevalence of data and ICT items. The effectiveness of councils' promotion of healthy lifestyles was a question new to the survey for 2006 and was given the second-highest rating overall. High ratings also went to the leadership provided by senior officers as well as the effectiveness of support for child protection for designated members of staff and governors.

Areas on which schools gave their most negative ratings

- 15 The lowest-rated items were as follows (all but the first item were rated, on average, between satisfactory and good; the most negatively-rated item is listed first).
- (Q F8) The effectiveness of your council's support for gifted and talented pupils – rated just below satisfactory overall. Twenty-eight per cent of responding schools rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q C7) The quality of building maintenance services – 27 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q A7) The extent to which schools influence council policies / plans / procedures – 28 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q A9) The educational rationale behind the school funding formula – 25 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q D2) The transparency of your council's asset management planning process – 21 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q F3) The clarity of your council's rationale for the deployment of Additional Learning Needs [ALN] funding – 25 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q A20) The effectiveness of your council (education, social care and other council departments) in working in partnership with external agencies, including other councils, to improve outcomes for children and young people – 18 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q D3) The effectiveness of your council's support in the preparation of your school's Disability Discrimination Act [DDA] access plans – 21 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q F7) The effectiveness of the council's assessment of and provision for pupils with ALN through the medium of Welsh – 24 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.
 - (Q C2) Your council's support in enabling you to be an effective purchaser of traded services, whether from the council or from external providers – 18 per cent rated this as below satisfactory.

- 16 The lowest rating from schools in Wales to any question in the 2007 survey was given to the effectiveness of support for gifted and talented pupils.
- 17 The other items listed above, although the lowest-rated items in the survey, were still all rated above satisfactory on average. The lowest-rated items contain a series of questions on the clarity of the rationale for the allocation of money and resources, including the funding formula, the Asset Management Planning process and deployment of ALN funding. Other low-rated items included the influence of schools on council policy, partnership working within the council and with other agencies, support for pupils with additional learning needs through the medium of Welsh, building maintenance and the support to become an effective purchaser of traded services. The support for the preparation of DDA access plans was a new question for 2006 and also features as one of the lowest-rated areas.

Changes over time

- 18 Of the 80 questions in the 2007 survey, 67 can be matched to a question in the summer 2005 survey. Fifty-six questions (84 per cent) were rated more negatively by schools in 2007; of these, 14 dropped by 5 per cent or more (to a maximum of 8.5 per cent). Eleven of the 67 matched items were rated more positively, only one increasing by 5 per cent or more.
- 19 **Principal deteriorations** (the most negative change listed first):
- (Q F10) The effectiveness of your council's support for meeting the needs of pupils from minority ethnic groups, refugee families and Traveller communities – 8.4 per cent deterioration in the overall average rating from schools.
 - (Q A6) The effectiveness of your council's communication with your school – 8.1 per cent deterioration.
 - (Q F9) The effectiveness of your council's support for meeting the needs of pupils with English as an additional language – 8.0 per cent deterioration.
 - (Q B4) Your council's support to develop management and leadership in your school in order to secure school improvement – 7.1 per cent deterioration.
 - (Q A7) The extent to which schools influence council policies / plans / procedures – 6.9 per cent deterioration.

- (Q D8) The effectiveness of the council's arrangements for securing access to Welsh-medium education – 6.8 per cent deterioration.
- (Q C5) The quality of payroll services – 6.6 per cent deterioration.
- (Q A12) The effectiveness of your council's strategy for the recruitment and retention of the school workforce – 6.1 per cent deterioration.
- (Q B12) How effectively the council secures Welsh-medium curriculum support for schools – 5.9 per cent deterioration.
- (Q A5) The effectiveness of your council's strategic planning for school improvement – 5.8 per cent deterioration.
- (Q A20) The effectiveness of your council (education, social care and other council departments) in working in partnership with external agencies, including other councils, to improve outcomes for children and young people – 5.2 per cent deterioration.
- (Q A13) The effectiveness of your council's strategy for data collection, and for managing information and data – 5.1 per cent deterioration.
- (Q B11) The quality of the council's support for the Welsh language to meet the varied needs of different users – 5.1 per cent deterioration.
- (Q B2) Your council's knowledge and understanding of your school and the community it serves – 5.0 per cent deterioration.

20 The areas receiving the largest drop in ratings involve the general connections between schools and their council: schools' perceptions of council strategy and schools' ability to influence policy, including councils' understanding of and communication with their schools. Three Welsh-medium education items received some of the biggest deteriorations; all had appeared in the top ten highest-rated questions in the 2005 survey. Schools are also less positive about councils' support for meeting the needs of minority groups and those with English as an additional language.

21 Improvements: only one item received more than a 5 per cent change for the better:

- (Q C8) The quality of technical support for ICT – 5.4 per cent improvement in the overall average rating from schools.

The views of schools maintained by different councils

- 22** The overall results mask large variation between the views of schools maintained by different councils. A simple study of the difference between the highest-rated and lowest-rated council for each question in the survey reveals that 12 of the 80 items in the survey have a difference of 2 points or more on the 5-point scale. The questions which received the largest variation (biggest difference listed first) were as follows:
- (Q B8) Your council's support for ICT in the curriculum.
 - (Q F13) The effectiveness of educational psychology support.
 - (Q F1) The quality of your council's ALN strategy.
 - (Q B7) Your council's support for numeracy.
 - (Q F5) Your council's effectiveness in developing your school's capacity to meet the needs of pupils with ALN.
 - (Q F2) Your council's planning of ALN provision to meet identified needs.
 - (Q F7) The effectiveness of the council's assessment of and provision for pupils with ALN through the medium of Welsh.
 - (Q F9) The effectiveness of your council's support for meeting the needs of pupils with English as an additional language.
 - (Q A6) The effectiveness of your council's communication with your school.
 - (Q B17) The quality of your council's financial information, including comparative data for schools.
 - (Q C4) The effectiveness of your council's support to improve resource and financial management in your school.
 - (Q F3) The clarity of your council's rationale for the deployment of ALN funding.
- 23** Many of the questions receiving the largest range of responses cover the support from councils for schools' work in relation to pupils with additional learning needs. This suggests that the support schools receive for their work with this vulnerable group of children and young people varies widely between council areas.

The views of different types of school

- 24 The views of nursery and special schools have not been examined separately due to the low number of responses from both types of school.
- 25 Primary schools gave slightly more positive responses than secondary schools – 51 per cent of questions received a higher rating from primary schools than from secondary schools.
- 26 Primary schools gave their most positive rating to the local authority's support for literacy (Q B6) and their most negative rating to the extent to which schools influence council policies / plans / procedures (Q A7).
- 27 Secondary schools gave their most positive rating to the council's support to schools for using pupil performance data to secure school improvement (Q B18) and their most negative rating to the effectiveness of your council's support for gifted and talented pupils (Q F8).

 For further information on the School Survey please go to:

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/schoolsurvey

Councils can also access their survey results for 2006 and previous years at this web address.

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