Estyn

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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Having your say - young people, participation and school councils

February 2008

BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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 education authorities (LEAs);
- ↟ primary schools;
- ↟ secondary schools;
- ↟ special schools;
- ↟ pupil referral units;
- ↟ independent schools;
- ↟ further education;
- ↟ adult community-based learning;
- ↟ youth support services;
- ↟ youth and community work training;
- ↟ LEAs;
- ↟ teacher education and training;
- ↟ work-based learning;
- ↟ careers companies;
- ↟ offender learning; and
- ↟ the education, guidance and training elements of The Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- ↟ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ↟ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Contents	Page

Introduction

Purpose

1   The purpose of this report is to provide the Welsh Assembly Government with a
position paper on the extent to which:

- secondary schools comply with the School Council (Wales) Regulations 2005[1]
and have regard to the subsequent guidance issued in 2006[2];

- regulations support whole-school approaches to pupil participation; and

- schools make effective use of the www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk website.

2   An appendix to this report reviews the extent to which young people aged 11-25 are
involved in making decisions about aspects of their education and training in the
following sectors: work based learning providers, youth support services,
further-education colleges, local authority education services and initial teacher
training.

3   In addition, a few examples of good practice identified by inspectors are highlighted
in the text.

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[1] http://www.england-legislation.hmso.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2005/20053200e.htm
[2] http://new.wales.gov.uk/publications/circular/circulars2006/1552974/?lang=en

Background

4   The School Council (Wales) Regulations 2005 outline the requirements for all maintained schools, except nursery and infant schools, in Wales to put in place a school council. The purpose of the school council is to 'enable pupils to discuss matters relating to their school, their education and any other matters of concern or interest and to make representations on these to the governing body and the headteacher'[3].

5   The regulations set out the practical arrangements for school councils, including membership requirements and ballot arrangements. In addition, it makes clear the requirement for up to two school council members to have the opportunity to become associate pupil governors.

6   The Welsh Assembly Government has produced a website, www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk to help schools develop school councils.

7   This report is the third in a series of reports by Estyn on children and young people's participation. The first report, published in 2005-2006, focused on opportunities for young people aged 11-25 to participate in decision-making in youth support services. The second reported on participation in primary schools. These reports can be found at http://www.estyn.gov.uk/publications/Young_Peoples_remit_report.pdf and http://www.estyn.gov.uk/publications/Remit_report_Decision_making.pdf respectively.

8   The definition of participation used by inspectors in this advice is: 'Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions or planning and reviewing an action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice.'[4].

9   The evidence base for this report includes:

- reports on 43 secondary schools, 17 work-based learning providers, nine Local Authority Education services, five further education providers, four youth support services and one initial teacher training provider, all inspected between September 2006 and July 2007;

- statistical data relating to the use of www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk provided by the Welsh Assembly Government; and

- findings from a telephone survey of 35% of secondary schools and visits to 10% of secondary schools inspected between September 2006 and July 2007.

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[3] Explanatory notes, School Council (Wales) Regulations 2005
[4] This was the winning sound bite in a Welsh Assembly Government competition for young people. This has been adopted by WAG and the Participation Consortium to explain what is meant by 'participation' in Wales.

Main findings

Compliance with regulations relating to school councils

10   Overall, secondary schools comply with almost all of the requirements of the Schools Council (Wales) Regulations 2005.

11   The regulations are having a positive impact on pupils' decision-making in most schools in Wales. The regulations have strengthened the status of school councils.

12   Almost all schools had a school council before the regulations were introduced. Therefore, the regulations formalise existing practice, with the exception of the regulations concerning associate pupil governors, which requires associate pupil governors to be elected by pupils.

13   Only a minority of secondary schools comply fully with the regulations concerning associate pupil governors.

14   In only a few schools is the impact of the school council significant. In these schools, pupils are involved in appointing senior staff and they influence decisions about budget allocation and school policies and procedures.

15   In a few schools, pupils do not have enough structured opportunities to express their views in school councils. In these schools, pupils are often not encouraged enough to study independently or develop decision-making skills[5].

16   Only a very few schools fail to respond to the views of pupils. These schools have not prioritised pupils' participation and have not developed the school council in line with the regulations.

Whole-school approach to participation

17   In a minority of schools, the school council has brought about more pupil-led activities. In these schools, the approach to pupil participation has permeated into other aspects of school life. In the best cases, feedback from pupils increasingly leads to improvements in teaching and learning, because teachers respond to the feedback and adapt the way they teach where appropriate.

18   A few schools use Information Communication Technology (ICT) well to find out the views of pupils. This enables schools to take early and effective action to address the needs and concerns of pupils.

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[5]   The proposed non-statutory Skills Framework for Wales covers the development of thinking skills, including decision-making skills. The framework is available at http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038232/403829/Consultations/870830/1096456/skills-cons-e?lang=en

19   A few school councils have effective links with other organisations in the local community. Through these links, pupils develop knowledge of decision-making processes and develop skills to take part in discussions.

Use of the www.schoolscouncilswales.org.uk website

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20   Teachers responsible for the school council in about half of the schools surveyed are aware of the website, but less than a third have used it.

21   No teachers, governors or pupils have used the forum on the website.

22   Many teachers feel that they do not need resources to support the establishment of their school council as they already had one before the regulations came into force.

23   Many school councils are well established. There are not enough resources to help these councils, or other less established councils, to extend the influence pupils have in schools by giving more attention to matters affecting teaching and learning.

24   The case studies are the most useful part of the website as they enable teachers to understand the features of good practice.

Recommendations

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

R1   provide schools with guidance on the role of associate pupil governors; and

R2   make sure that any advice, guidance and resources provided for schools including the www.schoolscouncilswales.org.uk website meet the needs of well-established school councils.

Schools should:

R3   comply with the regulations on associate pupil governors; and

R4   engage pupils more in:

   a   planning for school improvement;

   b   school self-evaluation; and

   c   decisions affecting teaching and learning.

Recommendations

School Councils

Compliance with Schools Council (Wales) Regulations 2005

25 Overall, secondary schools comply with almost all of the requirements of the regulations, and these regulations are having a positive impact on most schools in Wales. The regulations have strengthened the school council's status in schools, and nearly all school councils influence aspects of decision-making within secondary schools. In the majority of schools, headteachers and other staff work well with the school council to bring about improvements.

26 Almost all schools had a school council before the regulations were introduced. But the regulations have formalised existing practice (with the exception that schools generally did not previously have associate pupil governors). In addition, the introduction of the regulations has encouraged schools to review their current practice.

27 The regulations require school councils to meet six times a year. Most school councils meet more often than this.

28 The school council influences decisions about practical arrangements in most schools. These include decisions such as those relating to school uniform, toilet facilities and options available at meal times. However, often, only minor improvements are made to these matters, despite pupil involvement.

29 In only a few schools is the impact of the school council significant. In these schools pupils are involved in the appointment of senior staff; they influence budgeting decisions and make changes to school procedures. In addition, pupils help develop school policies, such as pupil rewards and sanctions, substance misuse, recycling and anti-bullying policies.

Case study 1: A mid-Wales school council contributing well to school policy development.	Working effectively with governors, the school council contributed to the processes for selecting and appointing staff, and provides on-going feedback to staff on teaching style and methods. As a consequence, the school council better understands pupils' responsibility to participate actively in teaching and learning. The council makes very useful contributions when working with senior staff on policies relating to pupil behaviour. Through the school council's election and feedback systems, pupils own the policies they have contributed to and respond well to their implementation.

30 In addition, pupils in schools where school councils are particularly influential can have an impact on aspects of teaching and learning. Examples include:

- pupils supporting teachers to evaluate learning experiences and making improvements as a result;
- year group councils working with teachers to help them to gain an insight to pupil views on classroom experiences; and

- pupils sharing their views on the school's approach to 'assessment for learning'.

Case study 2: A faith school in south east Wales use the pupils' own annual school improvement plan to improve feedback to pupils.	Pupils have their own annual school improvement plan. The school council consider specific questions during the year to help the staff to deliver the plan effectively. One of the plan aims for 2006-2007 was 'to improve the quality of feedback to students and to promote learning'. The school council was asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of how work was marked across the school. This was then discussed in year councils and in form groups so that all pupils were involved. The deputy headteacher leading this work met with the school council to discuss their views. Following the work undertaken by the school council and other pupils to improve feedback and promote learning, the school introduced a new approach to 'assessment for learning'. In addition, a focus group of pupils meets regularly with teachers to monitor its development.

31 In a minority of schools, school council members play leading roles in supporting their peers, and help the school to provide support for pupils. Schemes such as 'peer mentoring' and 'buddy systems' help young people get the support they need to progress with their learning. Young people support other young people in these schemes and make sure their fellow pupils get the support they need to succeed with their learning.

32 In about a third of schools, the school council is actively involved in self-evaluation processes. Where headteachers listen effectively to pupil feedback, changes are made to support systems and assessment procedures as a result.

Case study 3: A school council in North Wales influence post-16 curriculum choices.	The headteacher in one school supported the representatives of all year councils to understand how the school decided which subjects it would offer to post 16 pupils. The senior management team made sure that pupils understood curriculum requirements, timetabling constraints, the resources available and the provision delivered by other partners. The school council helped the senior team and its partner providers to decide on the range of subjects taught in the school post 16. The school changed the range of subjects and qualifications available by responding to the needs and interests of learners and did not unrealistically raise the expectations of the young people.

33   A minority of school councils have budgets; this gives increased status to the school council, and pupils feel more highly valued. However, school councils can be effective without having their own budgets, as long as the headteacher and governing body consider requests for resources from the school council fairly and regularly.

34   School councils work well with governing bodies to make improvements in a few schools. However, most schools are in the early stages of developing links between school councils and governing bodies and cooperation has yet to become productive.

35   Only a minority of the schools surveyed have appointed associate pupil governors. In around half of these schools, the associate pupil governors are the head boy and head girl, who have been selected by members of staff and not elected by pupils, as required by the regulations.

36   Many headteachers feel that the Welsh Assembly Government has not provided enough guidance about the regulations concerning associate pupil governors. A few schools are unaware of them. In addition, a few headteachers and governing bodies do not agree with the regulations about the role of associate pupil governors and therefore avoid implementing them.

37   In one school, senior teachers feel that the regulations about associate pupil governors do not go far enough and that pupils should have the same voting rights as other governors. This opinion was prompted by a recent governing body decision on changes to the school's substance misuse policy. The senior management team's proposal lost by one vote at the governing body meeting. The deputy headteacher felt that if the associate pupil governors had been able to vote too then they would have won the vote to make improvements to the way pupils are supported, and changed the substance misuse policy.[6]

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[6] The Welsh Assembly Government's 'Guidance for Governing Bodies on the Establishment and Operation of School Councils' states that although associate pupil governors may not vote at governing body meetings, they "may be members of non-statutory governing body committees and may vote at those committees if the governing body grants them voting rights."

38   Only a minority of school council meetings are fully chaired and administered by pupils. It is teachers who chair the meetings of many school councils and they do not allow pupils to control the meeting. This is often because teachers do not believe that pupils have the skills, confidence or maturity to take leadership roles. The regulations require a member of staff to be present at meetings to supervise only.

39   Most form teachers think that it is important for pupils to make decisions affecting schools. However, in many schools, there are a few form teachers who do not value the school council. These form teachers do not give enough time for pupil discussion or for feedback from school council meetings. The pupils in these teachers' form groups usually feel that their voice is not heard as a result.

40   In the more developed school councils, all pupils contribute confidently during meetings. In less mature school councils, discussions are dominated by a few pupils, usually the older ones.

41   A minority of school councils have good links with their local authority youth forum. These links enable pupils to contribute to decision-making beyond the boundaries of their own schools or local community. They can influence local strategic plans and contribute ideas for consideration by local authority elected members[7]. In these cases, school councils work with providers of youth support services to contribute young people's views to documents such as Single Education Plans.

42   In the few schools where headteachers and governors do not comply with regulations, pupils do not have opportunities to express their views about the school. In addition, in these schools there is insufficient encouragement for pupils to work independently and develop decision making skills through research and enquiry.

43   The Estyn report on participation in primary schools published last year, and that on youth support services in 2005-2006, noted the increasing trend towards employing 'participation officers' or 'school council officers' to help schools meet the statutory requirements for school councils. This trend has led to decisions about pupil participation being taken outside primary schools and leading to a loss of ownership of these decisions by teachers in primary schools. However, in secondary schools, leaders and managers take strong ownership of school council developments and lead on most of the work with pupils.

44   An analysis of grades awarded to secondary schools inspected between September 2006 and July 2007 for part of key question 4 of the Common Inspection Framework[8] is shown in the chart below. This question is not exclusively about school councils.

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[7] Refer to the Local Education Authority services section in the appendix.
[8] Question 4.1

Does the school plan and manage care and support arrangements and services effectively, including meeting with the school council to establish pupils' views?

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
58%	37%	2%	2%	0%

The chart suggests that most schools support pupils well and listen to their views through the school council when planning and reviewing the care that they provide.

Whole-school approaches to participation

45   In a minority of schools, the success of the school council has led to more activities where pupils play a lead role, for example, in peer mentoring and raising money for charity. In these schools, the approach to pupil participation has permeated wider aspects of school life. In addition, many schools are developing more ways to ensure that young people's views are valued and considered.

46   In the best cases, individual subject teachers use feedback from pupils to improve teaching and learning approaches. Pupils are increasingly influencing what they learn and how they learn. For example, in one English class, pupils suggested studying a different poem the following year. The teacher changed the poem to one that was more in line with pupils' interests and found that their motivation increased, which in turn led to higher levels of engagement and higher levels of engagement in that part of the course.

47   A few schools use ICT well to listen to learners. Examples include the use of virtual learning environments, surveys and voting software. In the best cases, schools capture the views of all pupils, involve them in analysing them and in deciding what action needs to be taken. This enables schools to take early and effective action to address the needs and concerns of pupils.

| **Case study 4:**

The analysis of results from a pupil self-assessment audit tool is used well to inform planning for learning. | An English medium community school in the south Wales valleys makes good use of a survey of pupils' feelings about school, perceived learning capability, self-regard, preparedness for learning, attitudes to teachers, general work ethic, learner confidence, attendance attitude, and response to the curriculum.

Teachers cross-reference the analysis of the survey results and data relating to achievement, attendance, gender and socio-economic background. Senior managers then use the data to identify pupils who would benefit from support from a learning coach. Form tutors and subject teachers use the information to improve their understanding of the pupils in class to set targets and to tailor teaching and learning to pupils' needs.

The school is in its third year of using this survey and is beginning to analyse data over a number of years, in order to identify trends to see whether new approaches are working.

The use of the tool complements the effective school council in ensuring that the views of pupils in the school are used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. |

48 One school targets pupils who underachieve and are at risk of becoming non-attendees and encourages them to become more active in making decisions about which subjects they take and in which setting. This has led to pupils developing more positive attitudes towards school and learning as they feel more involved in processes that affect them.

49 Often, schools enable pupils to participate regularly in setting and reviewing their own targets. Where pupils also have the support of a mentor, this makes a significant impact on standards of achievement.

Case study 5:	In one school, pupils participate in the termly setting and reviewing of GCSE target grades between Year 9 and the end of year 11.
Pupils in a school in the western valleys of south Wales get involved in continuous target setting and achieve good outcomes.	Each year, around sixty pupils in Year 11 are identified to receive specialist mentoring. These pupils participate in setting and reviewing their GCSE target grades weekly with subject teachers. These are then discussed each week with their mentor, who is a member of the senior management team. Any issues are discussed between the pupil and mentor and the school allocates further support as necessary, through after-school 'catch-up' clubs, for example.
	The targets are entered onto a grid on the school intranet so that all members of staff have access to them. Pupils who meet or exceed their targets receive merit points that can be exchanged for rewards. The pupils help to decide what rewards are available.
	The depth and consistent nature of pupil involvement in target setting is the key feature.
	The school was in the top quarter of similar schools for the main GCSE performance indicators in last three years.

50   A few schools have effective links with other organisations in the community which help pupils develop further skills in making decisions. They work with school councils in partner primary schools to influence the transition process from primary to secondary school. For example, pupils in years 8 and 9 have taken action to make sure that year 7 pupils are well informed, recognise a friendly face and are therefore more confident when they arrive in their new school. In addition, pupils often discuss aspects of out-of-school-hours learning, transport links for young people in the community and anti-social behaviour by young people in the school community.

51   An analysis of grades awarded to secondary schools inspected between September 2006 and July 2007 for part of key question 6 is shown in the chart below. This question is not exclusively about pupil participation.

Do leaders and managers seek out and take account of the views of pupils, staff and other interested parties?

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
30%	47%	21%	2%	0%

52   The chart shows that leaders and managers in many schools take good account of the views of pupils, staff and other interested parties. In schools with outstanding features, headteachers develop a culture of participation in the school, where everyone feels valued. Inspection reports increasingly show that pupils are involved in self-evaluation.

53   Very few schools fail to respond to the views of pupils. These schools have not prioritised pupil participation and have not developed the school council in line with the regulations. These schools do not have a whole-school ethos where the participation of pupils is valued.

Use of the www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk website

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54   The Welsh Assembly Government website, www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk , aims to support the development of school councils. The professionals and governors section of this website provides 'information and support materials for adults who are involved in helping to set up and develop a school council'. It has been available since September 2006 and is still being developed.

55   The Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned a separate report on the impact of increased participation in schools that took part in the second phase of the Welsh Assembly Government's pilot of the School Councils Project. This report only comments on the use of the website and its impact on improving the ways school councils work.

56   Teachers responsible for school councils in about half of the schools surveyed are aware of the website, but less than a third have used it. Only two of the teachers surveyed are using the website well and have accessed the training materials and case studies.

57   Less than 15 secondary schools across Wales have registered with the website. Schools do not need to register in order to use the site, but they cannot use its interactive features.

58   No teachers or governors have used the forum on the website since it was created in January 2007. Similarly, no pupils have used the forum on their section of the website since it was created in May 2007.

59   Teachers do not need resources to support the establishment or development of their school council as most were in place before the regulations came into force.

60   There are not enough resources for councils that are already well-established, and where the mechanics of running a school council are familiar. Specifically, the guidance does not focus enough on the benefits of participation and how to focus the work of school councils on teaching and learning and improving standards in education.

61   Most teachers that have used the website feel that it is easy to use, and find the case studies are the most useful part of the resource. However there are not enough case studies for councils which are advanced in their development, specifically those which describe the difficulties of having a significant impact on the process of making more challenging decisions in schools. Schools would benefit from case studies on:

- the challenges of the pupil governor role and how to address them;

- how to overcome teacher apprehensiveness about using pupil feedback on teaching and learning; and

- effective processes for setting up school councils to ensure ownership by all pupils and not just the few involved.

62   Teachers and pupils in almost all schools value learning from other schools. However, the 'Links to School Council websites' page on the website provided no links at the time the survey was carried out in October 2007.

Appendix: Young people's participation in decision-making

Work-based learning

Most work-based learning providers arrange useful induction programmes that help learners settle into their programmes quickly. Learners often complete brief questionnaires at different stages of their training to provide staff with their views on the quality of training and learning experiences. However, too few learners have enough opportunity to get involved in decision-making on issues which affect their lives.

Youth support services

Nearly all local authority areas inspected this year work hard to make sure that young people receive information about, and contribute to, decision-making processes at all levels. Young people are involved in day-to-day planning at the projects they attend, and are also involved in longer term planning for developing services for young people such as sexual health services. This has led to increased commitment to and understanding of involving young people by council members and senior local authority officers.

Further education

Leaders and managers in further education (FE) make good use of a range of methods such as questionnaires, surveys and focus groups to listen to the views of learners. These results are analysed and used to plan improvements. For example, changing the timing to avoid bunching assignments at certain times of the term.

All FE colleges have student representatives on the governing body. In a few cases this works very well, especially when the student governor is an official of the student union. The best governing bodies make good use of this opportunity to listen to the views of learners. In the best examples, students contribute effectively to college development plans, policies and procedures. Course teams include student representatives, usually one from each year group. They attend meetings and contribute to discussions about how the course is delivered and how the course may be improved.

Increasingly learners are consulted about their preferred learning styles. However, the extent to which this influences teaching very much depends on the commitment of teachers. Preferred learning styles are used very well in a few departments, such as hairdressing and construction, where traditional teaching styles are often barriers to effective learning in any case.

Local authority education services

About half the local authorities inspected this year consult effectively with learners about its strategic priorities for education. In the best examples, leaders and managers involve young people in consultation relating to the Single Education Plan, school reorganisation and Learning Pathways 14-19 developments. Often local authorities use school councils and youth forums to reach service users.

However, a few local authorities consult only with headteachers and parents, rather than with pupils, regarding decisions that affect young people's education.

Initial teacher education

Most providers of initial teacher training provide trainees with good information about the content and the requirements for their training course. They provide good opportunities at different stages of the course for trainees to report their views about the quality of the training and the relevance of the course material. In many cases, trainees do this through questionnaire responses and in discussion groups. In most cases, teacher-training providers invite trainee representatives to sit on university decision-making groups. Overall, teacher training providers take good account of trainees' views. They use the information well to adapt the content and structure of courses.