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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

The impact of RAISE funding:
an interim report

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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 Jobcentre plus.

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.

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Introduction

1   In April 2006, the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills announced plans to release £32 million of funding over two school years to raise the level of performance of disadvantaged pupils. This is known as the grant to 'raise attainment and individual standards in education' (RAISE).

2   The Welsh Assembly Government sent a letter to all local education authorities (LEAs) giving details of the schools selected to receive the grant. They based the selection on a free school meal entitlement of 20% and above. Selected schools also had to have 50 or more pupils of statutory school age. The letter identified the grant each school would receive in 2006-2007.

3   The Welsh Assembly Government asked schools to prepare two-year plans for the use of the grant and to agree the proposed use of the funding with their LEA and with the Welsh Assembly Government. They also provided a list of eligible uses of the funding and a set of criteria against which they would evaluate each bid.

4   Following the announcement of the RAISE programme, the Welsh Assembly Government's remit to Estyn for 2006-2007 was amended to ask Estyn to build on the work in 2005-2006 on underperformance in secondary schools and to extend this work to primary schools. Estyn was asked specifically to evaluate the extent to which schools that receive the RAISE grant are working with their LEAs to promote the Assembly's social justice agenda, by addressing the link between socio-economic disadvantage and underachievement. In undertaking this work, Estyn was to work with LEAs to evaluate the effectiveness of their work to challenge and support schools that receive RAISE funding.

5   This report focuses on the early stages of the RAISE initiative, including planning and establishing processes for managing the grant. Future reports will judge the impact of projects on pupils' attainment and achievement.

6   This report is based on visits made by inspectors between October 2006 and February 2007 to:

- 27 primary schools;

- 10 secondary schools;

- three special schools; and

- eight LEAs.

7   Inspectors reviewed the initial work of the schools in:

- planning projects and producing an action plan;

- managing projects and using the grant; and

- establishing processes to monitor and evaluate RAISE projects.

8   Inspectors reviewed the role of the LEAs in:

- monitoring and evaluating the schools' action plans;

- coordinating the activities of schools, within and between LEAs; and

- establishing processes to monitor and evaluate the impact of the grant.

Main findings

9   Most of the schools visited have set up a range of useful projects, but few of them are innovative. The introduction of the RAISE initiative gave too little time for schools to plan and criteria for evaluating school plans were not provided soon enough.

10   The primary schools visited have concentrated mainly on projects for raising standards of pupils' literacy and numeracy. The secondary schools have focused on improving pupils' literacy and attitudes, while providing a wider curriculum for older pupils.   Projects in the three special schools visited are designed to broaden the range of experiences available for their pupils.

11   Most of the schools linked their RAISE action plans effectively to their school development plan. Around a half of schools took into account the priorities set out in the 'Learning Country: Vision into Action' when writing their plans, but few consulted widely enough with a range of partners.

12   Most of the schools have a clear picture of the link between socio-economic disadvantage and underachievement. However, a few secondary schools used performance data instead of disadvantage as the main criterion for selecting pupils to take part in projects.

13   The majority of the schools have established clear baselines for measuring progress in pupil attainment and achievement, although this is more effective and widespread in primary schools. Nearly all schools use a wide variety of data to measure pupils' progress and many have set realistic and challenging targets for their pupils.

14   Most of the schools manage their projects well and many primary and secondary schools provide opportunities for staff to train and develop new skills or resources.

15   The majority of schools have established procedures for evaluating the project. Many of the schools have not planned thoroughly enough to sustain the benefits of projects when RAISE funding is discontinued, although this aspect of planning is better in special schools.

16   Initially, too little financial assistance was provided for LEAs to carry out the additional work of coordinating, supporting, monitoring and evaluating the initiative. Funding has now been provided to lead local authorities in four regions to set up coordination arrangements. Progress in clarifying and establishing the role of regional coordinator varies too much across Wales. Generally, LEAs are not working closely enough with schools to coordinate activities within and between LEAs.

17   Nearly all of the LEAs visited are monitoring their schools' RAISE action plans and offering schools support, challenge and advice. The evaluation role of LEAs is under-developed and only a few of the LEAs have encouraged schools to set up baselines to measure pupils' attainment, achievement and progress.

18   Although it is too early to judge the impact of projects on pupils' attainment and achievement, most pupils are responding positively to the opportunities provided for them.

Recommendations

19   All schools that receive RAISE funding should:

R1   evaluate RAISE projects thoroughly and integrate successful strategies into mainstream teaching and learning;

R2   use a full range of data to track the progress of individual pupils on projects, relative to a well-established baseline;

R3   consult more widely with partners in developing RAISE projects;

R4   develop RAISE projects creatively to tackle the effects of disadvantage; and

R5   plan to sustain the benefits of projects when RAISE funding is discontinued, for example, by training staff in new teaching and learning approaches.

20   All local education authorities and regional coordinators should:

R6   enable schools to share good practice and work together;

R7   monitor and evaluate projects more carefully;

R8   support and challenge schools to set targets, measure progress and evaluate more thoroughly; and

R9   provide more guidance and training to help staff to sustain the benefits of projects when RAISE funding is discontinued.

21   The Welsh Assembly Government should:

R10   consider how best to support schools and local education authorities in implementing the initiative and in developing the role of regional coordinators.

Emerging findings

Primary schools

Planning projects and action plans

22 Nearly all of the primary schools visited have introduced projects that are designed to improve the numeracy and literacy, in English or Welsh, of a targeted group of pupils from across the age range. A variety of other projects include setting up after-school clubs, improving attendance, developing pupils' critical thinking skills, and team building. A few schools have used the Welsh Assembly Government list of eligible activities to set up new projects, but most have used the list to confirm the suitability of their existing, established ideas for programmes.

23 Most of the schools show enthusiasm for the opportunities presented by the RAISE grant. They take a positive attitude and are determined to realise their vision of success.

24 Most schools have fully involved all staff in selecting and planning the projects to be undertaken. New work has been closely related to schools' development plans and links well with strategies already in place. Around a half of schools referred to the 'Learning Country: Vision into Action' when they were writing their action plans.

25 Most of the schools have not consulted widely in deciding on their projects, other than to discuss their plans with cluster schools or the LEA.   A few schools have been active in leading in-service training for other schools.

Managing provision

26 The primary schools visited have a clear view of the link between disadvantage and underachievement. Most have identified suitable groups of children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to take part in their projects. They have identified particularly those disadvantaged pupils 'who do not come to school ready to learn', 'who get no assistance at home' and for whom 'school represents their only place of stability'.

27 Nearly all of the schools have used a range of tests to help them to target groups of the disadvantaged pupils who would benefit most from intervention. A few schools have used specific criteria, for example, for targeting pupils who:

- have a reading age six months behind their chronological age;

- are not on the special needs register but are already benefiting from extra funding; and

- could with additional support attain level 4 at the end of key stage 2.

28 A few of the schools have been flexible in selecting pupils, as their projects have developed. If, after careful assessment, pupils have shown enough progress, they are removed from the target group and replaced by other pupils who can benefit.

29   The majority of the schools visited have used funding to employ extra teachers or learning support assistants to support the groups of target pupils. However, most schools do not have a clear strategy for sustaining the benefits of this new provision in the long term, other than to incorporate the additional costs into the school budget if possible. This is a significant shortcoming in their planning for sustaining the benefits of the RAISE grant.

30   Headteachers in a few of the schools have planned for sustaining the long-term benefits of the projects by building on:

- the increased teacher expertise and knowledge of a wider range of innovative teaching and learning strategies, some developed through action research, including extending pupils' critical thinking skills and taking account of pupils' individual learning styles;

- the greater involvement of parents and other members of the community in school life; and

- the improved and increased resources.

31   Headteachers in most schools manage the overall programme well and members of staff take responsibility for individual projects. Many schools have strong management structures and good communication links, especially between class teachers and the learning support assistants who are supporting the target groups of pupils.   In the best practice, all staff involved in the projects meet regularly to plan work thoroughly.

32   Many schools fully support staff in their preparation of new teaching and learning materials and have established strong support networks for new staff. Most of these schools offer staff opportunities for training and a few provide extra non-contact time for staff or buy new resources.

33   Most schools have informed all interested groups of these developments but a few have not fully informed parents of new arrangements that affect their children.

34   In the schools visited, many pupils enjoy most aspects of their new work. They know how well they are doing and know how they can improve. They behave well and develop extended vocabulary, including one outstanding example, in which pupils use and understand terms such as 'facilitator' and 'quality checker' in connection with their group work.

Monitoring and evaluation

35   Many of the schools have established clear baselines against which to measure pupil progress. Others, however, have given too little consideration to this and as a result will find difficulty in accurately measuring pupil progress.

36   Almost all schools use a wide variety of tests and other assessment material to monitor pupils' attainment and achievement. Many schools assess pupils on a regular basis and this feature is a significant strength of these schools' arrangements.

37   Many schools have established clear targets for improvement for the class as a whole and for individual pupils. These are set on a weekly or longer-term basis and, in a small number of cases, pupils help through discussion to set their own targets. Other schools, however, have given too little thought to setting targets, even although they have enough data and information available to them to do so.

38   Most schools have good self-evaluation systems and are able to make sound evaluative judgements about the progress of their RAISE projects. In a few schools this is a particular strength. One or two schools have not established formal evaluation processes for their projects.

Secondary schools

Planning projects and action plans

39   Nearly all of the secondary schools visited have set up projects which cover the full age range of pupils. In nearly all schools, the activities relate closely to the school's development plan. In a few cases, the schools have addressed issues identified in recent school inspection reports. Most schools used the Welsh Assembly Government eligibility list to confirm projects they had already selected.

40   In key stage 3 and 4, many of the projects relate to improving pupils' attendance, behaviour, attitudes and literacy. In addition, in key stage 4, most schools provide opportunities for pupils to experience an extended curriculum or an increased range of qualifications. In a minority of cases, schools have used the grant to fund a learning coach.

41   In nearly all of the schools, the headteacher and senior staff produced the RAISE action plan. The plans are generally of a good standard. There are strong features in the planning of two of the schools visited. In one, the school plan met the Welsh Assembly Government criteria, fully reflecting the priorities of the school and recognising the background of the pupils. In another, the school surveyed pupils and used their ideas to help write the plan. Other schools have suitably involved the governing body or their team of LEA advisers.

42   However, only about half of the action plans scrutinised show clearly enough how pupils' performance will be tracked and evaluated. In the other plans, there is little or no indication of how the school is intending to carry out its monitoring and evaluation, even when the headteacher could explain this orally.

43   Around a half of schools referred to the 'Learning Country: Vision into Action' in producing their action plans. These schools tended to be the ones whose plans feature the role of learning coach and the importance of individual learning pathways.

44   Only a few schools have consulted with a full range of partners such as the local learning network, local colleges, Careers Wales companies and other schools. Many schools, however, held discussions with one or two of these bodies.

Managing provision

45   Most of the schools visited have a clear understanding of the link between disadvantage and underachievement. Procedures for selecting pupils for participation in projects have been varied. Nearly all school have used a wide range of data to identify pupils' needs, but only about a half used disadvantage as the main factor for selecting pupils. However, because of the socio-economic context of the schools, nearly all the selected pupils are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

46   Most of the schools have used the RAISE grant to employ new teachers or learning support assistants. If they retain these staff beyond the end of the programme, the costs will fall on the school budget. Only a few schools have planned to sustain the benefits of projects after the RAISE funding is discontinued. A few schools have planned to sustain the benefits of projects by building up staff expertise, buying resources that support new teaching strategies, and developing lasting partnerships with others.

47   In nearly all schools, the headteacher or deputy headteacher has taken responsibility for managing the RAISE programme. In a minority of schools, their vision has contributed significantly to the success of implementing the RAISE projects. In a minority of schools, it is not clear enough how the operational management of the RAISE projects is linked to the work of senior school managers.

48   In around a half of schools, members of staff receive effective professional development through in-service training days and after-school sessions. A minority of schools have arranged time for staff to prepare schemes of work or develop new resources.

49   Nearly all schools have kept all interested groups fully informed of the RAISE projects, especially governing bodies and the whole staff. A minority has communicated sensitively with parents. In one good example, the school has engaged parents who had previously been reluctant partners with the school. To do this, teachers visited parents at home and in the local community.

50   Overall, there is a lack of innovative and creative projects. Most schools have developed existing or planned projects. These were projects that were either well established or had already been planned but had not progressed because of lack of funding. Only a few schools introduced new teaching and learning strategies or offered increased flexibility for pupils to follow activities out of school hours, for example.

51   In most schools, pupils are well supported, greatly value their new courses and know where they can go for help. They show increased confidence and realise the importance of regular attendance. In one school, all pupils have a plan for their future and their attendance has reached new high levels. In another school, boys are able to describe the benefit of new teaching and learning strategies. In a few schools, the attitude of the selected pupils remains negative and they see projects as one-off activities rather than a means of successful re-integration into mainstream education.

52   Almost no school was aware of the role of the regional coordinator at the time of the visits.

Monitoring and evaluation

53   Most of the schools visited use data widely and have well-established systems for tracking pupils' progress. A majority have also established clear baselines from which to measure the progress of the pupils involved in RAISE projects. In a few schools, data is not used carefully enough to assess pupils' progress. These schools often focus too much on qualitative measures related to attitude and behaviour, without assessing progress in attainment and achievement.

54   Many of the schools have set targets for their pupils, although, in a small number of schools, there are no targets for individual pupils and targets relate exclusively to whole groups or classes.

55   Around a half of the schools have well-structured procedures for evaluating the success of the projects.   Most of the other schools are monitoring RAISE projects, but rely on anecdotal evidence only or have not set up thorough systems to report progress to senior managers.

Special schools

Planning projects and action plans

56   In the three special schools visited, nearly all the projects:

- focus appropriately on extending pupils' experiences through, for example, work placements;

- develop out-of-hours or outdoor learning;

- offer opportunities for pupils to achieve success; or

- provide pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with opportunities to interact with a wider range of people.

Managing provision

57   Two of the three special schools visited are implicitly aware of the relationship between disadvantage and underachievement, but only one school targeted disadvantaged pupils specifically. In another school, the link between disadvantage and underachievement is not well understood and the selection of pupils for the projects is not focussed on disadvantage.

58   Most senior managers consulted with their staff before planning projects and established close links with outside bodies. One school created an innovative steering group of representatives from a range of agencies. It has linked RAISE projects very effectively with other initiatives such as 'Physical Education and Sport in Schools' and Dragon Sport.

59   Two of the schools have made plans to ensure that projects can continue when RAISE funding is discontinued. One school has established effective procedures to ensure that the benefits from the project continue.

60   It has:

- set up a structured training programme to develop expertise amongst existing staff;

- created extensive and strong partnerships; and

- purchased equipment to use over several years.

61   However, another school has only planned for one year and only one school has provided staff with time to develop new skills or resources.

Monitoring and evaluation

62   All of the schools note pupils' progress efficiently either by regular monitoring of individual education plans or through using detailed tracking proformas. However, none of the schools has established meaningful baselines or set individual targets for pupils.

Welsh Assembly Government and local education authorities

Monitoring of action plans

63   Most of the LEAs visited are positive about the RAISE initiative, although the timescales for producing action plans were short and the Welsh Assembly Government did not provide evaluation criteria for accepting school plans soon enough.

64   Initially, no additional resources were provided for LEAs to carry out the additional work related to supporting, monitoring and evaluating the initiative, over and above their usual role with schools. £50,000 has now been provided to lead local authorities in four regions to set up coordination arrangements for the school year 2006-2007. A significant degree of freedom has been given to the regional groups to define the role of regional coordinator. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this strategy.

65   Nearly all of the LEAs reacted quickly when they received notification of the grant and informed schools immediately by email or letter. A few LEAs held meetings with the headteachers of the schools which had been awarded RAISE funding. Overall, LEAs gave schools as long as possible to complete their action plans.

66   Schools had to submit their action plans to the Welsh Assembly Government for approval. Nearly all LEAs offered schools good support in evaluating and modifying their action plans and bids. In one LEA, the RAISE coordinator provided strong strategic direction for the work of the schools. The funding allowed a few LEAs to work with schools that they considered difficult to influence. In most cases, advisers know their schools well. They reviewed the plans carefully and discussed suggested changes with headteachers.

67   Nearly all of the LEAs considered the action plans carefully and supported the development of projects which would make a difference to disadvantaged pupils. One LEA provided a clear guidance document to help schools to write their plans.

The majority of LEAs appropriately compared RAISE plans with the schools' development plans. Only a minority of LEAs referred to the 'Learning Country: Vision into Action' for guidance or compared schools' RAISE plans with strategic documents such as annual network development plans. A few also used the Welsh Assembly Government criteria for evaluation, when these became available.

68 Most LEAs gave good advice to schools whose plans lacked detail. Advisers either emailed or re-visited these schools, but not all headteachers responded and re-wrote their plans thoroughly enough. Many LEAs ensure that action plans contain a clear identification of baselines against which to measure progress, as this is the main shortcoming in most schools' initial plans. One LEA has not been thorough enough in insisting on the inclusion of baseline data. The majority of LEAs suitably evaluate how schools select groups of pupils to be involved in different projects, but other LEAs do not challenge schools enough about this.

69 The Welsh Assembly Government divided action plans into three categories. Category 1 meant that the proposals were acceptable and required no significant amendment. Nearly all LEAs worked closely with schools whose plans were placed in category 2 (acceptable but required some amendment) or 3 (unacceptable). In one LEA, this was an outstanding feature. The senior adviser took personal responsibility for supporting the redrafting of these plans. Another LEA rang all schools whose plan was in category 2 and invited headteachers of all schools whose plan was in category 3 to a discussion.

70 Throughout the time the plans were written and evaluated, all LEAs have taken appropriate care to remain in close contact with schools. In most authorities, link officers have discussed the plans regularly with headteachers. One senior officer has written a series of informative letters to schools and, in another LEA, the RAISE coordinator has visited every school receiving funding.

Coordination, support and challenge

71 During the planning stage, the Welsh Assembly Government provided too little time for LEAs and schools to think about planning innovative projects. Once schools have established a programme of activities, LEAs have found it difficult to encourage them to adopt new, creative approaches, especially when the school's plan has been approved by the Welsh Assembly Government.

72 All of the LEAs visited have supported schools in introducing their projects to varying degrees. One LEA has only held an initial meeting to emphasise the importance of tracking data and outcomes. Another has set up a series of initiatives which many schools 'buy into' using their RAISE funding. Others are using their existing adviser and cluster links. However, most LEAs do not have a comprehensive strategy to coordinate the activities of schools, even where several schools have adopted similar projects, on, for example, literacy or numeracy.

Monitoring and evaluation

73 Most LEAs have not yet developed a clear strategy for monitoring and evaluating the impact of schools' RAISE projects. One LEA visited has provided its advisers with a thorough checklist for their monitoring visits to schools. Most LEAs plan for link

advisers to monitor the projects as part of their normal programme of school visits, using school self-evaluation and data, but they did not always use RAISE-specific criteria. Overall, most LEAs have given too little consideration to this aspect of their role.

74 Few LEAs have sufficiently encouraged schools to set up rigorous baselines against which teachers can assess the progress made by pupils involved in RAISE projects. One LEA has established a useful self-evaluation development programme for schools. However, overall, only a few LEAs are monitoring how well schools are evaluating RAISE projects.

75 Each regional group or consortium of local authorities has appointed at least one RAISE co-ordinator by March 2007. However, progress in clarifying and establishing the role of the coordinator varies greatly across Wales. One consortium has produced a clear action plan that involves linking schools that are involved in similar projects. This plan also gives details of a coordinated training programme and arrangements for sharing good practice between all schools in the consortium, not only those schools receiving RAISE funding. Overall, however, LEAs are not working closely enough with schools to coordinate activities within and between LEAs.