

Local government

Summary

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National school survey results 2006

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

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

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Introduction to the school survey

- 1 The Audit Commission's School 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 (LEA) 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 but two local councils in England and Wales have participated at least once – both these councils maintain only one school each.
 - 4 Only six^{II} councils in Wales opted to take part in this year's survey,^{III} resulting in the survey being available to 612 schools; 248 chose to respond, an overall response rate of 41 per cent. Only 28 of these responses came from secondary schools (11 per cent). The survey was open for six weeks during the summer term of the 2005/06 academic year.
 - 5 This summary report examines the responses from schools across the six councils in Wales to the questions in the survey, which cover six areas; local authority strategy, support for school improvement, facilitating access to services, access and promoting social inclusion, special educational needs (SEN) and Welsh-medium education.
 - 6 Schools were able to answer 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.
- ^{II} This low participation rate reflects the agreement by local authorities in Wales that they will take part in larger numbers every two years, starting in 2007.
- ^{III} The 2006 School Survey was also open to schools in 131 councils in England, but as the two countries' surveys are becoming increasingly different, a separate summary has been produced for each.

The views of schools overall

- 7 Of the 78 questions in the survey, all 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 The most positively rated areas covered school improvement support, child protection, and the local authority's strategic planning and leadership from senior officers.
- 9 The most negatively rated areas covered the support for pupils with special needs through the medium of Welsh, the leadership provided by elected members, the school funding formula, school buildings and school places issues.

Areas on which schools gave their most positive ratings

- 10 The ten highest-rated items overall (most positively-rated first) were as follows:
 - Your local authority's support for literacy (Q B7).
 - The effectiveness of your local authority's support for child protection (Q D12).
 - The quality of payroll services (Q C4).
 - The quality of your local authority's financial information, including comparative data for schools (Q B13).
 - Your local authority's support to schools for using pupil performance data to secure school improvement (Q B14).
 - The effectiveness of the leadership provided by senior officers (Q A1).

The following items in the top ten were rated between satisfactory and good:

- Your local authority's support to develop self-management (including self-evaluation) in your school (Q B4).
- The quality of your local authority's strategic planning for school improvement (Q A4).
- The effectiveness of electronic communication between schools and the local authority (Q A14).
- Your local authority's effectiveness in challenging your school to perform better (Q B3).

Areas on which schools gave their most negative ratings

- 11** The lowest-rated items overall (most negatively-rated first) were as follows (it should be noted that all were rated between satisfactory and good):
- The effectiveness of the local authority's assessment of and provision for pupils with SEN through the medium of Welsh (Q W6).
 - The effectiveness of the leadership provided by elected members (Q A2).
 - The transparency of your local authority's asset management planning process (Q D2).
 - The quality of building maintenance services (Q C6).
 - The educational rationale behind the school funding formula (Q A9).
 - The extent to which schools influence local authority policies, plans and procedures (Q A7).
 - The effectiveness of your local authority's school place planning (Q D1).
 - Your local authority's support to make you an effective purchaser of traded services, whether from the local authority or from external providers (Q C2).
 - The effectiveness of your local authority's coordination of the admissions process (Q D3).
 - The effectiveness of your local authority's support for gifted and talented pupils (Q D6).

Changes over time

- 12** Of the 78 questions in the 2006 survey, all can be matched to a question in the previous year's survey, which was run in the summer of 2005. Fifty-three questions were rated more positively by schools in 2006; 25 rated more negatively.
- 13** **The top five improvements** (the most positive change listed first) were:
- The appropriateness of the provision for 14-19 education planned by the local authority and its partners (Q B16).
 - The effectiveness of behaviour support (Q E8).
 - The effectiveness of your local authority's support to schools in bidding for external grants (Q A10).

- The quality of your local authority's SEN strategy (Q E1).
- The effectiveness of your local authority's support for gifted and talented pupils (Q D6).

14 Top five deteriorations (the most negative change listed first) were:

- Your local authority's support for numeracy (Q B8).
- The effectiveness of your local authority's coordination of the admissions process (Q D3).
- The effectiveness of the local authority's assessment of and provision for pupils with SEN through the medium of Welsh (Q W6).
- The quality of the catering service (Q C9).
- The effectiveness of your local authority's communication with your school (Q A6).

The views of different types of school

- 15** The views of nursery and special schools have not been examined separately due to the low number of responses from both types of school.
- 16** Secondary schools gave their most positive rating to the effectiveness of the local authority's arrangements for securing access to Welsh-medium education (Q W1) and their most negative rating to the quality of building maintenance services (Q C6).
- 17** Primary schools gave their most positive rating to the local authority's support for literacy (Q B7) and their most negative rating to the effectiveness of the local authority's assessment of and provision for pupils with SEN through the medium of Welsh (Q W6).

 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.

For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:
Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ
Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421
www.audit-commission.gov.uk