

Foreword

Annual Report 2010-2011

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Foreword

This annual report is presented to the Minister for Education and Skills, who will also be setting it before the National Assembly for Wales for debate.

This is my second annual report and it is the first annual report that reflects on the findings from the first year of the new inspection cycle that began in September 2010. The report is based mainly on evidence from the inspections we completed during the 2010-2011 academic year. The report also draws on several surveys that we undertook during the same year. Most of these surveys were completed in response to requests made in the annual Ministerial remit to Estyn.

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The report is presented in a series of free-standing documents on our website.

In the main body of the report, I describe the progress being made across the education and training sectors in Wales. Another section summarises the main findings of our remit surveys. I also identify some of the insights gained from the inspection evidence we have gathered over the last academic year as well as issues that have been raised in pursuing some of the main lines of enquiry on inspections and in surveys HMI have undertaken. Finally, in a data report, I set out and comment on a series of charts to illustrate the outcomes of end-of-key-stage teacher assessments and external examination results.

The appendices to the annual report include charts that show the distribution of grades awarded in each sector we inspect as well as the grades awarded to all providers we have inspected.

This year, I have included appendices to the annual report that summarise responses to the learner and parent questionnaires that we circulate before inspections. The picture that emerges from their responses is largely positive. I also continue the practice of identifying case studies of best practice from the individual providers we inspected in 2010-2011. I hope that providers will take advantage of this showcasing to discuss and share the practice described with colleagues. I also hope that learners, parents and other readers find much that is useful and informative in these case studies as well as in the other sections of this report.

In this foreword I comment on some of the successes and challenges that have emerged from the inspection evidence we have gathered in 2010-2011. It is notable that several aspects of education and training have improved and a few individual providers have demonstrated sector-leading practice.

There are examples of excellence among the schools as well as among the other providers that Estyn inspects and these deserve to be used by others as exemplars. We describe these exemplars in the case studies section of the Estyn website.

The more general successes in the system include the roll-out of the **Foundation Phase** to all children aged three to seven years old. It is clear that the vast majority of children of this age enjoy engaging in the more exciting and varied activities being offered in the Foundation Phase and that this has resulted in improvements to their wellbeing, behaviour and physical development. Active learning approaches, in the classroom and the outdoors, help these children to become increasingly independent, confident and creative. They take part in play-based activities where they can ‘have a go’ and try things out without feeling pressure to get things right the first time. As a result they persevere with activities for longer and attempt new things more readily.

Many boys in particular benefit from the regular opportunities to run, jump, balance, climb, explore and experiment, which are common features of the Foundation Phase. In most schools, the Foundation Phase provides rich contexts and motivating opportunities for children to learn to read and write. However, in a minority of schools and settings, there is not enough direct teaching of reading and writing. It will not be until the next annual report that we can report on the full range of achievements of the national cohort that will by then have completed their four years in the Foundation Phase.

Wellbeing is a significant feature of the new inspection framework and the evidence overall suggests that standards of wellbeing in schools and in other providers are high. Learners’ wellbeing is good or better in nearly all non-maintained settings, schools and post-16 settings inspected.

We invite learners to comment on their experience of education in response to a questionnaire. Nearly all pupils who have responded, in both primary and secondary schools, say that they feel safe in school and that they know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset. Nearly all say that the school teaches them how to be healthy and most pupils say that they have lots of opportunities for exercise. Nearly all learners in post-16 settings say that they enjoy learning and feel safe and free from harassment in their learning or work placements. However, despite this generally positive picture, there has been little improvement in school attendance levels and bullying remains a concern for too many young people and their families.

While levels of wellbeing are generally good and the provision in the Foundation Phase is proving to be stimulating, there remains much to be done to improve education more generally in Wales. Examination and teacher-assessment results continue to improve year-on-year, but not as quickly as in other home countries, and key indicators, such as the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics, are improving too slowly.

Performance in four-fifths of primary schools and two-thirds of secondary schools inspected is good. However, we identified around 25% of schools as needing follow-up visits by Estyn, including 5% that are causing serious concern. A further 20% gained largely 'good' inspection judgements, but have one or more important areas for improvement. We ask local authorities to report back to us in detail on the progress made by these schools.

We judged performance to be good overall in only two **local authorities** inspected this year. Five of the seven authorities inspected require follow-up. Three authorities were only adequate, one in need of significant improvement and one is in special measures.

Standards vary too much across the post-16 providers we inspected this year. Although standards were good in six of the eight work-based learning settings inspected, they ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory in the four further education institutions and from excellent to adequate in the three adult community learning providers.

We identified strengths in many aspects of provision in 2010-2011, but there are also several areas for development that require action if we are to improve standards. We focus more sharply on learners' **skills** in the current cycle of inspections, especially on literacy skills. Unless learners have appropriate levels of **literacy** they cannot read well enough to keep up in their lessons. Later on, they cannot progress to higher levels of education or training or make a full contribution to their community and the economy. In last year's annual report I said that, despite achieving some progress in improving literacy during the previous six years, Wales still has problems of low-level literacy. This is still the case.

In a survey that we undertook this year, we found that 20% of pupils enter secondary school with a reading age below nine years and six months, which is generally considered the level of functional literacy, and a further 20% have a reading age that is between six and 18 months below their age. In secondary school, these pupils do not always catch up. It is also a concern that only 17% are identified nationally, in teacher assessments of reading at the end of their primary school education, as not achieving the expected level. This figure seems too low.



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In most primary or secondary schools, standards of writing are lower than those of reading and pupils' writing skills are not well developed. Few write at length in subjects other than English or Welsh first language. In the best schools, there is a systematic approach to developing pupils' literacy skills across all areas of the curriculum but, more commonly, improving pupils' literacy is not central enough to the design of the school curriculum.

Cross-curriculum planning is weak in most schools. Teachers plan the curriculum on the basis of the requirements of National Curriculum subjects, without thinking enough about how subjects, such as history or science, can be a context for pupils to develop literacy or numeracy or information and communication technology skills. Most schools ask teachers to map where they cover aspects of literacy in lessons, but few plan in detail how to develop and reinforce skills across the whole curriculum. Only a few secondary schools start with a plan to develop skills and then apply that plan consistently to underpin all subjects. In these schools, teachers work together to agree how they will develop specific skills and reinforce them in subject and themed lessons across year groups.

Too often, as with literacy, neither learners' **numeracy** skills nor their ability to speak **Welsh second language** are well developed outside mathematics or Welsh lessons respectively. Only a minority of schools plan to develop numeracy systematically across the curriculum. As a result, pupils often do not apply the numeracy skills that they have acquired in mathematics lessons confidently in other areas of the curriculum. In many English-medium secondary schools, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to improve their ability to use Welsh other than in Welsh lessons, and there are too few extra-curricular opportunities for them to practise their Welsh.

Co-ordinating the delivery of skills systematically across different subjects requires leaders and managers to establish whole-school approaches to teaching and learning and a common understanding of how to improve skills. This is not happening methodically in most schools at present. In-school variation in standards and in the quality of **teaching and learning** is a common feature in most schools. Even where a school is judged 'good' overall, there are often individual lessons or departments where the quality of teaching or learning is poor.

While it is difficult to make a simple comparison between the grades awarded in the previous cycle and the judgements made in the current cycle of inspections, there has been a significant drop in the proportion of 'excellent' or 'outstanding' teaching being identified.

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In the last inspection cycle, lesson observations focused largely on teaching and learning in National Curriculum subjects. We now focus much less on subject content and more on how teachers adapt their material to meet the needs of all learners and how they improve learners' literacy and numeracy skills. We also expect teachers to plan lessons to remedy gaps in what pupils have understood.

Different groups of pupils need to have their distinctive learning needs treated differently. Once identified, these learners need specific and discrete support to help them to achieve their potential. However, we are finding that provision and delivery are generally not differentiated or targeted carefully enough to meet their needs. This is apparent in schemes of work and is characteristic of too many of the lessons we have observed. While the less able pupils are often well supported, not enough is done to design activities and tasks that will stretch other groups, notably the more able.

Managers do not always make sure that teachers develop and use the skills required to plan work that will meet the needs of different groups of pupils, particularly when teaching mixed-ability classes.

Too often, in schools and in post-16 institutions, teachers' marking does not help learners understand how well they are doing in enough detail to let them know how to improve their work. Although assessment policies seem sound, teachers do not always apply them consistently.

Many of the weaknesses I have identified above can be traced back to failures of **leadership**. There is a strong link between outcomes, provision, and leadership and management. Where leaders and managers are making sure that whole-school policies and procedures are being applied consistently, this reflects positively in the provision and in the standards pupils achieve. It is usually because there are some weaknesses in the work of leaders and managers that schools are found to need follow-up monitoring by Estyn.

The quality of leadership and management is a main driver for improvement. **Self-evaluation** is only fully effective where leaders and managers can identify priorities for improvement because they monitor provision and assess outcomes robustly. But few schools analyse data rigorously enough to identify gaps in the progress of specific underperforming groups such as looked-after children or those from minority-ethnic groups. Generally, providers do not use tracking systems well enough to identify the full range of underachievement.

In a third of primary schools and a fifth of secondary schools, there are shortcomings in the way that quality is monitored and improved. This is usually where senior managers:

- carry out lesson observations that focus too much on what the teacher is doing rather than on what pupils have learnt;
- do not scrutinise learners' work systematically;
- do not analyse data rigorously or use the findings well enough to plan for improvement;
- do not identify areas for development clearly and honestly in self-evaluation reports;
- do not take action to address identified shortcomings or set challenging targets; or
- do not offer support and training for teachers that are sharply tailored to meet their specific needs.

In many schools, **governors** provide effective support to the headteacher and are actively involved in setting the direction for their school. However, in around a quarter of primary and secondary schools, governors are not given the information they need or do not use it well enough to hold the school to account. In schools, if governors are to carry out their role effectively, they need to be able to compare how their school is performing against others in their family of schools, which face similar challenges. They also need to visit the school, be involved in its work and find out as much as they can about it. In schools where governors are armed with information, they can engage in robust and challenging dialogue.

Leaders and managers too need to address issues of **underperformance** more robustly and directly. Many primary and secondary schools have appropriate performance-management systems but not all schools make full use of them. In around a quarter of primary schools and a few secondary schools, senior managers do not tackle the underperformance of individual teachers. In some of the other sectors that we inspect, such as work-based learning, leaders and managers do not always analyse outcome data or take enough account of such data when assessing staff performance.

In many local authorities, a few schools have been allowed to underperform over a long period of time, mainly because authorities do not use the full range of their powers to improve schools quickly enough. In the majority of local authorities, officers do not evaluate the impact of new initiatives on learners' outcomes or give schools enough practical support. The stronger local authorities do give a sound school improvement service that targets underperformance and supports teachers well.

As part of our school inspection arrangements, we ask local authorities to provide a briefing to the inspection team on the school's work before inspection. These reviews do not always provide a robust analysis of the school's work and do not identify shortcomings clearly. This suggests that several local authorities do not know how well their schools are performing, although the stronger authorities know their schools well.

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More learners have progressed into **further education or training** in recent years. The further education sector has had varying degrees of success in working with local schools and other providers to increase the range of courses for learners, share resources and avoid duplication of provision. Progress towards achieving the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure has been excellent overall. However, there is still some inefficiency and duplication in the provision of courses in some areas. At the points when they choose options, and particularly at 16, learners do not always receive the highest-quality independent information, advice and guidance on the courses that are best for them.

Providers need to do more to attract learners into certain fields of study such as engineering, manufacturing technologies and business administration. They need to become more responsive to the needs of the local and wider economy, take more account of the labour market and improve links with employers across the full range of vocational areas in which they offer education and training.

To become more responsive to industry, providers need to improve their strategic planning. It is natural for providers to want to continue with the pattern of curriculum and courses they have established over time and this often meets most of the aspirations of the learners they enrol. However, providers do not always question whether they are adapting quickly enough to changing circumstances. For example, colleges do not monitor the enrolment rates of learners from deprived backgrounds – those who are in receipt of the education maintenance allowance – carefully enough to make sure that they are offering courses that will attract these young people.

In a survey of further education institutions that we undertook this year, we found that, on entry, around a fifth of learners were assessed at below level 1 in literacy while almost three-fifths were at level 1. Only around a quarter of learners were at level 2. Institutions offer a range of literacy support programmes. However, the majority of learners who need it do not take advantage of this support and, even when learners accept support, many further education institutions do not measure the impact of support programmes on the standards of learners' literacy.

A considerable proportion of schools and providers will get 'follow-up' inspections in 2011-2012. We visit those in special measures every term, and we will be monitoring the progress of the providers judged to require other Estyn follow-up activity about a year after their initial inspection. We will also liaise with local authorities after a year to review the progress of schools that gained largely 'good' inspection judgements in 2010-2011 but have one or more important areas for improvement. I look forward to reporting on the outcomes of this targeted and proportionate activity in next year's annual report.

In this foreword I have tried to highlight some strengths in those areas where we have seen real progress and to highlight some of the continuing challenges that face education and training in Wales. In doing this I hope that my annual report can contribute to a continuing national debate about how to go on improving standards in all sectors of education and training.



Ann Keane

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