



# Estyn

*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

## Impact of the Better Schools Fund on curriculum development

June 2008



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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## Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this advice is to provide the Welsh Assembly Government with an evaluation of the impact of the Better Schools Fund on developing a broad and balanced curriculum. The report includes a number of case studies in order to demonstrate different aspects of good practice.
- 2 The report is based on evidence gathered from:
  - the inspection of schools and local authority education services in Wales from September 2005 to August 2007;
  - an analysis of Better Schools Fund applications from all local authorities for the years 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009;
  - an analysis of documentation provided by local authorities and schools, including training programmes and course evaluations, school development plans and records from lesson observations;
  - interviews with officers responsible for school improvement, staff development and the management of the Better Schools Fund in six local authorities;
  - interviews with headteachers and other staff with responsibility for staff development from a representative sample of five secondary schools and five primary schools from across Wales; and
  - published reports on the Better Schools Fund by Estyn and the Wales Audit Office<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the Wales Audit Office published a report on the 'Administration of Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) and the Better Schools Fund'. This report recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government needed to consult earlier with local authorities about priorities for the Better Schools Fund; notify local authorities earlier about their funding allocation; improve the quality of local authority funding applications; and evaluate the impact of the funding better.

## Background

- 3 The Better Schools Fund provides targeted grant support for local authorities to help them to be innovative, share good practice and develop new initiatives to improve teaching, learning and the breadth of the curriculum. It supports the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for schools which is to:
  - provide high quality and inspirational teaching;
  - provide a broad and stimulating curriculum;
  - use assessment methods and targets which help learners to develop at their own pace; and
  - incorporate social inclusion, sustainable development, equal opportunities and bilingualism into all aspects of school life.
- 4 Each year the Better Schools Fund guidance identifies a number of activity areas and describes within these areas the priorities and types of initiatives which will be eligible for funding. In 2006-2007, the Welsh Assembly Government allocated £39.3m to the Better Schools Fund. This £39.3m included 60% grant and 40% contribution from local authorities. This amount was split between the activity areas of curriculum development, governor training, pupil support, additional learning needs, Iaith Pawb mewn Ysgolion and information and communications technology (ICT) in schools. In 2007-2008, the Welsh Assembly Government allocated £38.4m to the Better Schools Fund. This amount was split between basic skills and transition; revised curriculum and assessment arrangements; pupil support, welfare and health; inclusion; Iaith Pawb mewn Ysgolion; and ICT in schools.
- 5 The Better Schools Fund is targeted at work which supports the underlying themes of: developing and sharing good practice; promoting innovation; encouraging whole-school approaches and cross-curricular interventions; showing impact on teaching and learning; and collaboration across different local authorities and schools.
- 6 This report considers work within activity area 1C in 2006-2007 which supported innovation and initiatives in the areas of:
  - modern foreign languages;
  - physical education;
  - healthy schools schemes;
  - education for sustainable development and global citizenship;
  - cwricwlwm cymreig; and
  - Learning Pathways 14-19.

- 7 It also considers work within activity area 2C in 2007-2008 which supported innovation and initiatives in the areas of:
- staff familiarising themselves with the revised Orders and frameworks, and preparing schemes of work for Foundation Phase, key stage 2 and key stage 3;
  - the dissemination of good practice, and training to support greater emphasis, for teaching and assessing thinking and learning skills for learners aged 3-14;
  - the development of outdoor learning environments (in particular, for Foundation Phase);
  - specialist training and support for teachers in sex and relationships education; and
  - the development of innovative approaches to teaching science.
- 8 In 2007, in response to the recommendations of a Wales Audit Office report on the 'Administration of Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) and the Better Schools Fund 2006', the Welsh Assembly Government published guidance and information for the effective planning, management and evaluation of the Better Schools Fund Grant. This guidance provides good practice case studies in evaluating the impact of the Better Schools Fund activities. It also introduces a consistent and common format for the spending plans that local authorities need to submit to the Welsh Assembly Government.

## Main findings

- 9 The majority of Better Schools Fund resources for curriculum development are used on staff training and development. Although local authorities and schools monitor how schools use their funding and how useful staff find these training and development activities, they do not evaluate well how effective these activities are in developing the curriculum and improving outcomes for learners.
- 10 The Better Schools Fund is often used jointly with other resources such as funding for 14-19 Learning pathways, RAISE<sup>2</sup> or the transition grant to fund curriculum development activities. Also, the range of national priorities for curriculum development that are addressed through the Better Schools Fund is very broad. As a result of the breadth of priorities, the joint funding with other grants and the lack of focused evaluation, neither local authorities nor the Welsh Assembly Government know the impact of the Better Schools Fund on specific national priorities for curriculum development.
- 11 Overall, local authorities and schools organise a broad range of training and curriculum development activities using the Better Schools Fund. These activities address the national priorities identified in the Better Schools Fund guidance for curriculum development and include training, networking events, developing resources, conferences and targeted support for staff. Local authorities provide good information to schools on what training and development opportunities are available. In the best examples, the programme of training is planned in full consultation with schools.
- 12 In the majority of the schools visited, the leadership team uses their programme of classroom observations well to evaluate how whole school developments and training are improving classroom practice. This work allows them to evaluate the changes individual teachers make to how they plan and deliver the curriculum following whole school training. However, most schools do not know the impact of the Better Schools Fund on the school's curriculum or on outcomes for learners.
- 13 Between 2005 and 2007, the amount of joint curriculum development training that is arranged between different schools and different local authorities has increased. As a result, specialist expertise and good practice is shared more widely. However, the guidance and application process for the Better Schools Fund does not clearly promote better regional collaboration.
- 14 All local authorities do not use their analysis of needs and the success of previous curriculum development activity robustly enough to target support at those schools and learners who would benefit the most from it.
- 15 The Welsh Assembly Government does not collect appropriate monitoring information to be able to evaluate the impact of the Better Schools Fund in each local

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<sup>2</sup> The RAISE programme, (Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education in Wales), targets disadvantaged pupils and seeks to raise their levels of performance. Funding is targeted at schools where 20% or more of those pupils are eligible for free school meals (excluding schools with fewer than 50 pupils) and for learning support for looked after children.



authority or across Wales. In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government does not always identify the lack of analysis, focus on outcomes and prioritisation as shortcomings in funding applications during the assessment process, so they do not routinely require local authorities to make improvements.

## **Recommendations**

### **The Welsh Assembly Government should:**

- R1 reduce the range of priorities to be addressed within the Better Schools Fund guidance to allow greater local identification of needs and an increased emphasis on the key themes of sharing good practice and focusing on innovation, collaborative work and its impact on teaching;
- R2 develop a more robust reporting system to evaluate the impact of the Better Schools Fund on the quality of teaching and learning; and
- R3 use their assessments of funding applications to improve how well local authorities evaluate the impact of the Better Schools Fund.

### **Local authorities should:**

- R4 robustly evaluate the impact of the Better Schools Fund on broadening the curriculum and improving standards in teaching and learning across all schools;
- R5 target the Better Schools Fund activities more effectively towards curriculum areas, schools and pupils that are most in need of development; and
- R6 work with schools and other local authorities to plan a broad programme of continuous professional development activities in line with national and local priorities for curriculum development.

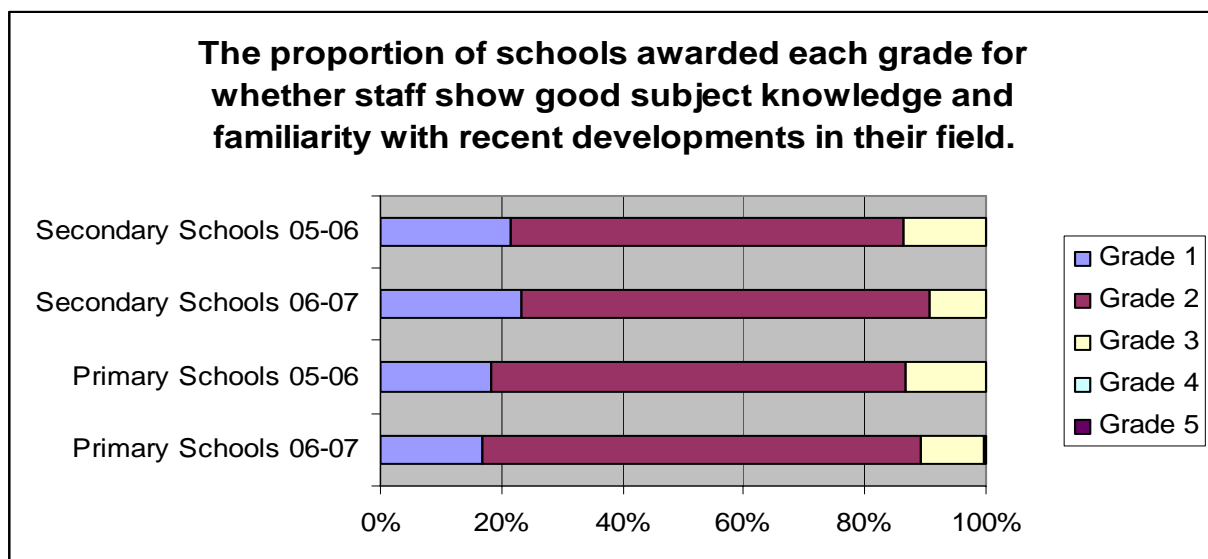
### **Schools should:**

- R7 identify greater opportunities for working collaboratively with other schools to arrange or purchase joint training; and
- R8 ensure that Better Schools Fund activities address identified whole school priorities for curriculum development and evaluate the impact of activities on these priorities and on outcomes for learners.

## The impact of the Better Schools Fund on curriculum development

- 16 The majority of Better Schools Fund resources for curriculum development are spent on staff training and development. The Welsh Assembly Government collects information on the numbers of training sessions provided and numbers of teachers trained using the Better Schools Fund. In 2006-2007, over 8,000 teachers were trained in curriculum developments relating to modern foreign languages, physical education, healthy schools schemes, global citizenship and sustainable development, 14-19 Learning Pathways and Cwricwlwm Cymreig. Of the teachers trained, only a fifth are from secondary schools. This imbalance is often due to local authority training initiatives targeting only one teacher from each school. As a result, a far greater proportion of primary school teachers across Wales are accessing curriculum development training funded through the Better Schools Fund than secondary school teachers.
- 17 Many schools use the Better Schools Fund to support curriculum leaders and other staff to keep up to date with new curriculum developments. For example, many local authorities have provided training to help staff prepare for the foundation phase. Overall, Estyn school inspections carried out between September 2005 and August 2007 have found that staff in many schools show good subject knowledge and familiarity with recent developments in their field.

**Chart 1: A breakdown of grades awarded in recent school inspections for how well staff show good subject knowledge and familiarity with recent developments in their field**



- 18 In all local authorities, the Better Schools fund is used appropriately to pilot curriculum development initiatives before developing practice across all schools. There are many good examples of the Better Schools Fund being used to support the development of resources which can be shared more widely including transition packs, folk dance materials and thinking skills resources. However, only a few curriculum development initiatives are targeted at schools or pupils most in need of

support. For example, one local authority targeted training and support for the Catch Up programme<sup>3</sup> at schools with poorer achievement in literacy and numeracy.

### **Case study 1**

#### **Action research initiative**

One local authority has run two initiatives aimed at developing thinking skills and assessment for learning across all schools. The assessment for learning initiative involved an internationally recognised educationalist working with 30 teachers in an action research initiative. Action research is research done in partnership by classroom teachers with a view to the ongoing improvement of their own practice. This initiative involved teachers in trialling new teaching strategies in the full range of school settings. The findings from the initiative were fed back to practitioners from across Wales at a conference. In the second initiative, teachers trialled a range of thinking skills strategies in schools. The teachers involved in both these initiatives meet regularly as a Learning Team and have shared resources with other schools such as lesson plans, case studies, posters and learning materials. Staff within schools are now more confident in teaching thinking skills, and opportunities to develop thinking skills are better planned in schemes of work. In one school visited, children were using more strategies when solving problems in mathematics as a result of the work on thinking skills.

- 19 Generally, staff judge that training and development activities funded by the Better Schools Fund are of good quality. In all the schools visited, staff were able to describe the difference that development activities had made to the quality of teaching and the breadth of curriculum on offer. Training had helped some schools broaden the range of curriculum subjects pupils could choose from at GCSE or A-level.

### **Case study 2**

#### **Embedding assessment and key skills in the history curriculum**

One comprehensive school had a team training day, for the history department, to work on assessment and the skills curriculum for year seven learners. As a result, staff revised the departmental schemes of work and assessment schedules. The team training day allowed the history department to share practice and to develop common lessons. This work has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and assessment is more embedded in the teaching and learning process.

- 20 Very few local authorities are able to show a clear link between the curriculum development initiatives undertaken using the Better Schools Fund and improvements in outcomes for learners. Many school development plans identify expected outcomes for learners, but achievement against these outcomes is not evaluated well. The Welsh Assembly Government does not know what impact Better Schools

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<sup>3</sup> The Catch Up programme is a structured programme of one-to-one teaching sessions for pupils who find literacy or numeracy difficult.

Fund curriculum development initiatives have on performance in national curriculum assessments or examination performance. In some cases, even after a number of years of sustained Better Schools Fund programmes, schools and local authorities have not achieved the intended outcomes for learners. For example, despite investment in the teaching of modern foreign languages in one cluster of primary schools, the number of learners opting to study modern foreign languages at key stage 4 has continued to reduce.

### **Case study 3**

#### **Continuity of teaching and learning in Years 6 and 7**

One cluster of schools pooled their funding to support the effective transition of learners between primary school and secondary school. This pooled funding enabled the schools to develop a specific programme on thinking and learning skills that was introduced in the primary schools and has been carried through into the partner secondary school.

The schools coordinated the necessary follow up work and monitoring to ensure that the training had an impact on learners and became embedded in the curriculum. A recent review of teaching and learning of Year 7 learners by the local authority's school improvement service identifies this work as outstanding practice that has helped to raise the achievement of learners, as well as transforming the teaching of the teachers involved. The outcomes of this programme are being shared throughout the authority and the process will be repeated in the future.

## **Management of the Better Schools Fund**

### **Administration of the Better Schools Fund by the Welsh Assembly Government**

- 21 The administration of the Better Schools Fund improved in 2007. The Welsh Assembly Government responded well to most of the recommendations from the report, in 2006, by the Wales Audit Office into the administration of the Better Schools Fund. In particular, the Welsh Assembly Government now produces standards to support the assessment of local authorities' spending plans and practical guidance on the evaluation of the impact of the Better Schools Fund for local authorities and schools. In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government now consults better with local authorities on this guidance than in previous years.
- 22 The funding applications submitted by local authorities still vary widely in quality. Applications are overly wordy and do not focus enough on robust analysis of needs to identify the key local priorities for curriculum development. In addition, funding applications do not identify clearly enough the expected outcomes for learners. The Welsh Assembly Government does not always identify the lack of analysis, focus on outcomes and prioritisation in funding applications during the assessment process, so they do not routinely require local authorities to make improvements.
- 23 The Better Schools Fund supports too many different curriculum development priorities from national policies for education and training. For example, within activity area 1C, curriculum development, in 2006-2007, there were six different eligible areas for activity. In addition, curriculum development appears as a priority in other activity areas such as basic skills and transition. As a result, schools and local authorities are confused about what resources they should use when planning curriculum development activities.
- 24 The Welsh Assembly Government does not require local authorities to submit an evaluation of the impact of the activities funded by the Better Schools Fund, including those to develop the curriculum. The annual bid form requires local authorities to plan how they will evaluate impact and asks what issues arose from the evaluation of the previous year's work. Local authorities submit bids for funding for the following year early in the autumn term which is before most of the current year's activity takes place. As a result, they are not able to evaluate the impact of the activity at that point.

### **Local authority and school planning**

- 25 All local authorities have a steering group of officers and representatives from schools that helps plan the Better Schools Fund programme. This group usually includes appropriate officers to identify local priorities for curriculum development. However, consultation between this group and schools is usually not early enough to allow the group to gain feedback from the other schools that are not represented. As a result, not all schools influence the planning for the Better Schools Fund.
- 26 Most local authorities require schools to submit an annual spending plan for the Better Schools Fund. However, these school plans vary widely in quality. In the best examples, the format for this spending plan helps schools to reflect appropriately on

their previous year's activities and show how planned activities link to curriculum development priorities in their school development plan. In the worst examples, local authorities ask schools to submit little more than how much they will spend in each activity area.

- 27 Many schools view the Better Schools Fund as funding for staff development. As a result, the programme of training and development in these schools responds too much to the needs of individual staff, rather than promoting whole school curriculum priorities and cross-curricular developments.
- 28 In many local authorities, there is a lack of clarity about the funding available for curriculum development. Local authorities and schools often combine Better Schools Funding with other grants including RAISE and the transition grant. As a result, local authorities and schools find it difficult to evaluate the impact of different grants on curriculum development.
- 29 All local authorities use their School Budget Forum<sup>4</sup> to agree how much of the Better Schools Fund will be delegated to schools. The proportion of the total Better Schools Fund delegated to schools ranges between 35% and 96% in different local authorities. The delegated funding, including funding for curriculum development, is usually distributed based on a formula which relates to the number of learners or staff in each school. As a result, delegated funding is not always targeted where it is most needed to support curriculum development.
- 30 Most local authorities retain a proportion of the Better Schools Fund centrally within the authority's budget in order to plan cross-county initiatives. Examples of good cross-county work on curriculum development include the teaching of thinking skills, assessment for learning and initiatives to ensure the continuity of the curriculum for learners during their transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3.
- 31 Most local authorities also develop a broad programme of training for staff in schools to support curriculum development. In one local authority, an analysis of training needs is completed annually by schools and the information from this analysis is used well to plan the programme of training courses. The training needs analysis asks schools to prioritise the continuous professional development needs of their staff. In addition, the authority asks schools for suggestions about the training that their staff will need in the following year. Although most local authorities collect a broad range of useful information on curriculum strengths and weaknesses in individual schools, a few local authorities do not make enough use of this information to identify and address training needs across all schools.
- 32 Local authorities promote curriculum development training well. Details of the training programme are often made available to staff through the local authority's website or through the distribution of CD Rom media. In all the local authorities visited, the range of courses was in line with the curriculum development priorities identified in Welsh Assembly Government's guidance on the Better Schools Fund.
- 33 Generally, the quality of support from local authorities for curriculum leaders in schools varies too much across Wales. In most local authorities, curriculum leaders

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<sup>4</sup> Schools Forums (Wales) Regulations 2003 required all local authorities to establish a School Budget Forum. Local authorities must consult the forum annually in setting their schools budget and on any revisions to their scheme for the financing of schools.

have good access to curriculum-related training but limited access to training and support to develop their leadership and management skills. As a result, many curriculum leaders have good subject knowledge but do not always feel confident in leading curriculum developments across the school. Leadership and management training is currently not eligible under the Better Schools Fund.

- 34 Estyn school inspections that took place between September 2005 and August 2007 show that most schools undertake effective staff appraisal in order to promote professional development and improve the quality of provision. Most schools also ensure that staff are deployed, managed and developed well. In the best examples, schools are able to demonstrate the impact of staff training and development on curriculum breadth, teaching methods and the range of resources used.

<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>
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- 35 All local authorities regularly monitor how schools spend their Better Schools Fund allocation. Usually the monitoring officers have good financial knowledge and audit procedures are used well to ensure that spend is eligible under the terms of the Better Schools Fund. Most local authorities provide good guidance to school leaders on the Better Schools Fund criteria and on financial administrative processes needed to manage the application for and expenditure of the fund. Officers follow up any underspending of the funding promptly so as to ensure that funding is spent by the end of the financial year. However, this monitoring focuses on overall spending, rather than spending against specific activities such as curriculum development activities.
- 36 Overall, local authorities get information about the impact of the Better Schools Fund on the quality of teaching and learning through a range of different activities. In all local authorities visited, curriculum development training activities are discussed with each school as part of termly link advisor visits. This discussion helps to ensure that the curriculum development activities are appropriate and well linked to the school development plan. Link advisors also scrutinise school development plans and self-evaluation reports. As a result, they have a good understanding of the overall progress made by a school to develop its curriculum.
- 37 In all local authorities, evaluation forms are used well to get immediate feedback from participants after training sessions. Usually the evaluation forms collect quantitative and qualitative information relating to the quality of the training, its effectiveness in meeting the needs and expectations of the participant and how it will be used to develop the curriculum back in school. Most local authorities carry out an overall annual evaluation of the quality of their training programme but this evaluation does not focus enough on the impact training has on the curriculum and outcomes for learners.
- 38 A few local authorities require schools to formally evaluate the impact of Better Schools Fund activities. Only one local authority visited is using the template suggested in the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance on evaluation of the Better Schools Fund which does ask about the impact of activities on pupils' progress. Most local authorities do not make good use of any information that schools provide on the impact of the Better Schools Fund to plan further curriculum development work or to share good practice.



- 39 As a result, local authorities are not well placed to judge whether the activities provided through the Better Schools Fund help to develop the curriculum and improve the quality of curriculum delivery. The monitoring activity carried out focuses too much on ensuring efficiency and eligibility of activities rather than on outcomes for learners.
- 40 Often, schools use their Better Schools Fund appropriately to purchase specialist curriculum support or training from providers other than the local authority. However, the schools' evaluations of training led by other providers are often not shared with the local authority. As a result, local authorities do not have an overview of the quality of the whole range of curriculum training accessed or procured by schools. As a result, officers in the local authority are not always well placed to advise other schools of what external training could be effective in addressing particular curriculum issues.
- 41 In the majority of the schools visited, the leadership team uses their programme of classroom observations well to evaluate how whole school developments and training are improving classroom practice. This work allows them to evaluate the changes individual teachers make to how they plan and deliver the curriculum following whole school training. However, most schools do not evaluate the overall impact of the Better Schools Fund on the school's curriculum or on outcomes for learners.

#### **Case study 4**

##### **Hot lessons**

One school identifies 'leading edge practice' through its programme of lesson observations. When 'leading edge practice' is identified then the member of staff must do a 'hot lesson' to help share this practice with other teachers in the school. This approach helps teachers develop a wider range of teaching methodologies and ideas for classroom practice. For example, a drama teacher did a 'hot lesson' on role-playing for teachers from other subject areas. This 'hot lesson' helped other teachers identify and use opportunities for role-playing more effectively across their own curriculum areas.

#### **Joint working and sharing good practice**

- 42 In some regions of Wales, there are formal agreements between local authorities to use consortia arrangements to deliver curriculum training, in particular through Cynnal, the Education and School Improvement Service (ESIS), Curriculum Support and the Ceredigion-Carmarthenshire partnership<sup>5</sup>. In addition to these consortia arrangements, all local authorities are starting to provide more joint training across the regions. This joined-up approach to training provision provides better value for money. However, the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance and application processes for the Better Schools Fund are not effective in promoting regional collaboration.

<sup>5</sup> ESIS provides education services for Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf local authorities. Cynnal provides education services for Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy local authorities. Curriculum Support provides education services for Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire.

### **Case study 5**

#### **Regional continuous professional development (CPD) conferences**

In one region, officers with responsibility for continuous professional development (CPD) meet regularly across all authorities within the region. These meetings help officers to develop a more co-ordinated approach to CPD. The programmes of short courses for each local authority are shared and there are common procedures for staff in schools to apply for and evaluate the courses that they attend. Each local authority takes responsibility for organising a regional conference which helps develop the curriculum in a specific subject. For example, one local authority organised a regional conference on the teaching of design technology using computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM). This conference was very well attended. The conference included a good range of specialist speakers. The day provided a useful opportunity to see examples of learners' work and attend demonstrations of how equipment could be used in lessons. As a result, there is shared understanding across the region of how CAD/CAM can be used to develop the curriculum for design technology.

- 43 In many of the local authorities visited, good networking relationships are developing between clusters of schools to help share practice. Local authorities and schools combine Better Schools Funding for curriculum development, transition and joint working between primary schools to develop curriculum links between schools. Through this joint work, teachers in primary and secondary schools understand each others' curriculum and communicate better to share ideas and support learners. As a result, some learners are better supported through transition and their learning in individual curriculum subjects in key stage 3 builds on their learning in key stage 2. In the best examples, clusters of schools share good practice well and plan joint curriculum training opportunities to respond to needs identified in their transition plans. In a few local authorities, the work of schools in clusters is not well developed nor is it being led well by the local authority.
- 44 In all schools visited, staff give feedback on training attended to colleagues at staff meetings. Where appropriate, training is often cascaded within the school by staff which helps ensure that the training provides good value for money and that developments have an impact across different curriculum areas.