



WALES **AUDIT** OFFICE

SWYDDFA **ARCHWILIO** CYMRU

**A report on the quality of local authority
education
services for children and young people**

in

**Newport City Council
Civic Centre
Newport
NP20 4UR**

November 2011

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on their capacity to improve.

In these evaluations, we use a four-point scale:

Excellent

Good

Adequate

Unsatisfactory

The report was produced in accordance with section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Context

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The city of Newport is located in the south east of Wales, sharing land boundaries with Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Cardiff. It is the third largest urban area in Wales with a total population is 140,355.

In Newport, 18% of people over the age of three say they can speak Welsh, compared with the Wales average of 25.6%.

In 2011, the employment rate in Newport was 65.4%, compared with the Wales average of 66.7%. There were 23.6% of children living in workless households. Of the working population in Newport, 14% have no qualifications, which is more than the Wales average of 13.7%.

In 2011, the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals in Newport was higher than the Wales average and the 15th lowest in Wales compared to other local authorities, where first is the lowest free-school-meal figure and 22nd is the highest. Sixteen of the 94 areas in Newport are now in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales.

As of 31 March 2010, Newport had 295 children looked after by the authority. There were 140 children on the child protection register.

Ethnic minorities account for 6.6% of the population, which is higher than the Wales average of 3.6%.

Funding context for Newport inspection 2011

The Welsh Government's 2011-2012 standard spending assessment (SSA) per head of population for Newport City Council is the 13th highest for local authorities in Wales. Within this, the education component, the education indicator based assessment (IBA), amounts to £106 million. This represents an average of £4,631 per pupil, which is the sixth lowest IBA per pupil in Wales.

It should be noted that the IBA is not a spending target, but a mechanism for determining the allocation of Welsh Government support for individual authorities. The level of the education IBA reflects the indicators that contribute to the allocation formula, including deprivation and sparsity. Newport City Council has set overall budgets for 2011-2012 for managing and delivering its education services at a level of 5.4% below the SSA. The net education budget per pupil in Newport is £4,382, the second lowest among the 22 authorities in Wales.

Summary

Overall judgement: Good

The local authority's education services for children and young people are good because:

- performance is good or better in all key stages;
- pupils who receive support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills make very good progress;
- there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils achieving Essential Skills qualifications in the last two years at all levels;
- school improvement is a very strong area of the authority's work;
- there is excellent up to date analysis of school performance in a wide range of contexts, including evaluations of leadership and management,
- support for additional learning needs (ALN) is good;
- the percentage of learners leaving full-time education without any recognised qualifications is extremely small and the best in Wales;
- the Children and Young People's Partnership has a strong focus on the entitlements for children and young people, and delivers these entitlements well; and
- the authority carries out regular and wide-ranging self-evaluation activities as part of its quality improvement work.

However:

- improvements in monitoring the local authority's and its partners' safeguarding arrangements have yet to be fully embedded into performance management and commissioning processes.

Capacity to improve: Good

The local authority has good prospects for improvement because:

- senior officers and elected members provide effective leadership through their good understanding of the education priorities;
- officers and elected members carry out robust monitoring of performance within the education service, which holds schools to account for their performance;
- senior officers, elected members and other partners work well together to drive forward improvement in education for the benefit of all learners; and
- there is a good track record of prioritising improvements in education services that impact upon standards.

However:

- the Children and Young People's Partnership does not use data well enough to inform its performance management and monitoring.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Newport City Council needs to:

- further improve the rates for attendance, exclusion and young people becoming NEET (not in education employment or training); and
- further develop the use of data for measuring the impact of services to young people so that future planning of services is better informed.

What happens next?

Newport City Council will produce an action plan to show how it will address these recommendations within 70 days (50 working days) of receipt of the report.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes? Good

Standards: Good

Performance in key stages 1 and 2 has been very good for the last four years. In 2011, the percentage gaining the core subject indicator (the expected performance in Welsh or English, mathematics and science in combination) is the best in Wales in key stage 1 and the second highest in key stage 2. The percentage gaining the core subject indicator in key stage 3 has consistently been above the average for Wales in the same period and is better than expected when compared to that of similar authorities. Performance in key stage 4 is also above Wales' averages on three of the five indicators and compares better to that of other authorities across Wales than could be expected when contextual information is taken into account.

When comparing Newport's schools to similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks, performance is well above average in key stages 1, 2 and 3. In key stage 3, nearly 90% of schools are above the average and 50% are in the top quarter. In key stage 4, performance is above average overall with only one school in the bottom quarter on any indicator.

Newport's performance against the Welsh Government's benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal entitlement has improved over the last four years. In 2010, Newport exceeded all three of these measures. Benchmark information for 2011 data was not available at the time of the inspection.

Progress between primary and secondary schools is above average in key stage 3 and average overall in key stage 4, although progress on the level 1 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades D to G) and level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C) is very good. In 2010, the percentage of learners leaving full-time education without any recognised qualifications was extremely small and the best in Wales.

In key stages 1, 2 and 3, the gap in performance between boys and girls is smaller than that across Wales. The same is true on three of the five main indicators at key stage 4. Particular groups of learners, including vulnerable groups and those with additional learning needs, generally attain at or above expected levels.

The distribution of learners' reading ages is above average overall. The large number of learners who receive support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills make very good progress and nearly all maintain these improvements. There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils achieving Essential Skills qualifications in the last two years at all levels.

Performance in Welsh first language is good at the expected levels in key stages 1 and 2. In Welsh second language, performance in all key stages is similar to or above the average for Wales. The percentage of learners entered for qualifications

in Welsh second language at the end of key stage 4 is improving although it remains below the Wales average.

The number of young people achieving well in informal and non-formal settings has improved over the past six years.

Wellbeing: Good

Standards of wellbeing are good. Learners improve their awareness of healthy living options, wellbeing and emotional literacy through their engagement in a good range of successful initiatives. Young people have increased their participation in sport and community-based learning by getting more involved with the local authority's youth service, libraries and arts and sports development programmes, including Positive Futures. Activities range from street football to yoga, kayaking to fishing, poetry to film making and circus skills.

Young people who participate in the joint local authority and the local health board's MEND programme have successfully reduced their body mass index. The reduction over five years in conception rates for teenagers corresponds well with the youth service's delivery of a condom (C-Card) scheme. Targeted interventions, such as Friday Night Projects, have contributed to reductions in the instances of antisocial behaviour.

When taking into account the socio-economic context of the area, attendance in secondary schools is good. This has improved steadily since 2007/08 and the rate is now the seventh best in Wales. In one secondary school where attendance is still poor, the rate of improvement is better than the improvement targets it has set. In primary schools, attendance is close to the all-Wales average, and reflects that of similar authorities. Attendance rates for most vulnerable groups such as looked after children and minority ethnic learners are good.

The rate of permanent exclusions in secondary schools has improved over the last five years and is now very close to the Welsh average. In primary schools, the rate is good. However, learners in Newport miss too many days due to fixed term exclusion. The number of days lost is slightly worse than the Wales average. The very recent introduction of a revised managed moves protocol has already reduced the average length of learners' fixed term exclusions.

The percentage of learners continuing in full-time education post-16 and the percentage not in education, training or employment (NEETs) improved in 2010. However, the level of NEETS remains too high and is the fourth worst in Wales.

Young people influence decision-making and local authority strategies well, in a good range of ways. For example, young people's involvement in the local authority's youth council helps them engage well with elected members and officers. This has enabled them to contribute effectively to the authority's consultation on its single plan.

Key Question 2: How good is provision? Good

Support for school improvement: Excellent

School improvement is a very strong area of the authority's work. The authority knows its schools very well, challenges them rigorously to improve and intervenes effectively when necessary. The local authority's excellent up to date analysis of school performance in a wide range of contexts significantly strengthens this role. These analyses include evaluations of leadership and management, which it shares well with schools. As a result, officers are able to identify and improve underperforming schools quickly and effectively.

The authority uses a secure intranet-based system to share all this information with schools, as well as key school documents such as self-evaluation reports and school improvement plans, and clear, informative notes of school visits and reviews. The comprehensive information on this intranet, the very good use made of it by schools and the contribution it makes to the local authority's effective challenge, monitoring and intervention in its schools are all sector leading.

Schools understand well the criteria the authority uses to place schools in one of five categories. All schools are clear about the category they are in and the support and intervention they will receive as a result. In those schools where the authority has intervened, there have been good improvements in standards and quality.

The authority has a robust strategy for moderating teacher assessments of the core subjects at the end of the key stages. This ensures that assessments in different schools accurately reflect pupils' achievements.

The authority provides schools, including their governing bodies, with very strong support for the analysis of performance data. It also produces clear and relevant additional data to go with that of the all Wales data. This helps schools to evaluate rigorously their performance. The authority is effectively improving their schools' capacity to analyse and evaluate all aspects of their work.

There are very strong, well-established strategies to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The improvement in standards of literacy and numeracy, particularly in primary schools, demonstrates the effectiveness of this support. The recently introduced reading and numeracy tests provide schools and the authority with very detailed information on the performance of pupils and year group cohorts. This information allows the authority to track learners' progress accurately and provide schools with well-targeted support.

The authority provides good, and in some cases excellent, support for school leaders and governors including focused seminars for school leaders and networks for middle leaders. The centrally-run clerking system provides governors with a high level of up-to-date information, support and advice.

The authority has effectively linked with University of Wales Newport to provide an MA in school improvement, for secondary teachers. This is an excellent initiative with 45 secondary school staff involved, drawn from all Newport's secondary schools. This programme, together with a range of other relevant leadership development

opportunities, is having a very positive impact on self-evaluation and school improvement. This is sector-leading practice.

Support for additional learning needs: Good

The authority is meeting its statutory duties in relation to learners with additional learning needs well. There has been a significant decrease in the number of statements issued over five years. There has also been a sizeable reduction in appeals to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales (SENTW) from 45 to six over the same period. This reflects well the increasing confidence felt by parents that the authority is providing appropriate levels of support.

The recent restructure of the inclusion service has resulted in improved joint working with the school improvement service and other partners. The inclusion services' intervention agreement provides a very robust system for supporting and challenging schools. The commitment of headteachers to this initiative ensures that schools make progress at both a strategic and individual pupil level.

The local authority's review process for schools requiring an intensive level of support enables these schools to identify challenging targets for improvement. The authority has clear criteria for allocating and ceasing support to its schools, which schools understand.

The authority uses data well to challenge its schools, and to monitor the progress of pupils with additional learning needs. Termly inclusion link meetings with every school ensure that schools identify the needs of children with additional learning needs at an early stage, and provide appropriate interventions.

The authority provides a wide range of high quality training to schools and other settings. Initiatives such as the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) Friendly Schools pilot project and the specific learning difficulties (SpLD) Friendly Approach project, as well as the outreach service, have increased the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of children and young people at school action. This has resulted in a reduction in referrals to specialist services. However, these initiatives are at an early stage and there is not yet enough evidence to evaluate their impact.

The authority provides good information for parents and carers on how to access services. Parents and carers feel well supported by Parent Partnership work.

Promoting social inclusion and wellbeing: Adequate

The authority has a clear, shared definition of wellbeing. Its draft Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out its strategic aims clearly and explains its aspirations for service characteristics in three years' time. The authority promotes well initiatives for improving physical wellbeing and emotional literacy. Monitoring and analysis of race-related incidents are adequate but there are inconsistencies in the way that schools record these incidents.

The authority has a successful strategy to improve secondary attendance, which has enabled it to meet or exceed its year-on-year improvement targets. The authority and individual secondary schools agree annual attendance targets and they both

regularly review progress towards these. The authority is now beginning to use what it has learned from the secondary attendance strategy to improve attendance in primary schools.

The consistency of secondary schools' reporting of exclusions has improved as a result of the behaviour support strategy. The authority has developed schools' capacity to undertake preventative programmes with learners at risk of exclusion. It is too early to evaluate the full impact of this. However, there are early indications that referrals to pupil referral units (PRUs) are reducing and that requests for emergency intervention are reducing significantly.

There are helpful targeted interventions aimed at learners from vulnerable groups that result in individuals receiving good support. However, staff do not always use data well enough to measure the impact of this support.

Learners in Newport have excellent access to counselling.

The youth service has restructured to improve learners' access to services. They have made good use of data and learner consultation to decide where to shut centres that were underused. Overall, this has improved the quality of provision and learner participation.

There is a clear safeguarding policy. The authority has recently updated its guidance to staff, which now more clearly explains what they should do in the event of safeguarding incidents. There is a comprehensive programme to provide staff and partners with differentiated safeguarding and child protection training. The local authority has recently improved its systems to ensure that all staff have CRB checks. The authority monitors the safeguarding policies of its partners. However, the authority could not verify whether its staff in schools and those of its partners have references in place. The authority had already identified this and has taken swift action to strengthen its safeguarding arrangements.

Access and school places: Good

Overall, Newport has the lowest percentage of surplus places in Wales although primary school surplus places have increased over the last three years. Newport has an accurate system for forecasting pupil numbers, and the authority predicts that pupil numbers will increase in future years due to a rising birth rate and planned housing developments.

The authority has a good knowledge of the condition, suitability and sufficiency of its school buildings. It has made substantial investment in improving them primarily from its own resources rather than from Welsh Government grants.

The admissions process is generally appropriate. The authority meets a high percentage of parental preferences for choice of school, and addresses all appeals within the statutory time limits. There is a useful admissions booklet, which is available in English and Welsh. It is not available in any of the main minority ethnic community languages of Newport.

Newport meets its statutory requirement for providing places for nursery education. It evaluates the quality of work with early years well and provides appropriate support and flexible training for staff working in the early years.

The Children and Young People's Partnership has a strong focus on the entitlements for children and young people, and delivers the entitlements well. It has made good progress in improving the range and quality of support services for young people across the city. Mapping of provision and the universal analysis of need is good. Access to support for basic skills is continuously improving across providers, with Newport youth service and community service leading developments well.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management? Good

Leadership: Good

Senior officers and elected members share a clear vision for education provision in Newport. This vision is communicated effectively with all partners and stakeholders across the authority. Strategic leaders understand well the challenges and priorities facing the education service and they know their schools well.

The 'golden thread' of 'Excellent Education for all' runs through all strategic plans. These plans take good account of national priorities, and clearly link them to local priorities based on a thorough analysis of need. This has led to effective shared strategies for example in raising standards in literacy and numeracy across the authority, and for raising the levels of attainment for particular groups of learners such as looked-after children (LAC) and young carers. Leaders and managers regularly monitor well progress against these strategies through line management, and regular reports to partnerships and strategic boards.

Elected members also monitor education provision well through reports to cabinet, regular meetings with officers, involvement in school governing bodies and partnership boards such as the Local Service Board (LSB), and through the scrutiny work programme. In particular, the work of the Cabinet Member for Education is particularly effective, through rigorous reviews of school performance and the holding of all schools to account for inspection outcomes as well as reviewing schools that cause concern at other times.

Senior officers and elected members have taken swift action to address the recently identified gaps in their verification processes for the safe recruitment of staff in their schools, and partner agencies. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these.

The work of the Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Forum is developing well and members receive useful support and training to help them undertake their role more effectively. However, elected members would benefit from training targeted towards the more specialist aspects of education.

The authority has managed well the period of part-time secondment of its chief education officer. They have taken the opportunity to raise the corporate management skills of other officers, and to bring into the authority learning from the secondment.

Quality improvement: Good

The authority carries out regular and wide-ranging self-evaluation activities. These include analysing data, evaluating the quality and impact of services and reviewing progress against strategic and other plans. It produces a comprehensive self-evaluation report that makes accurate judgements and identifies clearly the areas for improvement.

The authority consults well with children and young people and takes good account of their views. It receives a good response to an extensive community needs assessment that helps inform its priorities for education. Consultation takes appropriate account of the diversity within Newport's communities.

The authority has very effective performance management arrangements. Senior managers and their teams use these well to plan and monitor improvements. They help elected members to understand and make effective use of performance information. This means that members monitor performance regularly and take remedial action in a timely manner. Improvement plans at all levels maintain a sharp focus on national priorities and on making sure that all children and young people in Newport succeed at school and at work.

The authority has made good progress against nearly all of the recommendations from previous Estyn inspections of education and youth support services.

The authority leads effectively on the development of professional learning communities (PLCs). It has itself established cross-school PLCs that model effective practice. Nearly all schools have learning communities and many of these PLCs focus appropriately on literacy and numeracy. The authority's link advisers monitor these well. The quality of the work done by PLCs varies. In the majority of schools, it is too early to see the effect of their work on the range of pupil outcomes.

The regional consortium has developed an innovative PLC on-line tracking system that will allow schools to share their work across the consortium and beyond. Newport has contributed well to the development of this. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative.

Partnership working: Adequate

Partnership working in Newport is strong with good support from elected members and senior officers. The authority works well with the Local Service Board (LSB) and pro-actively leads and supports the delivery of priority objectives across the city.

The Children and Young People's Partnership is progressing well. Its focus on improving learning and the support for learners runs clearly throughout the partnership plan. The Children and Young People's Partnership's core aim groups reflect young people's entitlements well. Together with the co-ordinating group, they plan, implement, monitor and review their work effectively. A clearly defined performance management framework underpins the work of this partnership.

The introduction of outcomes-focussed accountability processes has further enhanced this effective monitoring. It is helping officers to plan joint working more

effectively. This has helped the authority to demonstrate the impact of provision upon individual learners, groups of learners and communities. The wider use of data across the Children and Young People's Partnership is in the early stages of development. There is still not enough use made of data to help the authority and the partnership know what impact non-formal and informal learning and youth support services have upon learners and on priority objectives.

The mapping of the available resources across the Children and Young People's Partnership is too slow. Mapping remains at an early stage, and the authority and the partnership are not yet able to judge how best to allocate and plan for the best use of all accommodation, staffing and financial resources.

Newport has engaged well with consortium partners in the development of regional joint working. The authority has contributed significantly to the development of the consortium's joint school improvement project. The authority has also benefited greatly from their involvement in the CPD on-line programme and the PLC developments.

Local authority and school partnerships are effective. Schools receive high levels of support and challenge through individual service level agreements. The authority's focus on increasing schools' capacity to take more responsibility for developing and implementing improvement strategies is working well.

Resource management: Good

The local authority's education services have developed good processes, which link planning, budget priorities and performance monitoring into an effective cycle.

The authority has made good use of capital resources to improve the school building stock. Over the last three years, £56 million has been invested, £13 million of this from Welsh Government grant and £43 million through prudential borrowing, capital receipts and planning gain.

Officers provide good financial support to schools to help them manage their budgets. No schools had deficit budgets at March 2011. The authority gave good advice to a secondary school to help it restructure its budget so that it could recover from a deficit position in the previous year. However, surpluses are too high in a few schools.

Newport's education services overall provide good value for money. There are good mechanisms in place for challenging and improving the value for money. Education service reviews have been carried out which have improved how effectively resources are used.

The development of a pilot project for a secondary school and 11 primary schools to share a bursar is very innovative work. There have been substantial savings in administrative, procurement and support services costs as a result. The authority is now rolling this pilot project out to all schools.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

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