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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales



WALES AUDIT OFFICE

SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

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

in

**Caerphilly County Borough Council
Penallta House
Tredomen Park
Ystrad Mynach
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July 2012

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

Context

Caerphilly is located in South Wales and it has borders with seven other local authorities: Blaenau Gwent, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen. The total population is 173,124.

In Caerphilly, 18.7% of people over the age of three say they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 24.8%.

The employment rate in Caerphilly is 62.3% compared to the Wales average of 66.4% and 23.3% of children live in workless households. Of the working population in Caerphilly, 17.8% have no qualifications, which is higher than the Wales average of 12.1%. Ethnic minorities account for 0.8% of the population, lower than the Wales average of 3.6%.

In 2011 the percentage of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals was higher than the Welsh average and the 19th highest in Wales compared to other local authorities, where first is the lowest free school meals (FSM) figure and 22nd is the highest (PLASC 2011). Sixteen of the 110 areas in Caerphilly are in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales.

As of 31 March 2011, Caerphilly had 300 children being looked after by the authority. There were 225 children on the Child Protection register.

Funding

The Welsh Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per head of population in Caerphilly for 2011-2012 was £1,770, slightly above the Wales average of £1,697.

The council set its overall revenue budget at 98.9% of SSA and set the education budget at a level of 96.5% of its Indicator Based Assessment (IBA), below the Wales average of 99.5%. It should be noted that the IBA is not a spending target, but a mechanism for determining the allocation of Welsh Government revenue support grant for individual authorities. The net education budget per pupil was £4,671 compared with the all Wales figure of £4,791. The budget delegated to primary schools is £3,635 per pupil, which is below the all Wales average of £3,821. The budget delegated to secondary schools is £4,252 per pupil, close to the all Wales average of £4,272.

Summary

Overall judgement: Adequate

The local authority's education services for children and young people are judged as adequate because:

- overall standards are adequate. In 2011 at key stage 3, two thirds of secondary schools were below average and in key stages 3 and 4 there are too many schools in the bottom quarter for important performance indicators when compared to similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks;
- Caerphilly has not met its Welsh Government benchmark at key stage 3 in the last three years;
- secondary schools have not been held consistently to account for their performance and, as a result, improvement in some schools has been too slow;
- fixed-term exclusions from schools of five days or less have risen notably; and
- since the last inspection in 2009, there has been little progress in reducing the significant number of surplus places in both secondary and primary schools.

However:

- when the performance of Caerphilly schools is compared with that of similar schools in Wales, based on the percentage eligible for free school meals, performance is just above average in key stages 1 and 2;
- performance against the Welsh Government's benchmarks based on free-school-meal entitlement has improved at key stage 4 over the last four years and in 2011 the authority met the two main benchmarks for key stage 4;
- there are effective processes for the early identification of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and appropriate support for their physical and learning needs; and
- Caerphilly is successfully reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Capacity to improve: Adequate

The local authority is judged as having adequate prospects for improvement because:

- target-setting and self-evaluation are not consistently robust and challenging;
- corporate and statutory partnership planning processes are not aligned;
- progress against recommendations from previous inspections has been inconsistent;
- elected members have not acted quickly enough with regard to the secondary school modernisation strategy and do not challenge underperformance in schools robustly enough; and
- the Local Service Board (LSB) is yet to develop the capacity to hold others to account.

However:

- senior leadership within the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate is strong and is driving the improved challenge and support to schools;
- there is good practice where firm links to planning and appropriate focus on improving outcomes for learners are contributing to measurable improvement in standards;
- the director of education makes sure that appropriate links are made between projects and strategies at service level and those at strategic partnership level in order to add value to the directorate's work; and
- improved alignment of financial and educational outcomes data in planning and performance management is further strengthening the already effective financial management of education services.

Recommendations

In order to secure the improvements that are needed the local authority should:

- R1 implement improvement strategies and specific actions to improve outcomes for learners especially at key stages 3 and 4;
- R2 strengthen the level of challenge to its secondary schools;
- R3 improve the robustness of self-evaluation and target setting;
- R4 align corporate and partnership strategic planning processes in order to make best use of available resources to improve outcomes for children and young people; and
- R5 take urgent action to reduce surplus capacity in schools generally and secondary schools in particular.

What happens next?

Caerphilly local authority will produce an action plan to show how it will address these recommendations within 50 working days of receipt of the report. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

Estyn is of the opinion that the authority falls into the category of follow-up activity and will require an Estyn Monitoring visit. The date and focus of this monitoring visit will be determined by Estyn in due course.

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the authority needs any follow-up activity.

There are four types of follow-up activity:

- 1 good practice case study;
- 2 Estyn monitoring visit;
- 3 significant improvement; and
- 4 special measures.

Any follow-up inspection work will be planned in consideration of other inspection and regulatory activity within an authority. All follow-up inspections will be fed into the Local Authority Regulatory Calendar to avoid duplication and take advantage of any opportunities to work more closely with the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW).

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes? Adequate

Standards: Adequate

The proportion of pupils in Caerphilly who are eligible for free school meals is the fourth highest in Wales. When these high levels of deprivation are taken into account, performance is adequate overall. When the performance of Caerphilly schools is compared with that of similar schools based on the percentage eligible for free school meals, performance is just above average in key stages 1 and 2, although performance is below average for the higher levels in key stage 2. In key stage 3, nearly 30% of schools are in the bottom quarter and 65% are below the average. There are more schools in the bottom quarter than in previous years. At key stage 4, performance is above average in two of the five main indicators. However, on the other indicators too many schools are in the bottom quarter, particularly on those indicators that involve English or Welsh first language and mathematics.

The Welsh Government sets benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal entitlement. Caerphilly's performance against the key stage 4 benchmarks has improved over the last four years. In 2011 the authority met both of the benchmarks for key stage 4. However, it has not met the key stage 3 benchmark in recent years.

In 2011, the percentage of learners leaving full-time education without a recognised qualification was an improvement on previous years and is now better than the Welsh average.

In 2011, in key stages 1 and 2, the gap in performance against the core subject indicator between boys and girls is bigger than the average across Wales. In key stage 3 and 4, girls continue to perform better than boys, but the gap gets smaller because of relatively poorer performance by the girls.

Particular groups of learners, including vulnerable groups and those with additional learning needs, generally attain or exceed their expected levels. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) perform at a higher rate than their peers do at every key stage. In 2011, looked after pupils (LAC) in Caerphilly performed at or near the Wales average across the range of indicators. Overall, the gap in performance between those learners entitled to free school meals and other learners is larger than across Wales as a whole.

The authority's reading tests show that 25% of learners at the end of key stage 2 have reading ages below functional literacy. This is similar to the figure across Wales and reflects an improvement on previous years.

In 2011, performance in Welsh first language was similar to or above the average for Wales in key stages 1, 2 and 4. However, in Welsh second language performance is the lowest in Wales in both key stage 2 and key stage 3 and among the lowest in key stage 4.

Learners gain too few nationally recognised qualifications as a result of the opportunities provided in non-formal and informal settings.

Wellbeing: Good

Attendance is improving in both primary and secondary schools. In 2011, when compared to similar schools across Wales on the free-school-meal benchmarks, attendance was just above average in secondary schools but below average in primary schools. Caerphilly's own unverified school data shows attendance rates to be improving faster this year than previously.

Rates of permanent exclusions are reducing gradually, although shorter fixed-term exclusions have increased. The average number of days lost from school by all fixed-term exclusions is similar to the Welsh average.

Learners benefit from their participation in a wide variety of activities that promote their understanding of healthy living and develop positive attitudes to keeping safe. Learners participate well in a range of sporting activities. There are significant outcomes from the authority's work to help young people who are offending or at risk of offending. Youth-related crime has fallen by a fifth and youth-related anti-social behaviour has fallen by a third across the borough.

Children and young people engage well in dialogue with officers and elected members to explore, identify and act on issues affecting them. The youth forum was established over 10 years ago and enables young people to contribute positively to issues that affect their lives.

The percentage of Year 11 learners not in education, training or employment (NEETs) improved in 2011. It is close to the average across Wales. The authority is successfully reducing the number of young people in this vulnerable group. The percentage of young people continuing in full-time education also improved in 2011 and is six places ahead of its free-school-meals ranking.

Key Question 2: How good is provision? Adequate
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Support for School Improvement: Adequate

Since the school improvement service was last inspected in 2007, the authority has revised its relationship with Caerphilly Education Support and Improvement Service (ESIS). The different roles and responsibilities of Caerphilly's officers and ESIS advisers for supporting school improvement are clear. Lines of accountability have been strengthened and, in general, these arrangements have improved.

Link advisers know their schools better than before and good use of performance data has contributed to this improvement. Following termly visits they produce detailed reports on standards and provision, which inform the useful categorisation of schools and the targeted interventions which follow. However, reports are not always evaluative enough, particularly when commenting on the effectiveness of schools' leadership and management.

Arrangements to quality assure the work of link advisers have improved the consistency of the monitoring, support, challenge and intervention process. However, not all secondary schools have been held appropriately to account for their low performance and, as a result, improvement in these schools has been too slow.

Joint working between officers supporting school improvement, additional learning needs and inclusion is effective and is helping to improve the achievements of particular groups of learners.

The authority's Partnership Agreement with schools sets out clear criteria to target support where it is most needed. Schools understand these criteria well and officers have used them effectively to raise standards in a few underperforming schools. However, the proportion of schools requiring monitoring following their inspection does not compare well with the situation in other Welsh authorities. Although senior officers intervene appropriately when schools do not improve, the authority has not yet used its full range of powers to improve these schools quickly enough.

A range of initiatives focus appropriately on raising standards in priority areas such as boys' literacy within the skills strategy. Support for numeracy is less well developed. However, the authority has not yet fully evaluated the impact of these strategies.

The authority provides good support for new headteachers in schools. However, further opportunities for headteachers to develop their skills in a structured way are limited. The school improvement service has recently introduced useful training for school leaders to evaluate their own performance and that of their schools. However, link advisers do not monitor sufficiently the impact of training in secondary schools to ensure improvement. Officers support governing bodies to understand better the performance of their schools as part of the new 'Monitor Challenge Support' strategy introduced in 2010.

Support for Additional Learning Needs: Good

The authority is meeting well its statutory duties in relation to learners with additional learning needs (ALN). Procedures for supporting the statutory assessment process are strong. The percentage of pupils with statements has reduced steadily since 2007 and is now just below the Welsh average.

There are clear criteria for allocating support to pupils with ALN. As a result, resources are targeted appropriately and meet the assessed needs of individual pupils.

The local authority has effective processes for the early identification of pupils with ALN and it provides appropriate support for their physical and learning needs. Pupils are supported well on transition between key stages and on leaving school. The innovative 'Real Opportunities' initiative, which Caerphilly is leading in partnership with eight other authorities in Wales, has been successful in preparing young people with disabilities for adult life. The Quality Assurance System (QAS) provides a comprehensive range of data relating to individual pupils and groups of learners. However, not all schools use this system consistently, and the local authority is not yet using this data well enough to know whether pupils make enough progress.

The local authority provides a wide range of training for schools and settings. This includes literacy training as part of the Caerphilly Skills Strategy. However, the local authority has not yet evaluated fully the impact of this training. Outreach services from the special school and specialist resource base have increased the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of pupils with autism and speech and language difficulties. This has enabled children and young people to be educated near to their own home.

The local authority works very closely with parents and carers and this helps to ensure that there are very few appeals to the special educational needs (SEN) Tribunal for Wales. The Integrated Service for Children with Additional Needs (ISCAN) provides effective support for children and their families.

Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Adequate

The authority has developed clear policy and procedures for improving pupils' attendance. These have clarified roles and responsibilities and amended practice. The monitoring of attendance rates has improved and schools now report these weekly to the authority. As a result officers provide timely support and challenge to schools and families. These strategies are beginning to improve attendance rates.

The authority has recently revised its guidance to schools about the monitoring of racist and bullying incidents, and has improved the way it collects data. It has not yet evaluated fully the impact of these developments.

The authority has recently updated and revised its behaviour strategy and guidance. It has improved the way it monitors discipline in its schools, PRU and EOTAS provision. Officers are improving their support for behaviour management through early intervention, managed moves and training for teachers. These strategies are helping teachers improve their behaviour management but have not had a significant enough impact on improving exclusions.

There is an appropriate range of settings for pupils who receive education outside of school (EOTAS). The referral process is detailed and appropriate. The detail is used to make sure that pupils in these settings receive suitable support and as a result almost all achieve a recognised qualification at the end of key stage 4. The authority supports and monitors the attendance and performance of vulnerable groups well. Young people who offend or are at risk of offending receive appropriate personal support and are helped to re-engage with their communities.

Young people have good access to a range of support services. However, the youth service does not make sure that young people gain appropriate qualifications from their activities.

Work to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is underpinned by a clear strategy of addressing the needs of those who are risk of risk of becoming NEET. This work has contributed to the reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment and training.

The authority has clear policy and procedures for safeguarding children and young people. There are effective systems to ensure all education staff are CRB checked, and receive appropriate safeguarding training.

Access and school places: Adequate

Caerphilly has clear priorities in its strategic plans to transform the educational opportunities for learners through improved learning environments. However, it has made unsatisfactory progress in reducing the number of surplus places in both secondary and primary schools. The percentage of schools with significant surplus is amongst the highest in Wales. Although the authority recognises that it has three more secondary schools than it needs to meet current demand for places, it has not yet been able to secure full support for appropriate action.

The authority has met the increasing need for Welsh-medium education well at both primary and secondary levels. The authority knows the suitability and condition of its schools well. Almost all schools are fit for purpose.

Arrangements for school admissions are clear and well understood by the authority's staff and parents. In-term transfers, young people returning from custody, children with additional needs and children moving into the area are dealt with quickly and appropriately.

The authority reviews annually and meets the demand for early years provision in Welsh and English. There is an appropriate mix of maintained and non-maintained settings, some of which are housed in surplus school capacity. The authority monitors the quality of the early years provision and provides good training in areas identified as requiring improvement.

The Youth Service supports other youth support services to self-evaluate and improve the quality of services to young people. The service is already developing the use of this effective practice within the consortium and is extending it to all partnership provision for children and young people. Youth Support Services are co-ordinated well within the authority. Gaps in provision are identified and closed through the authority's partnership planning system.

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

Leadership: Adequate

Following the local elections in May 2012 the new Cabinet has made raising standards in education a priority and is providing leadership and support for senior officers. Generally the relationship between the council and its schools is collaborative and co-operative. Senior leaders and lead officers ensure that provision is generally comprehensive and effectively delivered overall. However, elected members do not challenge school underperformance robustly enough.

The council's planning process is too complex. Links between the wider partnerships and the various tiers of the council are not clear. It is difficult to identify a common purpose or thread from all strategic plans or to identify how they will have an impact

on outcomes for children and young people. The key priorities for education are not consistently communicated between key strategic documents.

However, the high level vision on, for example, participation and literacy is clearly set out and communicated well to schools. Overall, consultation mechanisms are comprehensive and transparent. In the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate and its individual service teams, operational planning and senior leadership are strong. Here policy and programmes are contributing positively to meeting operational targets and development needs.

Too often elected members have avoided taking difficult decisions in relation to school organisation and reducing surplus places. This has limited the ability of the council to improve standards. Members recognise the acute need to address further the still rising number of surplus places as outlined in their 21st Century Schools School Organisation Plan. However, there is no current action underway to deliver significant reductions.

Newly elected members are beginning to use the scrutiny system to challenge officers appropriately. Their use of performance management data is improving but the data they receive is often over-generalised and they do not get performance data on specific named schools. This means that the scrutiny process is not used to identify or challenge individual underperforming schools in order to contribute to raising standards. The scrutiny process is not used effectively to hold statutory and non-statutory partnerships to account for their work to improve outcomes for children and young people. Officers and schools are working together to raise elected member understanding of current education issues.

Quality improvement: Adequate

Formal self-evaluation at a corporate level is not well embedded in the work of the local authority. A self-evaluation report was prepared explicitly for the inspection and could not draw from any existing high-level process that brings together the authority's evaluation of its own progress. A range of stakeholders contributed to the preparation of the self-evaluation report and generally represented all partners appropriately. However, the report does not evaluate impact on outcomes robustly enough or support assertions with relevant evidence consistently. It does not always accurately identify areas of strength or those needing further development.

Services generally manage performance effectively in a variety of ways and work has begun to improve consistency and impact. However, there are too many initiatives in place across service areas where no evaluation of impact is built in from the start and consequently officers are not able to say whether the developing practice is effective or not. There is good practice where firm links to planning and appropriate focus on improving outcomes for learners are contributing to measurable improvement in standards. However this is not consistent across all services and agencies. Progress has been made in developing the collection of appropriate data to inform the effective allocation of resources, performance management and reporting. This work is already having some positive impact on improving provision. However, the use of data to inform evaluation is not yet consistent across all areas.

A network of professional practice has had a measurable impact on schools' capacity to manage challenging behaviour.

The authority has not always responded consistently to recommendations from previous inspections of local authority education services. It has now improved its systematic monitoring of post inspection action planning and delivered progress in some key areas. Nevertheless, there are significant challenges where the authority has not made enough progress such as the removal of surplus capacity from its secondary schools.

Partnership working: Adequate

The Local Service Board has been slow to establish itself as the key driver of strategic partnership working in the authority. It is yet to develop the capacity to hold others to account against its identified priorities. However, through its standing conference, the authority is successfully engaging with partners and discussing common priorities.

Planning systems within the authority respond to these priorities and to those identified in the Community Plan. However, the authority's corporate planning structures and the partnership planning structures operate on parallel tracks and there is little cross-over between the two planning structures. This means that the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate misses opportunities to work to full effect with its key partners to plan effectively and strategically or to make best use of pooled resources. Despite the two structures, the director of education makes sure that, overall, appropriate links are made between projects and strategies at service level where external projects add value to the directorate's work.

The authority has begun the process of rationalising its partnerships and reviewing the effectiveness of partnership planning. This has led to relevant changes in structures. However it is too early to judge the impact of this work. The authority's work to streamline planning is slow and current plans to create a single plan are limited only to statutory partnerships.

The authority and its partners are aware of the need to develop more systematically the process of measuring outcomes. Already, a few aspects of service delivery are more successful than others at capturing the impact of their work on outcomes. On the whole, there is not enough consistency among the partners in the way that they evaluate the impact of their work on learners. Overall, the success criteria in plans do not focus enough on outcomes and do not provide leaders and managers with an effective tool for monitoring and driving improvement. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new results based accountability processes for monitoring outcomes.

Managing the risks linked to the emergence of the new regional Education Achievement Service is rightly identified by the directorate as key priority. The authority has established a quality assurance process between the authority and this service to ensure that statutory requirements are fulfilled appropriately.

Resource management: Adequate

The local authority's effective medium-term financial plan clearly summarises proposals to invest in or reduce services. These plans are appropriately supported by a 'value for money' strategy and guided by relevant priorities and objectives. However, failing to address the substantial surplus capacity in secondary school provision stands in contradiction to these strategic intentions. This has significant impact on the authority's ability to sustain the best use of resources to improve standards.

The council and the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate have demonstrated strong financial management in balancing budgets and meeting savings targets. The authority has delivered good support for additional learning needs over the last four years within an unchanged budget. To develop this strength, it is piloting a new process in seven secondary schools. This quality assurance system appropriately monitors provision, associated costs and outcomes for children and young people with additional learning needs.

The council has aligned its workforce planning to medium-term financial planning well. All workforce decisions for the directorate and schools are taken appropriately, in line with its strategy. The authority uses external funding, sometimes collaboratively with other local authorities, to deliver services that have, for example, reduced the number of young people not in education, employment or training. It has appropriately re-tendered contracts to improve value for money.

There are no significant school budget deficits and schools with budget surpluses are being closely monitored. They are encouraged to use their balances towards the part funding of authority led initiatives such as the upgrading of internet access.

The directorate is developing its ability to focus on resource costs in planning and performance management. It has sophisticated databases that can align financial and educational outcomes data. It is developing the capacity to assimilate live data into performance monitoring reports. The planning framework is currently updated by these databases, although the process is still at an early stage of development. These developments are further strengthening the already effective financial management of education services. However, as the judgement for standards is adequate, therefore value for money is only adequate.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

Stephen Lamb	Reporting Inspector
Huw Collins	Team Inspector
Sarah Lewis	Team Inspector
Gerard Kerlake	Team Inspector
Betsan O'Connor	Team Inspector
Iwan Roberts	Team Inspector
Caroline Rees	Team Inspector
Samantha Spruce	WAO
Steven Phillips	Peer Inspector
Keri Cole	Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available on the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk).

Glossary of terms

National Curriculum

Expected National Curriculum levels

- By the end of the key stage 1, at the age of seven, learners are expected to reach level 2 and the more able to reach level 3.
- By the end of the key stage 2, at the age of eleven, learners are expected to reach level 4 and the more able to reach level 5.
- By the end of the key stage 3, at the age of fourteen, learners are expected to reach level 5 and the more able to reach level 6 or level 7.

Core subject indicator in all key stages

The core subject indicator relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh first language, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum. Learners must gain at least the expected level in either English or Welsh first language together with mathematics and science to gain the core subject indicator.

External examinations at key stage 4 or post-16

Core subject indicator – as above.

Level 1 qualification – the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.

The Level 1 threshold – learners must have gained a volume of qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs at grades D to G.

Level 2 qualification – the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.

The Level 2 threshold – learners must have gained a volume of qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.

The Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics – learners must have gained level 2 qualifications in English or Welsh first language and in mathematics as part of their threshold.

Level 3 qualification – the equivalent of an A level at A* to C.

The Level 3 threshold – learners must have gained a volume of qualifications equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.

The **average wider points score** includes all external qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age – for example at age 16 or 18. To calculate this, the total points gained by all learners in the cohort is divided by the number of learners.

The **capped average points score** only includes the best eight results for each pupil from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at age 16.

All-Wales Core Data sets

Schools and local authorities may refer to performance relative to their family of schools. These families of schools have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.