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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

**Monmouthshire County Council
County Hall
Cwmbran
Torfaen
NP44 2XH**

November 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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

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Context

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Monmouthshire is located in south east Wales. It is bordered by England in the east, by Newport, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent in the west and by Powys in the north-west. The total population is 91,508.

In Monmouthshire, 9.9% of people over the age of three say they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 19.6%.

The employment rate in Monmouthshire is 74.5% compared to the Wales average of 67.1%. There are 10.8% of children living in workless households.

Of the working population in Monmouthshire, 8.7% have no qualifications, which is lower than the Wales average of 12.1%.

The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals is 11.9%, lower than 19.3% nationally. This level of eligibility is the second lowest in Wales (PLASC 2012). None of the 58 areas in Monmouthshire are now in the 10% most deprived area in Wales (WIMD 2011).

As of 31 March 2011, Monmouthshire had 80 children being looked after by the authority. There were 62 children on the Child Protection register.

Ethnic minorities account for 1% of the population, lower than the Wales average of 3.6%.

Funding

The Welsh Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per head of population for Monmouthshire County Council in 2012-2013 is £1,492 per head, which is well below the Wales' average of £1,681. A net revenue budget of £139.4 million (excluding specific grants) has been set, which is 1% more than in the previous year.

The council set its overall budget at 102.3% of SSA, above the Wales average of 100.5% and it set the education budget at a level of 94.2%% of its Indicator Based Assessment (IBA), well below the Wales average of 98.7%. 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 net education budget per pupil was £4,833 compared with the all Wales average of £4,813. The budget delegated to primary schools is £4,217 per pupil and that for secondary schools is £4,681 per pupil. Both are above the respective all Wales averages of £4,114 and £4,589.

Summary

Overall judgement: Unsatisfactory

The local authority's education services for children and young people are judged to be unsatisfactory because:

- the authority's arrangements for safeguarding do not meet requirements;
- performance in Monmouthshire's secondary schools when compared to similar schools according to free-school-meal entitlement has been well below average for the last four years;
- progress between primary and secondary schools is well below average;
- the overall number of days lost to fixed term exclusions is too high;
- the arrangements for supporting and challenging schools are not robust enough and have not had enough impact on improving outcomes; and
- strategic planning for additional learning needs is weak.

However:

- attendance of learners in primary and secondary schools has been above the Welsh average over the past four years;
- Learners benefit from a wide range of good youth support services across the authority; and
- school budgets are well protected and the authority has made good progress in increasing the percentage of delegated funding to schools.

Capacity to improve: Unsatisfactory

The local authority has unsatisfactory prospects for improvement because:

- the lack of strategic and operational capacity in the Children and Young People's directorate has contributed to the lack of improvement in key areas;
- elected members do not receive the information they need to hold services to account fully;
- self-evaluation processes are not rigorous enough and, within the Children and Young People's directorate, corporate planning arrangements are not effective;
- officers do not use quality assurance processes or evaluate data consistently enough to know where resources and services should be directed to achieve the best outcomes for its learners; and
- performance management processes are not consistently implemented within the directorate and leaders and managers are not always able to direct staff or hold them to account well enough.

However:

- during a period of financial challenge, the authority's senior leadership have committed additional capital and revenue to education services in order to improve outcomes for learners; and
- the council participates well in a range of strategic partnerships.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust and underpinned by a clear policy
- R2 Improve standards of attainment for all groups of pupils, particularly in secondary schools
- R3 Strengthen the level of challenge to schools and use the full range of powers available to the authority to improve leadership and management in underperforming schools
- R4 Improve corporate planning to strengthen links between the local authority's priorities and service level targets
- R5 Improve self-evaluation across all services and make better use of data to plan services strategically and target resources appropriately
- R6 Ensure that performance management is effective and robust and allows elected members and senior officers to identify and address underperformance

What happens next?

The local authority will produce an action plan to show how it will address these recommendations within 50 working days of receipt of the report.

Estyn is of the opinion that the authority falls into the follow-up category of requiring special measures and will inform the Welsh Government of this recommendation.

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 and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Unsatisfactory

Standards: Unsatisfactory

Performance in Monmouthshire schools is above the average for Wales in all key stages and among the best in Wales in primary schools.

However, Monmouthshire has the second lowest rate of free school meals in Wales. When this relatively low level of deprivation is taken into account, performance compared to that of similar schools based on free-school-meal entitlement has been well below average for the last four years, although the picture in 2012 is an improvement on previous years. However, it remains well below average overall.

The percentage of pupils gaining the Foundation Phase outcome indicator is slightly above average. However, the percentage gaining the core subject indicator in key stage 2 is below average. Too many schools are below the median and too few schools are in the top quarter. Performance in the key stage 3 core subject indicator is well below average. No school is in the top quarter and only one school is above the median. In 2012 performance is well below average on four of the five main indicators at key stage 4. Only on the level 2 threshold is performance just average. On the other four indicators there are no schools at all in the top quarter. For three of these there is only one school above the median and for the level 1 threshold no schools at all are above the median. For the core subject indicator and the capped points score there are too many schools in the bottom quarter.

In recent years the percentage of Monmouthshire learners leaving full-time education without a recognised qualification has been worse than the Wales average and has not compared well enough to other authorities in Wales. However in 2012 this improved significantly and is better than the Wales average.

In 2011, Monmouthshire did not meet any of the three Welsh Government expected benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal entitlement. In the previous two years it had met the key stage 3 benchmark but not the two benchmarks at key stage 4. In 2008 it met two of the three benchmarks. Therefore there is a declining picture of attainment on these benchmarks.

Progress between primary and secondary schools is well below average. In 2012 in both key stages 3 and 4 progress on all indicators is in the bottom 25% except for English in key stage 3 which is below average.

In 2012 the gap between boys' and girls' performance in key stage 2 is smaller than the average for Wales. However, in key stage 3 and key stage 4, the gap is larger than across Wales. This includes cohorts where the gap was smaller than Wales when they were in primary school. The gap between pupils entitled to free school meals and other learners is larger than the average for Wales in key stages 2 and 3. However, in key stage 4 the gap is smaller. The performance of particular groups of pupils, including vulnerable groups and those with additional learning needs, is variable and this analysis is not consistently available for all groups.

The authority has recently introduced a reading test across all its schools. These tests indicate that only a few pupils leave primary school below functional literacy levels.

In key stage 2, performance in Welsh first language has declined over the last two years. However, in 2012, performance in Welsh second language improved at a faster rate than in Wales as a whole in both key stage 2 and key stage 3. In 2011, the percentage of learners gaining a full qualification in Welsh second language in key stage 4 was above the Wales average. However, this was from a small entry and only represents about a quarter of eligible learners in Monmouthshire secondary schools.

There are many good examples of young people achieving well in informal and non-formal settings and gaining a broad range of qualifications.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Attendance of pupils in primary and secondary schools has been above the Welsh average over the past four years, when compared to that of similar schools based on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals.

There have been no permanent exclusions for over two years. The rate of fixed term exclusions improved in 2011, although this does not compare as well to rates in other authorities as could be expected, particularly exclusions of five days or less.

Overall, the number of days of learning lost to fixed term exclusions is too high and has remained static for the last three years, despite Wales figures overall improving slightly. Also the exclusion rate for pupils with statements of educational needs is too high. As a result, Monmouthshire does not now compare as well as could be expected to other authorities.

The percentage of learners remaining in full-time education post-16 is the best in Wales. The numbers of young people not engaged in education, employment or training opportunities has reduced each year for past four years. However, the pace of reduction is slower than Wales as a whole and Monmouthshire does not compare as well as could be expected to other authorities.

Children and young people participate well in a wide range of physical activity, and take-up of specific schemes is good. Generally, the level of participation of children and young people in the Active Schools and Young People programme, Dragon Sport, and other outdoor activities is high.

However, Estyn's recent inspection of the pupil referral service showed that many pupils using the service do not develop their knowledge and understanding of healthy eating and lifestyles well enough. Many do not have enough opportunity to take part in physical exercise, either on their own or in a team.

A range of initiatives helps learners to contribute their views well to a variety of different settings, from designing new schools and learning environments to developing strategies for getting the views of their peers about bullying and harassment in their lives.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Unsatisfactory

Support for School Improvement: Unsatisfactory

The authority's arrangements for supporting and challenging schools are not robust enough and have not had enough impact on improving outcomes.

The authority has introduced a framework to classify schools according to risk and to plan appropriate interventions. This framework includes the use of a good range of performance data to evaluate standards of attainment but it does not include any evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. Headteachers understand well the category their school is in, although they are less clear about how this category relates to the different elements of the framework or about the support they will receive as a result. Not all governing bodies are aware of the category of their school. In a minority of schools the categorisation is over generous and does not challenge the school sufficiently to improve.

In recent years officers have supported schools well but have not challenged them rigorously enough. Officers have often reacted to requests from individual schools for support and review, rather than target interventions at those schools where they are most needed. However, through the work of the regional consortium, there is now a clear and consistent programme for all system leaders working with Monmouthshire schools. Officers now use a better range of performance data to focus discussions on standards of attainment.

However, officers' challenge has not been consistent or rigorous enough in the past to make sure that all schools improve sufficiently. Processes to quality assure the work of officers and the challenge they bring to schools have not been effective. Targets agreed with schools have not been effective in raising standards of attainment. Many written records of visits to schools are not evaluative and do not identify clearly areas for improvement. These reports do not provide a clear evaluation of all aspects of leadership and management in the school. As a result, schools are not always clear what they need to do to improve and too many schools are identified as needing follow-up after their inspections. One primary school did not improve quickly enough despite receiving considerable support and required significant improvement after inspection.

The authority has a range of strategies to improve literacy and numeracy. However, initiatives are not evaluated well enough to know which are most effective in improving learners' skills. The authority supports intervention programmes for those who need to improve their basic skills but learners' progress is not tracked well enough to know whether they continue to improve.

The authority provides good support for new leaders in primary schools. However, there is not at present a sufficient range of training opportunities for senior and middle leaders in schools. Governors have access to an appropriate training programme, although this is not targeted specifically at governing bodies of underperforming schools.

Support for Additional Learning Needs: Unsatisfactory

The authority meets its statutory obligations in relation to learners with additional learning needs. The number of statements of educational needs is high compared to the Wales average, although the authority has introduced new strategies which are successfully reducing the number of new statements. However, too many resources are directed towards the statutory assessment process rather than being used to improve the capacity of schools to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs.

Strategic planning for additional learning needs is weak. Although there is now a strategic plan which correctly identifies many important priorities, there is insufficient detail about resources and the expected outcomes of the initiatives. As a result, the authority has been slow to put required improvements in place.

The authority does not collect a wide enough range of appropriate data to enable staff to know how well pupils with additional learning needs are progressing. It is therefore unable to analyse the impact of interventions on pupil progress well enough. Also this limits officers' capacity to provide rigorous challenge to schools.

Specialist services, including those provided on a regional basis, deliver appropriate targeted support for pupils with a range of additional learning needs. In addition, an outreach service from one of the special needs resource bases is effective in increasing capacity in mainstream schools to meet the needs of these children. However, although there are a number of special needs resource bases and a special school within the authority, there is currently a lack of specialist facilities for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, behavioural difficulties and severe learning difficulties. As a result, too many pupils travel long distances to attend out of county placements.

The local authority's additional learning needs service provides useful and relevant training for special educational needs' coordinators. However, training for other teachers and teaching assistants is limited. In addition, the service does not evaluate the impact of training on pupil outcomes well enough.

Closer working with parents has led to a slight reduction in the number of appeals to the Special Education Needs tribunal. However, information for parents is limited, which means that not all parents are clear about what services are available to them.

Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Unsatisfactory

The local authority has effective policies and procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' attendance. The education welfare service collects and analyses attendance data for pupils across the authority. This enables staff to focus their work on the schools requiring most support to improve attendance.

The Principal Inclusion Officer monitors the needs of vulnerable groups of learners, which enables most individuals to receive timely support when they need it. There are two Social Inclusion Project Workers who provide outreach and early intervention when young people are at risk of exclusion or disaffection. However, this service has been effective enough in improving exclusion rates across the local authority, particularly for pupils with statements of educational needs.

The Youth Service works in close partnership with schools and the inclusion service to support learners to overcome behaviour issues and to access broader opportunities within the curriculum. It provides good, targeted support for learners, including vulnerable groups, which has helped them to engage with education. The service has recently developed a management information system to gather data more systematically, but the impact of interventions is not yet evaluated well enough or reported clearly enough to council members.

Learners have very good access to counsellors, which they use extensively. Counsellors liaise well with other support workers when appropriate.

The local authority has supported schools well to develop policies to combat bullying. It has recently introduced an improved reporting system that makes it easier for schools to record incidents of bullying or racist behaviour. Currently, not enough has been done to help schools understand and deal with cyber-bullying.

The local authority has made good use of partnerships, to develop work-based provision for young people. Monmouthshire training, the local authority's apprenticeship scheme, is a relatively recent development and it is too early to evaluate its impact.

In the 2012 inspection of the pupil referral service, the local authority was not aware of the shortcomings which Estyn judged were important and resulted in the facility going into significant improvement. The local authority has since restructured its provision and improved the range of the curriculum available to learners supported by the inclusion service.

The authority's arrangements for safeguarding do not meet requirements and give serious cause for concern.

At the time of the inspection, the local authority did not have an appropriate policy for safeguarding, although it has complied with the requirements of the 'All Wales Child Protection Procedure'. The local authority has clear mechanisms to ensure that staff receive Criminal Records Bureau checks, however its processes to check schools' monitoring of update checks is not rigorous enough. Also, the local authority does not have a formal mechanism to ensure that all partners who work with young people have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures.

There is extensive provision for safeguarding training to all levels of staff in the local authority. However, the local authority does not have clear systems to ensure that the staff training is at a level commensurate to their roles.

The very recent establishment of a Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team enhances the local authority's capacity to develop policy, procedures and training regarding safeguarding.

Access and school places: Adequate

Since the last inspection, the overall number of surplus places has increased in the local authority. This is because of the increase in surplus places in the secondary

sector which is now just below the Wales average. However, during the last three years, a key corporate priority has been to develop a strategy to modernise the authority's secondary school estate. These plans are central to the authority's vision for the future of education services in Monmouthshire and forms part of their 21st Century school proposals. The plans are targeted to reduce surplus places to below Welsh Government targets and to improve the condition of the sufficiency and suitability of the four secondary schools.

During the same period, the percentage of surplus places has reduced in the primary sector where the authority has closed four schools and opened one. However, the authority's plans to secure secondary school provision for Welsh medium in the long term are underdeveloped.

The authority's asset management planning is good and information on condition, sufficiency and suitability of school buildings is accurate.

The authority manages admissions to its schools well, enabling almost all pupils to obtain places at their first-preference school. The authority uses managed moves well to resettle in other schools most learners who are at risk of exclusion.

In general, there is an appropriate range of early years Foundation Phase learning and play provision which meets the needs of most children and their families. However, there are gaps in the provision for Welsh medium which limits parental choice in areas of the authority. The authority works effectively in partnership with the voluntary sector to plan and deliver provision, using surplus capacity in primary schools where it is appropriate to do so. The authority's monitoring of the standards within maintained and non-maintained settings isn't effective enough. This means that of half those settings inspected in the current cycle are in follow up. The local authority does not evaluate the training it provides well enough and officers are unclear about its impact on standards and provision.

Learners benefit from a wide range of good youth support services across the authority. Multi-agency provision is co-ordinated well by the authority on an area basis. However, overall co-ordination to ensure that all children and young people can access their entitlements and support services to meet their needs is not effective.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Unsatisfactory
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Leadership: Unsatisfactory

The authority has appropriately identified education as one of its three strategic priorities. During a period of financial challenge, the authority's senior leadership have committed additional capital and revenue to education services in order to improve outcomes for learners.

Within the Children and Young People's directorate, corporate planning arrangements are not effective. Opportunities for service improvement which align with the stated corporate priority for education have been missed, for example: in securing effective safeguarding arrangements; improving the challenge to school leaders planning for Welsh medium education; and improving services for those with additional learning needs.

The authority has a performance management policy in place. However, performance management processes are not consistently implemented within the directorate. This means that leaders and managers are not always able to direct staff effectively or hold them to account well enough.

The council has recently introduced a reporting system based on outcomes. However, officers do not yet provide members with the comprehensive information they need to make informed decisions. This is because of the lack of rigorous evaluation of services and of school performance. This reduces the effectiveness of the Select Committee in understanding trends, planning interventions or monitoring impact and limits the effectiveness of members in undertaking their democratic accountabilities.

The authority's lack of strategic and operational capacity in the Children and Young People's directorate has contributed to the failure of the directorate to maintain sufficient progress in a number of key areas, for example in improving outcomes for learners and in addressing underperformance in services quickly enough.

Quality improvement: Unsatisfactory

Quality improvement processes in Monmouthshire are not rigorous enough to help the authority identify and plan effectively for the continuous improvement of services for learners.

Senior leaders identify well risk areas in the Whole Authority Strategic Risk Assessment 2012-2013. These include leadership capacity at directorate level, strategic planning for Welsh in Education, the new arrangements for school improvement through the shared service and raising standards at all key stages. However, actions to bring about improvement in important areas such as safeguarding and leadership are not effective enough. The Children and Young People's Directorate's self-evaluation process is updated on regular basis and provides a useful description of activities at service level. However, the content is not evaluative enough to enable the authority to have an accurate understanding of the success of or barriers to learners' achievements and attainments. Too often, collaborative work is not analysed effectively enough, and initiatives are not evaluated sufficiently well to judge their impact on learners.

Overall, processes for evaluation of work and accountability are not sufficiently mature to help the authority plan for improvement well enough. Service Improvement Plans often identify inappropriate targets and are not sufficiently focused on outcomes. Therefore, the actions undertaken by officers to meet targets do not successfully and consistently lead to improvements.

The authority does not use performance data well enough to make sure that outcomes can be analysed effectively. Performance data of vulnerable groups is not collected consistently enough. The lack of appropriate data of the impact of youth support services means that the authority and its partners do not know how well their provision helps learners to progress and achieve.

The authority has partially met the recommendations from previous inspections of education services. However, the lack of rigour in self-evaluation means that key areas for improvement have not progressed well enough. In many cases, such as additional learning needs, officers have not kept abreast of best practice in other authorities and do not know what can work well. As a result the pace of improvement has been too slow.

The authority has a culture that does not challenge underperformance in schools well enough. It has not used its full range of powers to make sure that schools causing concern improve quickly enough

Partnership working: Adequate

Monmouthshire has a strong vision for partnership working, supported well with high levels of commitment from elected members, senior leaders and strategic partners.

The council participates well in a range of strategic partnerships, and undertakes a leadership role in the local service board, the regional consortium for school improvement and the children and young people's partnership. However, the authority does not have a strategic overview of how well this work impacts on learners and improves their achievements and attainments.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 develops further the council's integrated approach to planning with key strategic partnerships, and has an improved focus on outcomes for learners. Key themes of the partnership align well with the authority's priorities and other planning process. However, the integration of the priorities for learners and their support needs from the four key strategic partnerships is late when compared to the situation in other authorities.

Activities of the Children and Young People's Plan have progressed well and multi-agency initiatives have been delivered across a wide range of priority issues. Good relationships help partners to overcome organisational barriers to provide essential provision for vulnerable learners. The use of outcome based planning and reporting is at an early stage. The impact of the provision on learners or services is unclear and baseline and progress data is not used well enough. This does not help the authority and the partnership enough to know what impact services have upon learners and on priority objectives, or to plan with a clear analysis of need.

The Children and Young People's Plan audit of needs is currently being updated through the needs audit for the single integrated plan. However, there is not an up to date map of all services for young people across the county or an overall knowledge of the resources available in order to ensure that priorities for children and young people are met appropriately.

A new Partnerships and Engagement team gives high levels of support to the development of the single planning process. The head of the team reports directly to the Deputy Chief Executive. This demonstrates well the authority's commitment to the change process.

Resource management: Unsatisfactory

Since 2002 the council has used funding well to improve the suitability of its primary schools in particular. The financial strategy to deliver the 21st Century Schools plan, which focuses on renewing its secondary schools and some primary schools, is in place. Substantial additional funding is already being identified to finance the proposed enhanced 21st Century Schools programme. Additionally, approximately one third of the council's annual capital budget continues to be allocated to the schools' capital programme. This high level of financial commitment reflects the importance of education to the council.

Schools' budgets are well protected and the authority has made good progress in increasing the percentage of delegated funding to schools. It regularly monitors schools' budgets and provides appropriate monitoring information to schools. However, it does not provide comparative information on costs that would help them identify potential efficiency savings.

Although the authority has maintained the lowest level of school reserves in Wales overall, too many schools have deficit budgets. It requires schools to implement appropriate recovery and investment plans to reduce deficit and surplus budgets respectively. However, the deficit in two schools has been caused unnecessarily through overstaffing.

The authority has allocated good levels of funding to initiatives to improve priorities such as literacy and numeracy but it is unable to demonstrate the full impact because intervention programmes have not been consistently evaluated or reported. It has invested significantly in information technology for learners. The shared resource service is delivering cost savings for schools and for the education service.

Some Officers evaluate a few of aspects of the provision for pupils with additional learning needs pupils. However, the results of these evaluations are not used consistently to inform practice and planning for provision. As a result, the authority is unable to sufficiently demonstrate how well additional learning needs funding is used to deliver positive outcomes for learners.

Overall, the authority does not use quality assurance processes or evaluate data consistently enough to analyse what works well for all learners. This means that the authority does not always know where resources and services should be directed to achieve the best outcomes for its learners.

Given the levels of funding and the outcomes achieved overall, the education service provides unsatisfactory value for money.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

Clive Phillips	Reporting Inspector
Jane Taylor	Deputy Lead Inspector
Caroline Rees	Team Inspector
Alun Connick	Team Inspector
Betsan O'Connor	Team Inspector
Mererid Stone	Team Inspector
Helen Morgan-Rees	Team Inspector
Louise Fleet	WAO
Bryan Jeffreys	Peer Inspector
Deborah Mountfield	Nominee

Copies of the report

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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.