

This letter is also available in Welsh



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Denbighshire County Council
County Hall
Wynnstay Road
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11/11/2024

Dear Geraint Davies

Enhanced LALI visit: October 2024

On the 21 – 23 October 2024, Richard Thomas HMI and two HMI colleagues carried out an enhanced local authority link inspector visit which focussed on additional learning needs and attendance.

During our visit, we had the opportunity to:

- meet with yourself as the Director for Education, the senior team and relevant officers
- meet with the Chief Executive Officer, chair of scrutiny and lead member for education
- meet with headteachers and leaders
- scrutinise documentation

We hope you and your education services team found this visit to be helpful. Below is a summary of our findings.

Area of focus 1: How well does the local authority identify pupils with additional needs early through collaboration, transition and multi-agency working
Strengths

- The local authority has a strong ethos of collaborative working. This contributes well to the work of the dedicated team of additional learning needs (ALN) officers that support schools and settings effectively. As a result, the needs of pupils with ALN are identified in a timely manner.

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Mae Estyn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Bydd gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn y naill iaith neu'r llall yn cael yr un flaenoriaeth.	Estyn welcomes correspondence in both English and Welsh. Correspondence received in either language will be given equal priority.
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- The authority's processes for assessing, planning and monitoring helps to facilitate, timely identify and provide interventions for children and young people with ALN.
- Local authority ALN officers provide a wide range of advice, support and guidance to schools and settings. The service focus successfully on building capacity in schools and settings. The provision includes the beneficial and well-established multi agency 'Team Around the Pre-school' (TAPS) and 'Team Around the School' (TAS) model to support and advise schools on how to meet the needs of pupils including those with ALN. TAPS and TAS include staff from the ALN team, behaviour support and educational psychologists. The approach enables the timely identification and support for pupils with possible ALN. School leaders appreciate the purposeful advice and guidance provided by officers.
- Officers have facilitated valuable cluster meetings to support the work of additional learning needs coordinators (ALNCo). In addition, officers promote effective school to school working to support with all aspects of implementation of ALN reform.
- The authority shares effective ALN practice regularly across their own and other local authorities. For example, the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer for Denbighshire and Conwy co-presented to health professionals from the Children's Development Centres on ALN.
- Officers have developed a useful Principles and Expectation Document which summarises the authority's expectation of the support arrangements in educational settings for children and young people with ALN.
- The authority's provision for Welsh medium ALN multi agency services is a strength. This supports multi agency working to meet the needs of all pupils with ALN well.
- Effective transition arrangements are in place to support the needs of pupils with ALN. The authority fosters close links and collaboration between educational establishments. This enhances transition arrangements into maintained and non-maintained settings, into primary and secondary schools, and transition for post-16 pathways. Further, the authority aims to ensure that additional learning provision is consistently in place on transition.
- The authority has a measured approach to the consideration of school based and local authority maintained individual development plans (IDP). As a result, ALNCos and leaders in schools are clear on local authority processes and the distinction between a school or a local authority maintained IDP.

Consider

- strengthening the support for school ALN coordinators and leaders to make more effective and purposeful use of the LA digital platform.

Area of focus 2: How effective is the local authority in providing effective challenge and targeted support to improve pupil attendance

Strengths

- In line with Denbighshire's Corporate Plan, attendance is a priority and permeates through all service areas plans.

- Overall, processes and systems to monitor attendance are appropriate. Officers have a clear focus on improving attendance and in general, their approaches are having a suitable impact on raising attendance levels of pupils in the local authority.
- Officers have embedded local authority's values and vision within the Pupil Engagement Strategy which aims to improve attendance across all schools. The strategy aims to promote consistent approaches and effective collaboration between different partners to support leaders to plan and implement strategies to raise attendance in their schools.
- The Attendance Policy has been reviewed in line with Welsh Government guidelines and adopted by schools. This has been strengthened by including guidance to schools on the effective use of part-time timetables. The work of the family link and engagement officers supports well the development and implementation of these attendance approaches.
- The committed and dedicated Education Welfare team work effectively to support and guide school leaders and staff. They engage constructively with families to address and resolve barriers their child maybe facing in attending school.
- The multi-agency cross service approach is a strength of the local authority. This approach addresses the individual needs of pupils through tailored intervention support plans suitably.
- There is a purposeful Community Focus schools' approach within the local authority. This is beginning to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils, families and their communities.
- There are useful opportunities for leaders to share effective practice on a regular basis, for example in the weekly briefing with senior authority officers, cluster meetings and headteachers conferences. These interactions provide helpful guidance to schools on approaches to improve attendance.

Consider

- how effectively officers use a range of attendance information for groups of learners to identify trends and target resources and support across schools.
- how robustly officers hold school leaders to account in their use of pupils' attendance data.

Yours sincerely

Richard Thomas