

Section 1: Insights and issues

Annual Report 2010-2011



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The new inspection arrangements introduced this year have brought some key aspects of education and training into sharper focus. In the sections below, I identify some of the insights gained from the inspection evidence we have gathered over the last academic year about these key aspects. I also identify the issues that have been raised in pursuing some of the main lines of enquiry on inspections and in surveys undertaken by HMI.

The following aspects are highlighted:

- wellbeing;
- strategies for improving literacy skills;
- learning Welsh as a second language;
- the standards achieved by specific groups of learners;
- the leadership provided by school governors;
- the progress made by providers since their last inspection;
- the views of learners and parents about schools and other providers; and
- challenges for post-16 education and training.

Wellbeing

The new common inspection framework gives more emphasis to the inspection of wellbeing and this year I am reporting on learners' wellbeing in more detail than previously. The evidence overall suggests that standards of wellbeing in our schools and in other providers are high. The judgements on pupils' wellbeing are that it is good or better in nearly all non-maintained settings and primary, secondary, special and independent schools inspected. Wellbeing is also good or better in almost all work-based and adult community learning settings and further education institutions inspected.

In their responses to the questionnaires that we invite learners to complete about their experience of education, nearly all pupils in both primary and secondary schools say that they feel safe in school and that they know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset. Nearly all primary and many secondary pupils say that the school teaches them how to be healthy, while most pupils state that they have lots of opportunities to get regular exercise. Nearly all learners in further education institutions and work-based and adult community learning settings say that they enjoy learning and feel safe and free from harassment in their learning or work placements.

In the Foundation Phase, children's enjoyment, wellbeing, behaviour and physical development generally improve as a result of using the outdoors. Boys, in particular, enjoy and benefit from the regular opportunities to run, jump, balance, climb, explore and experiment, which are common features of outdoor learning. Children's greater engagement in such learning activities impacts positively on their personal and social development, general behaviour and wellbeing. For example, children persevere with activities for longer periods and will attempt new things more

readily. Shy children often become more outgoing in such situations while children with behavioural difficulties generally settle better in class after undertaking outdoor tasks. It is overwhelmingly clear that the vast majority of children in the Foundation Phase enjoy coming to school.

Nearly all children in non-maintained settings and primary schools know what healthy food is and how it is important to exercise. Many join extra-curricular activities to keep fit. Most secondary pupils also understand how to be healthy and take part in a broad range of physical activities. Learners benefit from access to a range of professional support, guidance and counselling.

Nearly all children in non-maintained settings apply themselves well to learning activities, play co-operatively with other children and show a good understanding of rules and routines. In most primary schools, pupils behave well, demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning and are enthusiastic and well motivated. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good or better in many secondary schools and very good in about a third of schools. Almost all pupils in special schools behave well and engage enthusiastically in learning. The numbers of permanent and fixed-term exclusions continue to fall, maintaining the steady pattern in recent years.

In nearly all primary schools, pupils show respect, care and concern for others. In the majority of schools, pupils participate well in community activities, for example as school councillors or as members of an eco-committee although, in a minority of schools, pupils play too small a role in making decisions about how and what they learn.

In many secondary schools, pupils develop their life and social skills well. They often take part in community activities and in making decisions about various aspects of school life, such as improving the environment, as part of the school council's work. In a few schools, where pupils' involvement in the life and work of the school is especially strong, they have a significant role in self-evaluation activities and in the process of developing school improvement plans. In a significant minority of schools, they have a say in what and how they learn.

The one indicator of wellbeing that remains disappointing is the level of attendance. Attendance rates have changed little in primary schools over the last six years. Although they are improving slowly in secondary schools, they remain below those in England.

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Strategies for improving literacy skills

In last year's annual report, I said that, despite achieving some progress in improving literacy in the previous six years, too many adults have low levels of basic literacy, and that typically 40% of pupils arrive at secondary schools with reading ages that are below their chronological age. Unless pupils have appropriate levels of literacy, they cannot read well enough to keep up in lessons. Later on, they cannot progress to higher levels of education or training or make a full contribution to their communities or as members of the workforce.

We know that developing the essential skills of literacy has a positive impact on standards in all subjects. That is why the best schools put so much effort into improving their pupils' reading and writing.

The main ways that these schools have done this are by:

- using creative play, drama and stories to enthuse pupils and help them to gain oracy skills;
- building on oracy skills to develop pupils' confidence in their story-telling abilities so that they can translate ideas and images into written stories;
- providing a range of exciting reading materials and writing opportunities that appeal to pupils and stimulate them to learn;
- teaching phonics regularly;
- implementing whole-school systems that will develop pupils' literacy progressively across all areas of the curriculum;
- planning frequent opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in a wide range of lessons and contexts; and
- making sure that teachers of all subjects use a consistent approach to assessing and tracking pupils' progress in literacy.

Most schools ask teachers to map where they cover aspects of literacy skills in lessons but, in practice, few start with a detailed plan for developing pupils' skills progressively across the curriculum. In one-in-five primary schools inspected, curriculum planning is only adequate and there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply skills, especially in writing, across the curriculum. In over a quarter of primary school inspection reports, inspectors say that literacy skills need to improve, particularly writing skills, and schools need to get better at planning for progression.

Similarly, only a few secondary schools start with a plan to develop skills and then apply that plan to underpin the curriculum. A quarter of secondary schools do not co-ordinate skills provision appropriately or monitor the consistency and impact of provision in lessons across the curriculum. In more than a third of secondary school inspection reports this year, there were recommendations to improve skills co-ordination across the curriculum and to plan for progression.

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Planning for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum

Too often, teachers plan the curriculum as separate subjects, without thinking enough about how subjects, such as history or geography, can be a context for pupils to develop literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, pupils do not apply their number, reading and extended writing skills often enough in the context of all subjects.

Only a few schools use a 'skills-based' approach to planning the whole curriculum. These schools plan activities that become more complex as pupils move through the school so as to develop their thinking, communication, information and communication technology and number skills progressively. Where schools plan a skills-based curriculum well, teachers work together to plan across all year groups and to target how they will develop specific skills in subject or themed lessons.

For more information about this please refer to our remit on the '[The Skills Framework at key stage 2.](#)'

Literacy from the early years through life

The Foundation Phase is generally having a positive effect on children's speaking, listening and reading. Children now have more and better opportunities to talk and more exciting things to talk about. However, a minority of children make slow progress in writing as they move through the Foundation Phase. In around a quarter of primary schools, the quality of children's writing in the Foundation Phase is not good enough. In a minority of schools, teachers are unsure about how much direct teaching should take place within the Foundation Phase. This means that there is sometimes not enough direct teaching of important reading and writing skills.

Many pupils in the majority of primary schools develop appropriate reading skills within the curriculum offered and can read in a variety of contexts. There is a minority of pupils in these schools whose reading ages are significantly below their chronological age. In a few schools, most pupils do not read with accuracy and do not understand what they read well enough.

Pupils' writing skills are not as well developed as their reading skills by the end of key stage 2, and the majority do not write at length or learn to improve their work through re-drafting. Few pupils write well or at length in subjects other than in English or Welsh first language. For example, older pupils do not write detailed accounts in history or make comprehensive notes on the science investigations they have carried out.

The end-of-key-stage 2 outcomes of teacher assessment in language are generally overgenerous. Even so, the outcomes show only small improvements in the percentages of pupils achieving the expected level 4 in reading and writing in English and Welsh first language in recent years. Standards in writing remain below those in reading. Girls continue to do better than boys in all measures, particularly in writing, although the gap has narrowed a little since last year.

In secondary schools, teacher assessments at key stage 3 suggest a worsening picture. Standards in writing remain below those in reading and about one-in-ten pupils who achieve expected levels in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 do not make enough progress to achieve the expected level 5 by the end of key stage 3.

In about one-in-eight secondary schools, where standards are excellent, pupils use their literacy skills effectively. For example, they read and synthesise information well and present it in a variety of styles for different audiences. Many pupils, across most schools, read with understanding, extract, and interpret information well. However, in a few schools, a minority of pupils have limited reading skills and this limits their progress in all subjects. Often, in these schools, more able pupils do not have enough opportunities to study and analyse complex texts.

Teaching phonics systematically

Coed Eva Primary School in Cwmbran teaches phonics systematically to children in the Foundation Phase.

Children practise regularly to build on the progress they make through the programme. The pace of delivery ensures that children gain the skills they need to develop their reading quickly. The programme is characterised by the features described below:

- it is clear, systematic and progressive throughout the Foundation Phase;
- phonic sessions are held frequently and regularly;
- the coverage is brisk and avoids unnecessary repetition; and
- teachers motivate children by using interesting approaches, such as using the outdoor environment to search for words that begin with the same sound.

Because the approach is systematic, children build the phonic knowledge, understanding and skills that they need at the right stage. The programme has had a significant impact on the literacy standards of all pupils.

For more information about this please refer to our remit on '[Literacy and the Foundation Phase](#).'

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In many secondary schools, pupils are given good opportunities to write clearly for a range of different purposes and audiences and they can write detailed accounts of events in humanities subjects. However, in a quarter of secondary schools, standards of pupils' writing are not as good as other aspects of literacy. In these cases, pupils do not produce enough extended writing and make basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Most local authorities have well-established initiatives to improve literacy. However, it is difficult to judge the impact of these initiatives on standards because officers do not track the progress learners make well enough.

Generally, further education institutions give learners a broad range of opportunities to develop and improve their literacy skills. Most learners make good progress in developing these skills. Most learners' written work is appropriate for their level of study. However, there is considerable variation in learners' attainment of essential skills qualifications in further education institutions. Learners' progress in gaining appropriate essential skills qualifications also varies considerably in work-based learning settings. Where provision is well planned, a significant minority of learners attain these skills at a level higher than required in their qualification framework. Too many providers do not give a high enough priority to developing learners' literacy skills.

Most adult learners in community learning settings have the literacy skills needed to succeed on their courses. However, there is too much variation in the extent to which learners undertaking adult basic education courses achieve their intended qualifications. There is not enough provision across Wales to support adults to improve their basic skills. Not enough adults with low levels of basic skills progress to level 2 qualifications. Moreover, providers of adult basic education do not plan well enough to attract young adult learners who have not achieved level 2 qualifications in English or mathematics while at school.

Reading ages

Last year's annual report suggested that there was a need to develop an all-Wales approach to assessing literacy skills. Recently, the Welsh Government has announced plans to introduce a national literacy framework and mandatory reading tests for pupils.

This year, we again undertook a survey of secondary schools to find out how schools test pupils' reading skills. About 50 schools responded and broadly confirmed last year's findings. Typically, 40% of pupils entering secondary schools have reading ages more than six months below their chronological age. Twenty per cent have a reading age below nine years and six months, which is generally considered to indicate the level of functional literacy. A further 20% have reading ages that are between six and 18 months below their actual age. These figures are higher than would be expected since in 2011 only about 17% of pupils did not achieve expected levels in reading in teacher assessments at the end of key stage 2. These teacher assessments do not include direct tests of reading ages.

Around two-thirds of the secondary schools that responded receive data on pupils' reading ages from partner primary schools. Many secondary schools find this information helpful. However, a minority of secondary schools do not receive reading age information at all from partner primary schools.

Nearly all secondary schools test pupils' reading ages on entry in Year 7, generally in the first month of pupils starting school. Schools use a wide range of different tests for this purpose. About half of schools carry out further reading tests, most commonly in Year 8 or Year 9. About two-fifths of the schools surveyed carry out reading tests each year throughout key stage 3. Many schools carry out further reading tests for specific groups of pupils who require additional support with their reading.

Literacy skills in further education

We undertook a similar survey of further education in Wales. We asked institutions to tell us how they assess learners' literacy skills when they enrol at college, what support the college offers and what impact this support has on learners' progress. Around half replied to the questionnaire. We found that nearly all learners in further education institutions undertake an initial assessment of skills.

In 2010-2011, around a fifth of learners were assessed at below level 1 in literacy while almost three-fifths were at level 1. Around a quarter of learners were at level 2. Institutions offer a range of literacy support programmes, including out-of-class support, one-to-one in-class support and small group in-class support. Less than a third of those learners offered out-of-class support attended these sessions for a full term and only about one-in-six learners continued beyond a term. Less than half of those learners offered in-class one-to-one support took up this option while around two-thirds of learners who were offered small-group in-class support accepted this support.

Many further education institutions do not measure the impact of their support programmes on the standards of learners' literacy.

Learning Welsh as a second language

This year, about half of pupils in English-medium primary schools achieved the expected level in Welsh second language by the end of key stage 2. Although this proportion is an improvement on last year, it remains lower than that for all other subjects. Many pupils make a good start to learning in Welsh in the Foundation Phase, but do not develop their Welsh language skills well enough in key stage 2. Teachers do not provide these pupils with enough opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the language and do not have high enough expectations of what the pupils can achieve. This is mainly because many teachers are not confident enough and lack the knowledge to teach Welsh at an appropriately high level.

Similarly, in many English-medium secondary schools, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to improve their ability to use Welsh other than in Welsh lessons. In 2011, about two-thirds of key stage 3 pupils achieved the expected level 5 or above in Welsh second language. This maintains the steady improvement seen over the last five years, but standards in Welsh second language continue to be lower than those in all other subjects and the gap between the performance of boys and girls is also greater than for all other subjects.

Only around two-thirds of key stage 4 pupils gain a recognised qualification in Welsh first or second language. There has been a downward trend in the proportion of pupils entered for the full GCSE course in Welsh second language. In 2011, less than half of pupils taking a GCSE examination in Welsh second language entered for the full course.

There are still not enough Welsh-medium or bilingual courses to meet the needs of Welsh speakers post-16. In half the further education institutions inspected this year, learners are able to develop their Welsh language skills, for example through the Welsh Baccalaureate programme and in other classes and tutorials, but few complete their coursework or assignments in Welsh. In the other institutions inspected, Welsh provision is very limited. In work-based learning, improvement in Welsh-medium provision is also slow and only a few providers encourage learners to study or complete assessments in Welsh.

Even in Welsh-speaking areas, only a few Welsh-medium adult community learning courses are available. When given the opportunity, most adult Welsh-speaking learners make good progress.

In the Welsh for adults centre inspected this year there is a good variety of courses at all levels. Most Welsh for adults learners are enthusiastic, make good progress and often use Welsh socially.

The standards achieved by specific groups of learners

Different groups of learners have their own distinctive learning needs. Such groups include disadvantaged learners, more able and talented pupils, and older adult learners. Disadvantaged learners include learners entitled to free school meals, those from minority groups, such as looked-after children and gypsy and traveller children, and those identified as being in need of additional support. The new common inspection framework now explicitly requires inspectors to look at how providers identify and address these needs.

The support available to these groups of learners varies considerably among providers. Generally, providers do not use data or assessment systems well enough to identify the underachievement of groups of learners or track their progress. Once identified, these learners need specific and discrete support, as well as good teaching and learning, to help them achieve their potential. However, provision is generally not differentiated or targeted carefully enough to meet the needs of these learners.

Disadvantaged learners

The few schools that support disadvantaged learners well analyse data rigorously to identify where to target support and implement systematic, whole-school approaches to support these learners. These schools tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners and raise the achievement of disadvantaged learners by providing a focus on giving pupils work in lessons that will improve specific skills. They also offer mentoring for individual pupils and extra help with basic skills and homework.

Only a few schools have a specific objective to target support at disadvantaged learners in the transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3. Full information about disadvantaged learners is still not being transferred systematically between primary and secondary schools. Generally, schools do not build on the links they have with other schools well enough to share and develop their strategies to tackle disadvantage.

Almost all work-based learning providers and further education institutions offer suitable programmes for learners from deprived areas to continue their education or training. Providers generally have information available that identifies the percentage of learners who reside in areas of deprivation. However, providers do not analyse their learner data well enough to know whether they attract a high enough proportion of learners from deprived areas. Learners generally receive good care, guidance and support. However, providers do not monitor the level or take-up of support for learners from deprived areas or analyse data on learners' completion and attainment rates well enough to show the impact of these guidance and support arrangements on learners' performance. Only a small number of providers compare the achievements of learners from deprived areas, or the achievements of learners in receipt of financial support, with the performance of other learners.

A whole-school approach to supporting disadvantaged learners

Bryngwyn School in Llanelli has adopted successful strategies to improve the attendance, attitude and the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

For more information about this, please refer to the [case study](#).

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Gypsy and Traveller learners

Schools and local authorities face particular challenges in improving outcomes for Gypsy and Traveller pupils. The most important factors in improving Gypsy and Traveller pupils' outcomes are to do with improving their attendance and attitudes towards school. This is a significant challenge for the staff involved as it means changing established attitudes in the Gypsy and Traveller community as well as in the schools themselves.

Although in a few cases the actions of local authority staff are beginning to improve attendance rates, despite this support the overall attendance rates of secondary school age Gypsy and Traveller pupils are still too low.

Most schools do not adapt their approaches to meet the needs of Gypsy and Traveller pupils. Overall, few secondary schools have policies or practices that address their needs and few schools adapt the curriculum to raise all pupils' awareness of the traditions and values of Gypsy and Traveller families.

Effective strategies to support Gypsy and Traveller pupils

St. Joseph's Catholic and Anglican High School in Wrexham has developed effective strategies to support Gypsy and Traveller pupils that have helped reduce exclusion rates and increased participation in extracurricular activities.

For more information about this, please refer to the [case study](#).

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“This is a significant challenge for the staff involved as it means changing established attitudes in the Gypsy and Traveller community as well as in the schools themselves.”

More able and talented learners

Generally, primary schools do not identify more able and talented pupils adequately or offer enough challenge to stretch these pupils. Too few of these pupils achieve at above the expected levels at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. In the few primary schools with the best provision, thorough analysis of data and assessment outcomes helps to identify more able and talented pupils. In these schools, the pupils are identified and offered a range of additional provision, and teachers track their progress carefully. Where provision is good, there are consistent, whole-school approaches to learning and teaching. More relevant extra-curricular activities are available and there are strong links with secondary schools to smooth transition and ensure that suitable challenge and enrichment continue. Where schools promote individualised or personalised approaches to learning, the more able and talented benefit significantly, particularly from having control over how and what they learn.

Older learners

Adult community learning partnerships across Wales generally provide effective support for learners between 50 and 65 years old who are not in employment or are in groups that do not access learning outside their communities. Through community learning opportunities, many of these older people have developed their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills and improved their employability.

However, older learners, particularly those who are over 65 years old and retired, do not have the same access to those education and skills development opportunities that could contribute to their continued health and wellbeing in the next phase of their lives. This is because the current emphasis on 'skills for employment' in what is offered has resulted in gaps in provision for older learners for whom this is not relevant. The curriculum offered to these older learners, including those who can pay for courses, is inflexible, does not meet their needs and does not promote lifelong learning positively.

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The leadership provided by school governors

In many schools, governors generally carry out their roles well in terms of supporting the school's work. However, in around a quarter of schools, while governors may be well informed about many aspects of school life, they generally have limited knowledge of the school's performance data or do not make comparisons with outcomes in similar schools, and rarely challenge or hold leaders to account.



In schools where leadership is judged to be only adequate, governors do not fulfil statutory requirements such as meeting their safeguarding responsibilities or producing suitable annual reports to parents. In unsatisfactory schools, governors are not well informed about the school's priorities or the performance of pupils.

If governors are to carry out their role effectively, they need information on certain key aspects of the school's work. School leaders and managers prepare reports for full governors meetings on at least a termly basis. Governing bodies also have sub-committees that focus on specific areas of governance, for example the school's budget, staffing and curriculum. However, in schools where leadership is weak, the information that governing bodies receive often makes it difficult for them to hold leaders to account. In too many cases, headteachers present school performance data and other contextual information in a way that hides the real issues. This results in a degree of complacency that is typical of many 'coasting' schools. As a result, governors are sometimes under an illusion about the school's performance and are therefore surprised when inspectors raise concerns.

In the best schools, governors have a clear vision based on the school's distinctive character and ethos. This helps them to play a strong role in shaping the school's future direction. In this strategic role, the governing body engages in robust and challenging dialogue about what future steps the school should take to provide high standards of pupil achievement and excellence for all.

At best, governors engage fully with the school and its community and also with the local authority. Governors have a presence in the school, are involved in aspects of its work and find out as much as they can about the school. Through visits to schools, governors are able to evaluate the school's work more effectively. When the focus is agreed in advance and the purpose is understood by all involved, these visits can be supportive and build up trust and respect between staff and the governing body. By engaging with the local authority and taking part in training, governors can learn more about their role and improve their skills.

Governors have an important role to play in school self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Governors should compare how their school is performing in comparison to schools in their family of schools and to schools facing similar challenges according to free-school-meals benchmarking. This information is made available to all schools and governors need to discuss the headline messages and ask the challenging questions to enable them to hold the school to account. Often, where a school is performing better than similar schools, it is because the school has a clear focus on raising standards and school leaders and governors have high expectations and are constantly looking for ways to improve.

Good practice in governance at Ysgol Emmanuel

Ysgol Emmanuel in Rhyl serves a socially and economically disadvantaged area and 49% of its pupils are entitled to free school meals. At the time of its inspection, there were 406 full-time pupils on roll and a further 61 children were attending the nursery on a part-time basis.

Governors at Ysgol Emmanuel have an in-depth knowledge of the performance of the school and rigorously hold it to account for the standards it achieves. Governors are directly involved in monitoring standards and provision across the school, for example through lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work.

Individual governors have responsibility for different aspects of the school's work, including specific curricular areas. For example, the governor responsible for literacy plays a full part in monitoring the standards of literacy at the school. This includes shadowing the literacy co-ordinator in reviewing how well pupils' literacy skills are being developed across the curriculum. As part of this work, the governor monitors samples of pupils' work, discusses aspects of their literacy work with groups of pupils and observes a sample of literacy lessons. Through these activities, the governor responsible for literacy gains greater awareness and understanding of provision and standards of literacy at the school, and is able to contribute fully to governors' discussions about the main findings of the review.

Similar processes apply to other governors with curriculum responsibilities.

Each term, the school holds an assessment week to monitor pupils' and class progress to meet projected targets. Governors' involvement in this work helps them to understand how well individual classes and groups of pupils are performing. Governors are able to challenge staff where there are discrepancies between targets and results and help identify suitable strategies to bring about improvement.

Over the last three years, pupils' skills have improved steadily. The school's performance places it in the top 25% when compared with similar schools, using free-school-meals benchmarks, for language, mathematics, science and the core subject indicator.

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“Governors are able to challenge staff where there are discrepancies between targets and results and help identify suitable strategies to bring about improvement.”

The progress made by providers since their last inspection

Most providers need to improve in some way following an inspection, although some will need to improve more than others. I summarise below some of the improvement journeys being undertaken by providers we inspected last year. They vary according to the position in which the school finds itself. Providers found to be unsatisfactory during inspection generally deploy different strategies from those providers that are attempting to progress from adequate to good. The improvement strategies are different again where already good providers want to become excellent. Even so, there are some common processes that apply to all providers. At the heart of any improvement process there is usually a clear focus on improving outcomes for learners, based on robust analysis of performance data and other evidence about the provider's work.

Irrespective of where the provider is on the improvement journey, it needs to:

- have clear and energetic leadership;
- set up whole-provider policies and systems and apply them universally;
- focus on improving standards for all learners as the main priority;
- concentrate on the quality of teaching and assessment as the key to improving standards;
- analyse performance data thoroughly to identify what, specifically, needs to improve;
- sustain a focus on improving literacy and numeracy;
- have high expectations and hold all staff to account for their areas of responsibility; and
- tailor learning experiences to meet the needs of specific groups of learners.

When a provider is unsatisfactory in a number of aspects of its work, it tends to adopt a largely directive and top-down approach in order to deal quickly with the most significant weaknesses. The aspects that are most likely to need urgent attention are:

- improving learner behaviour and attendance;
- raising levels of basic skills by using intervention strategies and making sure all staff see improving literacy and numeracy as their responsibility;
- allocating clear roles and responsibilities to all managers;
- setting up effective line-management systems for accountability;
- developing a culture of self-evaluation based on systematic analysis of performance data and session observations; and
- ensuring that performance-management arrangements focus on identifying and addressing underperformance.

In moving from adequate to good, providers usually introduce a more collaborative approach to improvement. This is likely to include using data to set targets for learners and tracking their progress carefully. Leadership roles are extended with more staff taking on responsibility for whole-school issues and working groups taking forward specific tasks or projects. Middle managers also take on a more significant role in carrying out lesson observations, which will focus increasingly on evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in dialogue with staff. Planning for improvement will include acting on staff and learners' views and responding constructively to their suggestions.

Excellent providers develop a collaborative, open and inclusive approach to moving from good to great. The approach is based on high expectations and features a high degree of consistency in the way all aspects of their work are carried out. There is greater emphasis on developing learners' higher-order skills, particularly thinking skills. The culture of observing sessions is fully embedded and concentrates on the impact of teaching and training on learners' achievements. Self-evaluation and reflective practice are well established. Many staff are actively engaged in collaborative activities within and beyond the provider that aim to improve teaching, training and learning. Learners play a significant role in improvement activities and contribute routinely to the preparation of improvement plans and policies.



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The views of learners and parents about schools and other providers

As part of our new inspection arrangements, we invite a sample of learners to complete questionnaires about their experience of education. For the first time this year, we have a national picture of learners' views about education, based on responses from about 16,500 primary pupils and 7,000 secondary pupils.

The picture is largely positive. In primary and secondary schools, about 95% of pupils feel safe in school and believe they are doing well.

A similar proportion of pupils indicate that teachers at their school help them to learn and make progress. More than 95% of primary school pupils say that they know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset, that they have lots of opportunities to get regular exercise, and that the school teaches them how to keep healthy.

However, around a third of secondary pupils and a quarter of primary pupils have concerns about the behaviour of other pupils. More than a third of secondary pupils feel that they do not have enough opportunities to influence the work that they do. Around a third of secondary pupils state that homework does not help them to understand and improve their work.

We also invite parents of school pupils to complete questionnaires and around 12,500 parents have responded in total (9,000 primary and 3,500 secondary). More than 85% of secondary school parents and 90% of primary school parents who returned questionnaires responded positively to all questions about the school's work. More than 95% of parents agree that their child likes school and was helped to settle in well when he/she started school. A similar proportion of parents are satisfied with their child's school, think that teaching is

good and that their child is making good progress. However, around 15% of parents of secondary pupils express concerns about pupils' behaviour and feel they are not kept well informed about their child's progress.

Learners in further education institutions, work-based settings and adult community learning are also positive about most aspects of their learning experiences. In these sectors, about 95% of learners state that they enjoy learning, were given good information by the provider when choosing their learning programmes, receive good personal support from tutors, trainers and assessors, and that staff help them to make good progress. A similar proportion of learners believe that taking part in their learning programmes has helped them to improve their life skills, while 97% say that their learning will help them to achieve their goals. Nearly all learners in work-based settings say that they have access to good-quality work placements and that employers support them well in their work placements. However, about one-in-six of learners in further education institutions and adult community learning do not believe that they have access to good-quality work placements or that employers support them well in their work placements.

Challenges for post-16 education and training

Meeting the needs of the economy

Generally, post-16 providers continue to provide learners with the technical and practical skills and professional training needed for employment and the economic regeneration of our communities.

There has been a steady improvement in learners' progression into further education or training over recent years and in inspection outcomes for work-based learning providers and further education institutions. However, providers need to do more to attract learners into engineering and manufacturing technologies, and onto construction and business administration courses. The quality of learners' outcomes on some courses in these areas also needs to improve further.

All providers need to find ways to become more responsive to the needs of their local economy. Providers can achieve this by giving more careful attention to labour market information and through improving their links with employers. Too often the links that further education institutions have with employers have been based on continuing historical relationships rather than on planning to meet new and emerging regional or national needs. They tend to be strong in a few learning areas such as engineering, caring and catering but underdeveloped or non-existent in relation to some other vocational learning areas.

Schools and post-16 providers share a major challenge in trying to provide relevant and useful work experience for their learners, particularly in a climate of financial restraint. At present they achieve this goal with variable degrees of success. Improved regional collaboration could lead to more efficient co-operation between individual providers in finding and managing work placements in order to prepare young people better for the world of work when they have completed their education and training.

To become more responsive to industry and to learners from the community, providers need to improve their strategic planning. It is natural for providers to want to continue with the pattern of curriculum and courses they have established over time and this often does match quite closely the aspirations of the learners they enrol. They do not question whether they are adapting quickly enough to changing circumstances and needs. For example, colleges do not monitor the enrolment of learners from deprived backgrounds – those who are in receipt of the education maintenance allowance – carefully enough to make sure that they are meeting the needs of all young people from the communities they serve.

Partnerships

Our inspections this year have looked at different types of partnership working. Some partnerships are working well, but others need to be strengthened.

The further education sector has been working with local schools and other providers, with varying degrees of success, to increase the range of courses for learners, to share resources and to avoid duplication of provision. But across post-16 sectors, learners do not always receive the highest-quality independent information, advice and guidance on what courses are the most suitable for them to follow.

Guidance is not always based on up-to-date labour market information either and this is vital if they are to follow appropriate learning routes leading to employment or further levels of study.

There are many good examples of partnership working at an operational level in adult community learning. However, there are still too many cases of poor planning at local authority level, which allow unnecessary duplication of courses. Too often, provision is planned to take advantage of the availability of funding streams rather than to reflect the needs of the area as a whole. Partnerships do not always involve the third sector, which plays an important role in the local delivery of education to vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Providers do not work together closely enough to share expertise and facilities, and especially to provide a coherent pattern of literacy support for learners. The South West Wales Regional Learning Partnership, which is developing provision of essential skills training on a regional basis, is a good example of how providers can plan more effectively to meet both the needs of individual learners and the requirements of the local economy.

Use of data

Across all post-16 sectors, the most significant driver for data collection is the National Planning and Funding System, which is currently under review. Providers do not collect or use data robustly enough to demonstrate that their strategies are having a positive impact on improving learners' skills. They do not track systematically the progress their learners make in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology across the curriculum. Providers cannot always show how the analysis and interpretation of data have influenced their decisions about teaching, the curriculum and use of resources, or how their decisions – for instance, about the allocation of resources or investment in areas of learning – have led to better quality and outcomes.

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