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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**

**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council  
Municipal Offices  
Civic Centre  
Ebbw Vale  
NP23 6XB**

**January 2013**

**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.

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## Context

Blaenau Gwent is located in South East Wales. The total population is 69,812. In Blaenau Gwent, 16.9% of people over the age of three say they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 19.0%.

Of the working population in Blaenau Gwent, 14.3% have no qualifications, which is higher than the Wales average of 11%. The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals is 29.1%, higher than 19.3% nationally. This level of eligibility is the highest in Wales. Twenty three percent of the 47 areas in Blaenau Gwent are now in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales.

As of 31 March 2012, Blaenau Gwent had 135 children being looked after by the authority. There were 70 children on the Child Protection register.

Ethnic minorities account for 1% of the population, lower than the Wales average of 4.2%.

### Financial context

The Welsh Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council for 2012-2013 was £1,823 per head of population. This was the second highest level of SSA per head of population in Wales. The authority set its overall revenue budget at 104.1% of SSA, resulting in continuing high levels of Council Tax.

In 2012-2013, the authority set its education budget above the level of the notional education component within the SSA. This produced an education budget of £5,489 per pupil net of grants, well above the Welsh average of £4,813 per pupil and the highest of local authorities in Wales.

Welsh Government figures show that the authority delegates 80.9% of the available education budget to schools, slightly below the Wales average of 81%.

It produces average delegated budgets of £4,777 per pupil in primary schools and £4,319 per pupil in secondary schools, including grants. The delegated budgets for primary schools are well above the Welsh average of £4,114 per pupil. The secondary school budgets are below the Wales average of £4,589 per pupil. This is because of the recent local change in sixth form funding.

The total cost, including funding for services that are centrally managed, of primary school education in Blaenau Gwent amounts to £5,002 per primary school pupil, compared with an average across Wales of £4,536. Secondary school education costs £4,749 per pupil, which is below the Wales average of £4,949.

### Corporate leadership

In May 2011, Estyn found the performance of the local authority's education services to be unsatisfactory. In addition, Estyn found the authority's prospects for improvement to be unsatisfactory. In light of these shortcomings, Estyn placed the authority into special measures.

In September 2011 the Minister for Education and Skills appointed four commissioners, two to exercise the function of the authority's executive and two advisory commissioners to support and challenge the education commissioners. At the time of inspection the Minister had reduced the number of commissioners to one.

## Summary

### **Overall judgement: Unsatisfactory**

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

- standards of attainment are unsatisfactory, particularly in secondary schools;
- for the last three years Blaenau Gwent has not met any of the Welsh Government benchmarks for attainment based on free-school-meal entitlement;
- the rate of longer fixed-term exclusions and the number of days lost to exclusion are increasing;
- initiatives for school improvement are too fragmented and are not strategically aligned or coordinated effectively at an operational level;
- operational leadership in the delivery of education has not generated improvements in areas of underperformance;
- business planning and risk-assessment processes have not been robust enough to identify and address the slow pace of progress in education services and schools; and
- arrangements for safeguarding do not meet requirements and give serious cause for concern.

However:

- attendance rates in primary schools have improved and are above average when compared to those of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks; and
- as a result of the work of the regional consortium's school improvement service, the authority has more accurate information about the performance of its schools and is beginning to tackle underperformance more systematically.

### **Capacity to improve: Unsatisfactory**

The local authority has unsatisfactory prospects for improvement because:

- the leadership of local authority services for children and young people continues to be unstable;
- the pace of action to bring about improvement has been too slow in the past to assure inspectors that improvement will take place without continued external support and challenge;
- the lack of capacity and competence in key roles at all levels within the organisation constrains progress;
- self-evaluation processes are undeveloped and progress against recommendations made in previous inspections has been limited;

- officers and school leaders have not been held to account effectively; and
- business planning arrangements have not supported leaders and managers to clarify expectations and manage performance.

However:

- within the Children and Young People's Partnership, there is a useful performance management framework where arrangements to secure accountability from partners are developing; and
- the authority has established helpful partnerships with several neighbouring local authorities to strengthen its capacity and expertise.

## Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards at all key stages, particularly at the end of key stage 4
- R2 Secure more thoroughness and consistency in self-evaluation both operationally and strategically
- R3 Formalise and strengthen business planning and performance-management systems in order to focus more on outcomes and hold officers to account
- R4 Create a leadership structure with the mandate to align the efforts of all relevant agencies in order to co-ordinate and direct initiatives for school improvement
- R5 Use the full range of powers available to the authority to improve underperforming schools more quickly
- R6 Improve provision for pupils with additional learning needs and those from vulnerable groups through better planning, building capacity in schools and tighter quality assurance of officers' work
- R7 Ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust and underpinned by a clear policy

### 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 should remain in the follow-up category of requiring special measures and will inform the Welsh Government of this decision.

Any follow-up 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). The authority's progress will also be monitored by Estyn's Local Authority Link Inspector.

## Main findings

### Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Unsatisfactory

#### Standards: Unsatisfactory

The proportion of learners in Blaenau Gwent who are eligible for free school meals is the highest in Wales. However, even when these high levels of deprivation are taken into account, performance is well below average.

In key stage 2 in 2012, the percentage gaining the core subject indicator improved. However, in all key stages except the Foundation Phase, performance is among the worst in Wales.

When the performance of Blaenau Gwent schools is compared with that of similar schools in Wales, based on the percentage eligible for free school meals, performance in the Foundation Phase and key stage 2 is above average. However, for the core subject indicator in key stage 3 over half of the schools are in the bottom 25% and no schools are in the top 25%. In key stage 4, only one school is above average on each of the five main indicators. Too many schools are in the bottom 25% and, on two of the indicators, no school is in the top quarter. The authority has made very little progress over the last three years.

In 2012, the percentage of Blaenau Gwent pupils leaving full-time education without any recognised qualification remained unchanged although the figure for Wales improved. As a result, the Blaenau Gwent percentage is now not as good as the Wales average although it was at the level of the average in 2011.

The Welsh Government sets benchmarks for an authority's performance in key stages 3 and 4 based on free-school-meal entitlement. In 2009, Blaenau Gwent only met one of its three possible benchmarks, and in the subsequent three years it has not met any of these benchmarks. At key stage 4, the percentages of pupils gaining a level 2 qualification in mathematics and science are the worst in Wales, whilst performance in English remains among the worst in Wales.

Progress between primary and secondary schools is above average at key stage 3 in 2012 although this is from a low baseline. At key stage 4, progress from key stages 2 and 3 is below average overall even allowing for this low baseline.

The gap in performance between girls and boys on the core subject indicator in key stage 2 was wider than the average for Wales in 2012. In key stage 3, the gap in performance has been consistently larger than that across Wales in recent years. At key stage 4, the gap is greater than it is across Wales on all indicators.

Standards of pupils with SEN are generally below the Wales average. In the Foundation Phase, key stage 3 and key stage 4, minority ethnic pupils generally perform better than their cohort groups. Gypsy and Traveller pupils and looked-after children generally perform less well than the cohort group. The authority does not have an analysis available consistently for all groups.

In 2011, the gap in performance between pupils eligible for free school meals and others was smaller than the gap across Wales for most indicators. However, this merely reflects the relatively low attainment of those pupils not eligible for free school meals.

The percentage of pupils leaving primary school with below functional-literacy-levels is higher than the average across Wales.

Although in key stage 2 performance in Welsh second language is better than the average for Wales, in key stage 3 performance in Welsh second language is among the worst in Wales. In 2012, the percentage of pupils gaining a full qualification in Welsh second language at key stage 4 was among the best in Wales. However, this was from a very small entry and represents less than one in ten of eligible pupils in Blaenau Gwent.

Learners gain a good range of qualifications in non-formal and informal settings, including work-focused qualifications.

### **Wellbeing: Adequate**

Attendance in Blaenau Gwent schools is improving slowly. When compared to that of similar schools on the free school meal benchmark, attendance is above average in primary schools but below average in secondary schools. The local authority's own unverified data for both secondary and primary schools in 2012-2013, which compares attendance in the first term with the same time in the previous year, suggests that attendance continues to get better.

Permanent exclusions increased in secondary schools in 2011, from none in the previous three years to five in 2011. Fixed-term exclusions of six days or more also increased in 2011. The rate of shorter fixed-term exclusions reduced slightly in 2011 reversing the previous year's upturn. Nonetheless, the average number of days lost for all exclusions is increasing.

The proportion of learners who stay on in full-time education at 16 years of age has improved. Similarly the numbers not in full-time education, training or employment (NEET) have also improved at a faster rate than the Wales average. The local authority's unverified data suggests that the reduction in NEET numbers is continuing at a faster rate than the Wales' average.

The most recent data (2011) indicates that the number of young people participating in youth support services provision including informal drop-in centres and street-work activities is adequate.

Young people engage well in after-school sports activities, and at a rate higher than the Wales average, but not as many take up community-based sporting activities.

Young people actively contribute well to the development of service planning and policy, by getting involved in education services consultations, the youth forum and Children's Grand Council. Young people also engage in training that enables them to assess the quality of provision using a local quality award both for anti-bullying and services people.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>
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<b>Adequate</b>
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### **Support for School Improvement: Adequate**

In recent months the authority has made good progress in improving its processes to support, challenge and intervene in schools mainly through the work of the regional consortium's school improvement service and the directors of recovery. Regional system leaders challenge schools more robustly and use a good range of performance data to focus discussions appropriately on standards of attainment. School target-setting processes are more secure and generally set higher expectations for schools.

Since September 2012, system leaders have classified schools according to the regional consortium's framework using a good range of performance data as well as other aspects of provision. At present this framework does not include aspects of teaching and learning, although this is currently under revision. Headteachers understand well the different aspects of the framework and the category their school is in, although a minority of headteachers are less clear about their entitlement to support as a result. The classification of schools has enabled the regional consortium to target intervention and support in those schools that need to improve the most.

The quality and frequency of written notes of visits have improved through the work of the regional consortium and a few notes include a useful evaluation of aspects of leadership and management. In addition, although a few do not fully identify areas for improvement, the consortium has recently introduced processes to quality assure the work of its officers and address these issues.

As a result of these improvements by the regional consortium's school improvement service, the authority now receives more accurate information about the performance of its schools and is beginning to tackle underperformance more systematically. However, these arrangements to identify and intervene in underperforming schools are relatively recent and have not yet had time to make an impact on standards of attainment in schools. Since the start of the current inspection cycle in 2010, a high proportion of schools have required follow-up after inspection and no school has been judged to have excellent practice.

The local authority has a programme of reviews in its schools using outside consultants. It has also recently established a Schools Standards Monitoring Group of elected members and senior officers who challenge the performance of schools. However the timing of these reviews relies too heavily on Estyn's inspection cycle. The revisions are done just before inspections are due, when there would be more benefit in focusing on the schools that need to improve the most.

The authority has a range of other partners working with schools including the Heads of the Valleys Education Programme as well as independent consultants. It also uses primary heads as consultants. These heads have introduced a variety of initiatives including several aimed at raising standards of literacy. However, the work of these partners is not co-ordinated systematically and the impact of initiatives is not evaluated well enough for schools to know which will help them to improve the most.



Several of the initiatives duplicate provision already being offered by the regional consortium.

Schools implement intervention programmes for those pupils who need to improve their basic skills but the authority does not track pupils' progress well enough to know whether they continue to improve. A few schools have introduced, through the regional consortium, a numeracy initiative, which has begun to improve standards. However, generally, the authority itself has not given enough priority in planning to improve numeracy.

The regional consortium has recently provided opportunities for subject leaders to meet in network groups, but there are not enough training programmes for senior and middle leaders in schools.

### **Support for Additional Learning Needs: Unsatisfactory**

The authority has made slow progress in its strategic planning of services to support pupils with additional learning needs. A neighbouring authority has helped the service to identify much needed areas for improvement; however, this recent direction is yet to have an impact. Business plans do not address many of the key areas for development and are not supported by robust financial planning.

The authority continues to be slow in developing processes for collecting and analysing additional learning needs data. As a result, it is unable to measure pupil progress, or evaluate the impact of interventions on pupil outcomes in order to plan services well enough.

The authority is beginning to develop a few of the basic requirements needed to deliver services for pupils with additional learning needs. For example, it has developed appropriate criteria for supporting pupils and introduced improved systems for referral to the Additional Learning Needs Panel. As a result, the processes for allocating support are now clearer and are being applied more consistently by the additional learning support panel. Improved challenge by the panel has also led to a recent appropriate reduction in the number of new statements.

The authority has recently introduced an inclusion categorisation model in order to better meet the needs of pupils. However, this has not been fully implemented and too many headteachers are unclear about the level of support schools will receive or how the authority will hold them to account in relation to outcomes for pupils with additional learning needs.

The authority has produced a small range of helpful leaflets for parents. Parent Partnership officers provide effective support for parents, helping them to understand the statutory assessment process and to resolve any concerns they may have. As a result, there have been no appeals to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales over the past year.

### **Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Unsatisfactory**

Overall, the authority has made slow progress in using outcomes as a basis for evaluation and planning, in order to target social inclusion and wellbeing interventions effectively.

Changes in the education welfare service, tighter policies, wider work with families, support from school nurses and sharing and implementing good practice between schools are all contributing to improvements in school attendance. However, monitoring and evaluation processes are still not robust enough to ensure that resources are always targeted effectively or to assure the quality of the work of relevant officers.

The local authority does not build enough capacity in schools to manage challenging behaviour. The behaviour support team has had a partial impact on improving the behaviour of a few pupils but is not successful enough in preventing pupils from being excluded or needing provision other than at school in the longer term. The level of support schools receive to support pupils' wellbeing based on their inclusion categorisation is unclear. It is also unclear whether the local authority has the capacity to deliver the support. Officers do not challenge schools robustly at inclusion link meetings.

Staff who are promoting social inclusion and wellbeing do not work closely enough with school improvement officers to share a common understanding of schools and to ensure that officer time is targeted effectively.

Overall, the local authority's youth service provides good services for young people. The service is making slow progress in improving its use of data from the management information system to monitor and evaluate performance more effectively.

Young people have access to a good range of appropriate support and guidance through other youth support services. However, the local authority does not have up-to-date information on the outcomes of the services.

The authority's arrangements for safeguarding do not meet requirements and give serious cause for concern. Senior managers do not quality assure the implementation of policies and procedures well enough. Managers do not report consistently on safeguarding to elected members and corporate managers.

### **Access and school places: Adequate**

The authority is responding well to the challenge of reducing surplus places in secondary schools. It has recently established a new 3-16 community school and has transferred post-16 provision to the new Learning Zone facility. Following the removal of sixth form provision from secondary schools, surplus places have increased, but the authority has well developed plans in place to reduce surplus places to under 15% by 2015.

Blaenau Gwent has the largest percentage of surplus places for primary schools in Wales. The reduction of surplus places in primary schools is appropriately prioritised in the authority's plans. The authority has closed three primary schools in order to establish a new community school, but its efforts have been focused mainly on secondary schools in recent years.

Blaenau Gwent responds appropriately to all requests from parents for Welsh medium education for their children and provide free home to school transport where

needed. However, this can mean long journey times for some pupils, even at primary level.

The authority has undertaken an appropriate 'child-care sufficiency' assessment and monitors child-care places well to ensure that there are sufficient places to meet demand within the different areas of Blaenau Gwent. In addition, the authority has good quality assurance procedures in place for non-maintained settings. Providers follow useful guidance, which helps bring about consistency in provision.

There is an appropriate audit of play provision within the authority and it is well placed to produce a 'play sufficiency' assessment within the statutory timescales.

Blaenau Gwent has a wide range of provision for youth support services. The youth support service undertakes many projects which are overseen by the youth services manager and quality assured by the youth support service's forum, but there is little evidence of evaluation.

<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>
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### **Leadership: Unsatisfactory**

The leadership of the Education and Leisure Directorate at Blaenau Gwent has been in a state of flux for a number of years. The quality of leadership has not been consistent or effective enough and officers have not taken timely and prioritised action to bring about improvement. In addition, there is no embedded culture or practice of challenge. School leaders, officers and managers have not been held to account for their performance.

Since the last inspection, the authority has sought a range of external support and has received support as a result of ministerial intervention. The advice given to officers by external parties has on occasion been contradictory and this has constrained the extent and pace of progress, most notably in the first year after the last inspection. Despite more recent progress, led primarily by the commissioners and the two directors of recovery, leaders and managers have still not established a sustainable pathway of change and improvement. Although the Local Service Board has successfully prioritised reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training, it has not used its influence fully to prioritise and drive performance improvement across education services and schools.

Elected members of all parties have made significant progress in recognising the impact of their negative behaviour on progress, and have changed the way they work. Members have taken useful advice, have responded positively to training and are now acutely aware of the critical role they have in raising standards for learners. Members are now better equipped to direct and challenge officers. They have also taken difficult decisions to deliver a tertiary model for post-16 education.

Scrutiny arrangements are now more robust, with elected members questioning more appropriately, seeking further detail and challenging officers. However, too often, the reports by officers to elected members and committees lack the necessary information. Important aspects, such as resources, appropriately challenging targets and details such as school-level data, are not consistently reported. This undermines

progress. In addition, documents presented as evidence for the inspection demonstrate a lack of focus on priorities and insufficient attention to detail.

Similarly, there is an inconsistent approach to business planning, reporting on progress and improvement. There is also a lack of understanding within the authority about the impact of actions taken on outcomes for children and young people. This means that corporate leaders have failed to set appropriate priorities to deploy resources well enough. There has been a failure of leadership in earmarking initiatives for school improvement services and additional learning needs in particular at both strategic and operational levels. This has led to a failure of delivery and a fragmentation of effort.

### **Quality improvement: Unsatisfactory**

Self-evaluation and performance management arrangements have not been good enough to impact on improve outcomes for children and young people.

The authority has introduced more systematic self-evaluation arrangements that underpin the corporate reporting framework. The authority consults well with a range of stakeholders. In particular, the views of children and young people have had a significant influence on aspects of the authority's work. However, the consistency, quality and rigour of self-evaluation across the range of the education services are weak.

The self-evaluation report provided for the inspection is largely descriptive. It refers to a range of actions and initiatives, many of which are very recent, and makes frequent assertions that practice has improved without supporting these with relevant evidence. The report is unbalanced and not sufficiently self-critical. There is too much emphasis on providing a positive interpretation of performance and not enough evaluation or identification of shortcomings. Too often there are references to activities that are taking place without any systematic evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of this work. Although the authority is beginning to use data more effectively to evaluate the effectiveness of provision, generally officers do not evaluate specific initiatives well enough to identify where they are most effective.

There are clear requirements to provide thematic reports to elected members, and monthly exception reports and quarterly reports on progress within the Education and Leisure Improvement Plan. However, reports are too descriptive, cover too many aspects rather than focusing on key priorities, and do not contain a robust analysis of performance outcomes and progress against targets. Reports refer largely to operational actions that have taken place, often suggesting that progress has been good, without evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions. Often, target-setting does not take sufficient account of previous performance. As a result, the authority does not have a secure appreciation of the extent to which it is achieving the objectives and targets set out in improvement plans. This restricts the authority's prospects for improvement.

The authority has not used its statutory powers to improve persistently underperforming schools quickly enough.

The authority has made limited progress in addressing recommendations from the last inspection. Officers now challenge schools more robustly and have improved their use of data to challenge underperformance. Rates of attendance and those remaining in full time education post-16 have improved. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs has not improved sufficiently and the Local Service Board has been slow to address shortcomings. Scrutiny holds the executive to account more effectively. However, there has been too little progress in relation to other important recommendations. Outcomes for learners remain unsatisfactory overall and data is not used well enough to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives.

### **Partnership working: Adequate**

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 and other strategic plans such as the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan articulate key education priorities clearly. However, the priorities are not always well defined, or underpinned by common performance measures. This makes it more difficult to maintain a clear focus on education priorities and to undertake effective monitoring and performance management across plans. However, the draft Single Improvement Plan revises these education priorities and brings them together more effectively.

The Children and Young People's Partnership uses a performance management framework, based on the use of resource based accountability. Arrangements to secure accountability from partners and other partnerships are developing. However, the report structure does not adequately capture the importance of missed targets, under performance, or new challenges.

Important measures such as identifying the impact of poor performance by pupils in key stage assessments are not included as a standard reporting item at Children and Young People's board level. This means that the Partnership does not monitor proactively enough the impact of underperformance at school level, or the contribution of other service areas to educational attainment and achievement.

The Local Service Board has revised its membership and now includes representation from the local further education college. This has helped it sharpen its focus on education issues and in particular on the priority for reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training.

The local authority has established helpful partnerships with several neighbouring local authorities in order to add capacity and expertise to help improve education provision. In addition, the local authority is working well with the regional consortium's school improvement service in order to improve schools in Blaenau Gwent.

### **Resource management: Unsatisfactory**

Although the authority has the second highest total education expenditure per pupil in Wales, standards are unsatisfactory. In addition, the delegated additional learning needs budget is the second highest in Wales. The authority cannot currently demonstrate that this budget is being used effectively to meet the needs of learners.

School transformation projects are also priorities of the local authority and are now positively impacting on surplus capacity in schools. Additional funding has been obtained from the 'invest to save' fund and the schools budget has been partially protected from budget cuts.

Service budget monitoring arrangements are effective. Budget overspends are rigorously monitored and managed from corporate resources or departmental budgets. A minority of schools have reserves of 5% or more. A few schools have reserves of 10% or more. Schools with excessive reserves and deficits are challenged and projected balances are more favourable.

The department uses external funding, partnerships and collaborative arrangements to deliver aspects of provision efficiently and effectively. In addition, the commissioning and decommissioning of services are increasingly based on outcomes.

The authority has evaluated the efficiency of a few of its services but it cannot consistently demonstrate that it has used its resources effectively to achieve good outcomes and improve standards. Standards remain unsatisfactory overall and therefore value for money is unsatisfactory.

## Appendix 1

### The inspection team

Betsan O'Connor	Reporting Inspector
Farukh Khan	Deputy Reporting Inspector
John Thomas	Team Inspector
Mererid Stone	Team Inspector
Caroline Rees	Team Inspector
Mark Campion	Team Inspector
Gerard Kerslake	Team Inspector
Samantha Spruce	WAO
Meinir Ebbsworth	Peer Inspector
Robert James	Peer Inspector
Lynn Phillips	Nominee

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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.