



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Ysgol Maes Garmon
Stryd Conwy
Mold
Flintshire
CH7 1JB**

Date of inspection: 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 school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

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

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Context

Ysgol Maes Garmon is a designated Welsh-medium school for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18. The school is situated in Mold and is maintained by Flintshire local authority. The school serves towns and villages across Flintshire. The area contains some prosperous areas in the town of Mold, and also some villages, in addition to less privileged industrial towns in Deeside.

There are 558 pupils on roll, including 105 in the sixth form. About 12% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is lower than the national percentage. Eighteen per cent of pupils are on the school's additional educational needs register and 3% have a statement of special educational needs.

Thirty-nine per cent of pupils come from homes in which Welsh is spoken and 90% are fluent in Welsh. The school has an 'immersion' provision for a group of pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 who have transferred from English-medium primary schools, to enable them to receive their education through the medium of Welsh in the main stream.

Only a very few pupils come from ethnic minority or mixed backgrounds. There are no pupils who have English as an additional language.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2010.

The individual school budget per pupil for Ysgol Maes Garmon in 2012-2013 is £4,304. The maximum per pupil in secondary schools in Flintshire is £4,738 and the minimum is £3,600. Ysgol Maes Garmon is in second position out of the 12 secondary schools in Flintshire in terms of budget per pupil.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Good features in the school's work include:

- a clear pattern of improvement in key stage 3 over the last three years;
- pupils making good progress in lessons against learning objectives;
- pupils' standard of behaviour is high and almost all feel safe at school and receive good personal support;
- a curriculum in both key stages, and in the sixth form, that provides wide and suitable opportunities and experiences;
- quality and consistency of teaching is a strength and has a positive effect on pupils' progress and understanding;
- good provision for pupils' health and wellbeing; and
- an effective immersion provision for learners from English-medium primary schools.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- of effective and firm leadership by the headteacher;
- the headteacher and senior management team have shared a clear vision with all staff for raising standards in the school successfully;
- middle managers co-operate well with each other and lead their teams very effectively;
- the school has appropriate arrangements for self-evaluation and planning in order to ensure further improvement;
- there is an appropriate process in place for lesson observations by the senior team and also for scrutinising pupils' work; and
- the school co-operates closely with primary schools in the cluster to ensure smooth transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards, especially in Welsh and the level 2 threshold
- R2 Ensure that girls show better motivation in order to reach their expectations
- R3 Disseminate the best practice in assessment for learning, ensuring that more open-ended questioning helps pupils to explain their understanding
- R4 Define the responsibilities of the senior team more clearly in order to ensure that duties are shared appropriately and effectively
- R5 Adapt the school development plan in order to include more quantitative targets and ensure that there are clear strategies for the actions
- R6 Develop the process of tracking pupils' progress in order to ensure that all departments are completely familiar with the relevant progress

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

In key stage 3, over the last four years, the school's performance shows good progress with a clear pattern of improvement. The school's performance in many indicators is better than that of similar schools in terms of levels of free school meals. There is a pattern of improvement in the core subject indicator and the school is now in the top 50% in comparison with similar schools in terms of levels of free school meals. In the individual core subjects, performance in English is in the top 50% in comparison with similar schools, and mathematics and science are in the top 25%. However, over the last four years, performance in Welsh is in the bottom 25% in comparison with similar schools.

In key stage 4, the school's performance, over the last four years in many of the main indicators, has been in the top 25% in comparison with similar schools. However, in 2012, there was an obvious decline across nearly all indicators. The level 2 threshold indicator, which includes Welsh, English and mathematics, has declined from being in the top 25% but is still in the top 50%. The level 2 threshold has declined from being in the top 25% to the bottom 25% in comparison with similar schools. Although performance in key stage 4 varies across all indicators, most of them show that the school is performing in the top 50% in comparison with similar schools. Results for 2012 place the school in the top 50% in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and in the bottom 25% in Welsh as a first language.

Pupils in the sixth form are all following level 3 courses. The percentage of pupils who attained level 3 in 2012 has decreased a little although the percentage is still higher than the averages for Wales and the family. In addition, the percentage who received A*/A grades has risen significantly over the last three years.

In the indicators that include Welsh or English and mathematics, boys perform better than girls. However, in the other main indicators, girls perform a little better than boys. In 2011, pupils who are entitled to free school meals performed very well across a range of indicators in comparison with similar schools, the family and Wales. However, in 2012, there was a significant decline in the percentage of pupils who attained level 2 and level two, including Welsh, English and mathematics. Pupils with additional learning needs make significant progress.

No pupils left the school without qualifications in 2010, 2011 or 2012 and almost all pupils stay in full-time education, employment or training.

In lessons, pupils make good progress against learning objectives. They build on their knowledge, skills and understanding well and many pupils offer extended answers in their lessons across the curriculum. In a few lessons, pupils make excellent progress and develop knowledge skills and thinking skills that contribute effectively towards their independent learning skills. Nearly all pupils work effectively

individually and also in small groups and respond purposefully to appropriate tasks. They can discuss their conclusions and ideas about the effectiveness of the style of previous texts effectively.

There is an increase in the number of pupils who are confident in Welsh and develop relevant writing and reading skills. Nearly all pupils who have reading ages below their chronological age at the beginning of Year 7 make very strong progress in reading during key stage 3. Many are fluent readers, and most pupils make appropriate use of their reading skills, linked with their work across curriculum subjects. Although there is improvement in standards of reading in Welsh, by the end of key stage 3, the proportion who achieve at the expected level continues to be much lower than the family and Wales. However, in a very few lessons, pupils do not use the language sufficiently. They speak English with their peers and with teachers, rather than using Welsh.

In most subjects, many pupils make appropriate use of their writing skills. Many pupils can write at length in Welsh or English lessons and also in additional subjects across the curriculum. In general, pupils make appropriate progress in terms of accuracy of written expression, although some pupils' books in key stage 3 show that there are weaknesses in their talent for spelling, punctuation and using relevant vocabulary. Evidence in key stage 4 books shows progress in pupils' skills and improvement in spelling, and in the use of vocabulary that is relevant to the subject. Most pupils listen attentively and submit their work in an organised way.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe at school and receive good personal support. Many pupils feel that the school deals well with the very few cases of bullying that arise. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and they have positive approaches to physical exercise and eating healthily. There are good levels of participation in fitness and sports activities, and many pupils take part in a variety of activities that are organised by the 5x60 club.

Over a period of three years, attendance levels show a little improvement and compare well with similar schools. Across the school, most pupils arrive at lessons punctually. Most pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. However, a few girls show less motivation than the boys and also are less courteous to their peers.

Many pupils make a strong contribution to a variety of aspects of school life through the activities of the school council, and through representatives on the governing body. A number of sixth form pupils work to promote the Welsh language, wellbeing and good behaviour of the younger pupils. Increasingly, pupils play a prominent role in the community.

Many pupils possess the skills to prepare them for life beyond the school or the next stage of their learning.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: Good

The school offers a wide and suitable curriculum and experiences and meets all statutory requirements. The school has responded well to pupils' needs by expanding the options that are available to include more vocational courses and the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. A wide variety of extra-curricular experiences are offered in several areas and this enriches learning. The strong links between the school and primary schools in its cluster allow effective continuation of learning experiences in key stage 2.

The school plans appropriately to ensure that there are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in all subjects. The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is used to strengthen provision for skills in key stage 4 and in the sixth form. In addition to these specific arrangements, most teachers ensure effective development of skills through lessons across the curriculum. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to develop communication skills, thinking skills and information technology skills, in addition to literacy and numeracy. Opportunities are given to write at length in almost every subject. Good experiences are planned in lessons, and outside them, in order for pupils to practise their Welsh language skills. This promotes their development of Welsh literacy. The school's intervention programmes are appropriate to ensure that all pupils' reading age compares favourably with their chronological age. The immersion provision for learners from English-medium primary schools is a prominent feature of the curriculum. There is an effective transfer programme for these pupils and extra-curricular activities are used effectively to support their linguistic development.

Provision for sustainable development and global citizenship is appropriate, in order to develop pupils' relevant understanding. Pupils have opportunities to visit foreign countries and recycling is a prominent part of the school's daily operation. The work of the eco-group supports subject work effectively.

Teaching: Good

Most lessons are planned effectively in order to ensure pupils' interest. Teachers set clear learning objectives for lessons in order to ensure that pupils understand the purpose of the work. Lessons include suitable activities, in order to gain pupils' interest to expand their relevant skills. Most teachers use a wide variety of teaching methods and resources in order to ensure that all pupils make good progress throughout the lesson. This ensures that more able and talented pupils are now challenged and they achieve very well in a minority of lessons. In addition, teachers give good support and guidance to pupils when they work individually and in groups. In excellent lessons, teachers promote learning of a very high quality by transferring many responsibilities to pupils. They give opportunities for pupils to listen, discuss and share information in order to develop subject skills and understanding, and other skills such as literacy, numeracy and thinking skills. In lessons, there is skilful use of questions being asked by teachers in order to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. In the very few lessons in which teaching is adequate, tasks do not challenge pupils sufficiently and questioning is too closed.

During lessons, most teachers give constructive oral feedback to pupils, along with appropriate opportunities for them to assess their own work and that of their peers. Nearly all teachers mark work regularly and most of them offer useful comments to help pupils to improve the standard of their work. Pupils have useful opportunities to identify improvement actions across subjects. However, in a very few books, marking is too superficial and there is not enough advice on how to improve. The school has a suitable electronic system for tracking pupils' progress. There are appropriate arrangements for addressing any underperformance. Parents receive valuable information about their children's progress in parents' meetings. However, end of year reports do not include enough detail about pupils' performance.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school promotes health and wellbeing effectively by using external agencies and pupils' working parties effectively. It has a comprehensive personal and social education programme which offers opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of contemporary issues. Opportunities to have contact with the community, employers in the area and to take part in eisteddfodau, are an important contribution to this programme. Aspects of the 'minute to think' programme add effectively to pupils' moral, spiritual, social and cultural development. The school has effective anti-bullying systems. The support that is given to pupils by staff and fellow pupils is good, and there is effective use of a variety of external agencies.

The school offers positive support to pupils who have additional learning needs. A county pupil profile system is used to measure these pupils' progress effectively. Pupils who have additional learning needs have full access to the curriculum. Teachers plan to meet pupils' individual needs by providing differentiated support or intervention during learning activities. Input by support staff is an important and effective contribution towards ensuring that pupils who have additional learning needs have access to all areas of the curriculum. The school's assessment, recording and reporting systems, including the annual progress reviews, meet statutory requirements. The minority of pupils who start school without adequate reading skills receive good support, and only a very few do not have these skills by the end of year 8.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and they are not a cause for concern.

Learning environment: Good

There is a homely and inclusive atmosphere at Ysgol Maes Garmon. They put emphasis on ensuring that all pupils have access and equal opportunities in all activities in which they are interested. The school challenges any stereotyping effectively through the personal and social education programme, as well as additional activities.

The school provides an appropriate environment and resources for lessons and general activities. There are technical resources of a good standard. The renovations help to create a stimulating learning environment that has attractive

displays of pupils' work. Pupils move around the site carefully and safely. The buildings and grounds are maintained to a good standard. The toilets are maintained appropriately and to a good standard of hygiene.

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

The headteacher and the senior management team have shared a clear vision for raising standards in the school successfully. As a result, staff have very high expectations for the achievement of all pupils.

The management team have a good awareness departments' work and staff receive strong support and an appropriate challenge from them. There is clear communication between senior managers and the remainder of staff in a comprehensive programme of meetings that focus appropriately on improving standards along with aspects of learning and teaching. The school has effective performance management systems that focus appropriately on priorities, such as developing pupils' literacy and achievement. These arrangements have contributed to consistently high standards and to effective teaching at the school.

Most middle managers take pride in their work and they make a significant contribution to the school's success. They work well together and lead their teams very effectively. The majority of them are developing their understanding of how to use data well. However, a minority of middle leaders do not make enough use of evidence that arises from the school's tracking systems.

During the last year, there have been changes to the structure and responsibilities of the senior management team. However, a few responsibilities have not been defined clearly enough and the headteacher has too many duties and responsibilities.

Governors have a suitable understanding of the significance of performance data and they give the school strong support. They are aware of the challenges that face the school and develop their role of challenging the school appropriately.

The school pays good attention to many national and local priorities. The school has expanded the range of options that are available to pupils, developed pupils' bilingualism and responded positively to Flintshire's children and young people's partnership plan.

Improving quality: Good

The school has appropriate arrangements for self-evaluation and planning for improvement. The whole-school self-evaluation document is appropriate and makes thorough use of external data to show progress and identify the areas to be developed. The school seeks the opinion of parents, pupils and other fora, and feed these results into the school's improvement programmes. This process is developing well and the school's staff receives regular guidance and training to develop its contribution to self-evaluation processes.

Middle managers' use of performance data is developing well and many of the departments have a comprehensive knowledge of the areas that need to be improved. A new system was introduced this year to track progress at the school, and this is being developed appropriately. However, aspects of this process have not been developed fully and it is too early to measure the effects of this on raising standards of achievement of some groups of pupils.

There is a relevant and robust link between the whole-school self-evaluation and planning for improvement. The whole-school development plan refers appropriately to improving standards of literacy across the school, raising girls' attainment and improving attendance rates. However, targets are not quantitative and in the majority of cases, actions are too superficial. Departmental improvement plans identify areas to be developed but in the majority of plans they have not been costed and there are no sufficiently measurable targets.

The school has an appropriate process for observing lessons and scrutinising work. The senior management team observes all members of staff and an agreed format is used for observing lessons. There is a focus on measuring standards, skills, teaching and assessment for learning within classes. A minority of middle managers use direct evidence to feed into the self-evaluation that includes comments about pupils' progress when observing and monitoring work. However, there is a little inconsistency in the frequency and thoroughness of these processes.

A number of school working parties have been established and these focus on the school's priorities, such as assessment for learning, Welshness and e-learning. Progressive members have led these networks and the good practices in all of them have been shared in whole-school in-service training. On the basis of the working parties, new policies have been produced, new systems have been adopted and interactive resources have been created. The effect of learning communities is measured in formal and informal ways. There is a comprehensive professional development programme that meets staff requirements, in addition to focusing effectively on the school's priorities. The school is in the process of developing formal links with other schools in order to see and share good practices and there are very good examples of sharing the best practices internally in order to raise standards.

The school has made robust progress towards meeting many of the recommendations of the previous inspection.

Partnership working: Good

The school co-operates effectively with a wide range of partners in order to expand pupils' experiences. The school conducts a close and productive relationship with parents by ensuring regular and clear communication. In addition, there is an active and enthusiastic parent teacher association.

There are beneficial links with a wide range of businesses and community organisations in order to develop pupils' wider skills. Close links with the local Rotary organisation give opportunities for pupils to develop their interviewing and speech-making skills. The school co-operates closely with a variety of agencies in order to

support pupils' wellbeing. A close partnership with the Urdd movement gives valuable opportunities to immerse pupils in Welsh culture.

Close co-operation with another Welsh-medium school and local colleges have expanded the choice of courses for post-16 pupils. However, there are no formal arrangements for ensuring the quality of provision of these courses. The school co-operates closely with partner primary schools in order to ensure smooth transition to year 7.

Resource management: Good

The school has enthusiastic and skilful staff in order to teach the curriculum effectively. Over the last two years, the school has responded well to financial constraints and has decreased the deficit of £100,000 significantly. The headteacher plans expenditure effectively and ensures that there are enough funds available to meet the needs of departments and whole-school priorities. Expenditure is monitored successfully by the governors' finance sub-committee. The 14-19 partnerships have ensured a wider curriculum in key stage 4 and the sixth form with more cost-effective arrangements. However, the majority of classes in the sixth form contain small numbers of pupils.

Considering the quality of teaching and standards, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

In key stage 3, over the last three years, the core subject indicator shows good progress with a clear pattern of improvement. Performance in 2012 is very close to the family average and higher than expectations in comparison with similar schools nationally in terms of levels of free school meals. There is a pattern of improvement over the last five years in the core subject indicator and the school is now in the top 50% in comparison with similar schools in terms of levels of free school meals. The percentage of pupils who achieve the core subject indicators is higher than expected on the basis of levels of free school meals.

Over the last four years, performance in Welsh is much lower than the family average and in the bottom 25% in comparison with similar schools in terms of levels of free school meals. Performance in English is among the top 50% in comparison with similar schools, and in mathematics and science, the school is in the top 25% in comparison with similar schools, and also higher than the family average. In 2012, performance at level 6 or higher in English, science and mathematics is better than the family average, but, in Welsh, it is lower than the family average. The proportion of pupils who achieve level 7 or higher is lower than the family in Welsh and mathematics, but is higher than the family in English and science.

In key stage 4, since 2009, except for 2012, results for the level 2 threshold and the level 2 threshold including Welsh or English and mathematics, have been higher than the family average and in the top 25% in comparison with similar schools in terms of levels of free school meals. In 2012, there was a decline in the percentage of pupils who attained the level 2 threshold, which is now lower than the family and in the bottom 25% in comparison with similar schools. During the same period, results for the level 1 threshold have been among the top 25%, but there was a decline to the top 50% in comparison with similar schools in terms of levels of free school meals. Since 2010, results for the core subject indicator have declined but the school is still in the top 50% in comparison with similar schools, and very close to the family average. Performance in this indicator from 2009-2011 placed the school among the top 25% in comparison with similar schools in terms of levels of free school meals. Since 2010, the average capped points score shows a varied pattern and in 2012 it placed the school in the bottom 50% in comparison with similar schools.

Since 2009, results in English, mathematics and science have been in the top 50% in comparison with similar schools. Over a period of five years, performance in Welsh has placed the school among the bottom 50% in comparison with similar schools and in 2012, among the bottom 25%.

In the sixth form, the school's performance in the level 3 threshold over a period of three years, has been higher than the average for the local authority and Wales. In 2012, the percentage declined, to be equal with the family. The wider average points score has improved since 2010 to be higher than the average for the family, the local authority and Wales.

In the core subject indicator in key stage 3, the performance of boys and girls is very similar, and boys perform higher than expected in comparison with the averages of the family and Wales.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

One hundred and forty four pupils, chosen at random across the school, responded to the questionnaire. This sample represents a quarter of all the school's pupils. The responses for almost all the questions are similar to or better than the responses of pupils from other secondary schools.

Nearly all pupils feel safe at the school. Many feel that the school deals well with any bullying and most of them indicate that they have someone to talk to if they are worried. Many pupils feel that others behave well. Many pupils feel that the school teaches them how to keep healthy and most of them indicate that there are enough opportunities at the school to take regular physical exercise. In addition, most pupils feel that there is enough equipment in the school for them to be able to do their work.

Most pupils feel that they are doing well and that teachers help them to learn and make progress. In addition, many feel that homework that is set builds well on what they are learning. Many pupils feel that staff treat all pupils fairly and show them respect. Many pupils feel that the school listens to their opinion and makes changes that they suggest. This proportion is higher than the proportion who say this in other secondary schools.

Most pupils indicate that the school encourages them to take responsibility. In addition, most feel that the school helps them to be ready for the next school, college or the world of work.

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 107 questionnaires from parents and all of them are satisfied or very satisfied with the school in general.

Most say that their children like school, make good progress and feel safe there. Most believe that pupils' behaviour is good and that their children are developing to be more mature and to shoulder responsibilities. Most indicate that pupils are respected and treated fairly and nearly all parents understand the school's system for dealing with complaints. Nearly all parents feel that teaching is good and that their children are making good progress at school.

Most parents feel that they receive good information about their child's progress and that the school prepares them well for moving on to the next school, college or work. Nearly all parents feel that there is a good variety of activities, including trips or visits. Nearly all parents are of the opinion that the school is well-run.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Ray Owen	Reporting Inspector
Ceri Jones	Team Inspector
Rhian Griffith	Team Inspector
Cath Evans	Team Inspector
Dylan Jones	Lay Inspector
Rhodri Thomas	Peer Inspector
Llifon Jones	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Year groups, the Foundation Phase and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and local authorities.

The following table sets out the age ranges relevant to each year group. For example, Year 1 refers to the group of pupils who reach the age of six and Year 13 is the year group who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	N	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The Foundation Phase and key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

Glossary of terms

Core subject indicator (CSI)	This relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.
Families of schools	These have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to that of 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.
Level 1	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.
Level 1 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G.
Level 2	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.
Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English or Welsh first language and mathematics.
Level 2 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.
Level 3	This represents the equivalent of an A level at grade A*-E.
Level 3 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.
Average wider points score	This includes all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age, for example at the age of 16 or at the age of 18.
Capped wider points score	This includes the best eight results from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the age of 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 that of 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.