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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

**The Vale of Glamorgan Council
Civic Offices
Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4RU**

May 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.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Context

The Vale of Glamorgan is located in South Wales. The total population is 126,679. In the Vale of Glamorgan, 10.8% 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 the Vale of Glamorgan, 6.6% have no qualifications, which is lower than the average for Wales of 10.6%. The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals is 13.7%, which is lower than 19.3% for Wales overall. This level of eligibility is the fifth lowest in Wales. Only 6% of the 78 areas in the Vale of Glamorgan are in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales.

As of 31 March 2012, the Vale of Glamorgan had 215 children being looked after by the authority. There were 115 children on the Child Protection register. Ethnic minorities account for 2.6% of the population, lower than the Wales average of 4.2%.

Financial context

The Welsh Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for the Vale of Glamorgan County Council for 2012-2013 was £1,610 per head of population. The Council's SSA per head of population has consistently been well below the Wales average in recent years.

In 2012-2013, the authority set its education budget, net of grants, at £93.05 million. This is very close to the notional education component within the SSA and represents £4,430 per pupil compared with the Wales average of £4,874 per pupil. The net education budget per pupil in the Vale of Glamorgan is the lowest in Wales. Nevertheless, the budget for 2012-2013 represents a 1.2% increase on 2011-2012, compared with a 0.2% increase nationally.

Welsh Government figures show that the authority delegates 84.2% of its gross schools budgeted expenditure to schools. This is the highest rate of delegation in Wales. Nevertheless, average delegated budgets in the Vale of Glamorgan are £3,813 per pupil in primary schools – the second lowest in Wales – and £4,190 per pupil in secondary schools, which is the lowest in Wales.

Summary

Overall judgement: Adequate

Current performance is judged as adequate because:

- the performance of schools in the Foundation Phase and key stage 4, when taking free school meals into account, is at or above the average for Wales;
- attendance of pupils in primary and secondary schools is around the Wales average when compared to that of similar schools on the Welsh Government's free-school-meal benchmarks;
- the rates of fixed-term exclusions in primary and secondary schools are amongst the lowest in Wales;
- the percentage of learners remaining in education post-16 is average when the low level of deprivation is taken into account;
- support for additional learning needs is good; and
- the authority has low numbers of surplus places and has suitable plans in place to reduce these further.

However:

- the performance of schools at key stage 2 and key stage 3, when taking free school meals into account, is below the average for Wales;
- the level of challenge experienced by schools has been inconsistent, resulting in a few underperforming schools not being identified quickly enough by the authority or the regional consortia school improvement service;
- one primary school has remained in special measures for two years and three secondary schools have been placed in informal monitoring categories by Estyn over the last 12 months; and
- the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating wellbeing are not fully developed.

Capacity to improve: Adequate

The local authority has adequate prospects for improvement because:

- elected members and senior officers know the important challenges facing education in the authority well, and are committed to improving the pace of change;
- the authority has satisfactory processes for self-evaluation and performance management; and
- the local authority plays an effective role in strategic partnerships in the Vale of Glamorgan.

However:

- benchmarked performance in all key stages was weaker in 2012 than for the previous two years;

- the authority has not fully addressed all recommendations and other identified shortcomings from the previous Estyn inspection in 2010;
- improvement planning is not carried out in a consistent way such as in the use of quantifiable targets, milestones and identified resources; and
- the authority's evaluation of the outcomes of services and initiatives and their funding arrangements is inconsistent, therefore making judgements on the value-for-money of these difficult.

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards in schools, particularly in key stage 2 and key stage 3
- R2 Improve the rigour and the level of challenge provided to schools about their performance and quality of leadership
- R3 Use the full powers available to the authority to improve schools that are underperforming
- R4 Make sure that planning for improvement is thorough and consistent throughout all services
- R5 Ensure that robust systems are in place for evaluating the outcomes of initiatives and that they demonstrate good value-for-money
- R6 Strengthen arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the wellbeing of children and young people

What happens next?

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

Estyn is of the opinion that the authority falls into the category of follow-up activity and will require Estyn monitoring. The date, focus and nature of this monitoring will be determined by Estyn in due course.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

The Vale of Glamorgan has the fifth lowest rate of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals in Wales.

When compared to the performance of similar schools on the Welsh Government's free-school-meal benchmarks in 2012, the performance of schools was slightly above average in the Foundation Phase, and below average in key stage 2 where too few schools were in the top 25%. Performance was significantly below average in key stage 3 with one-half of secondary schools in the bottom 25% and three-quarters below average.

For the last three years, the Vale of Glamorgan has met or exceeded the Welsh Government's key stage 4 benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal entitlement. However, in 2012 it did not meet the key stage 3 benchmark for the core subject indicator.

In key stage 4, performance is good on three of the Welsh Government's five main indicators, although there are too many schools in the bottom 25% on the two indicators that include English or Welsh first language and mathematics. Performance in all key stages was weaker in 2012 than for the previous two years, particularly in key stage 4 where all five indicators had been well above average in 2010 and 2011.

In 2012, the percentage of pupils leaving full-time education without a recognised qualification improved significantly. It is now better than the average for Wales.

Progress between primary and secondary schools was below average at key stage 3 in 2012. At key stage 4, progress from key stages 2 and 3 was around average overall.

The gap in performance between girls and boys at key stage 2 is increasing and has been larger than the average across Wales for the last three years. At key stage 3 the gender gap is smaller than the Wales average. At key stage 4, the gap in performance between girls and boys has fluctuated around the Wales average over the past three years, mainly due to a relative decline in the performance of girls on some measures. The standards of other particular groups of pupils, including looked-after children, vulnerable groups and those with additional learning needs, are generally in line with expectations. Pupils that are more able generally perform better than expected when compared to those in similar schools across Wales, apart from in English at key stage 3.

In 2012, performance in Welsh first language was above average in primary schools and below average in secondary schools. Performance in Welsh second language was average in both primary and secondary schools.

The authority did not provide sufficient information about reading ages to demonstrate functional literacy levels of pupils leaving primary school. Pupils receiving additional support for literacy and numeracy make appropriate short-term progress. However, the authority does not track pupils' progress well enough to know whether they sustain these gains over a longer period.

The local authority has a limited analysis of qualifications gained from non-formal and informal learning. The proportion of young people gaining a nationally recognised qualification through the youth service has increased, although it is below the Wales average.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Attendance of pupils in primary and secondary schools is around the Wales average when compared to that of similar schools across Wales on the free-school-meal benchmarks for 2012.

The rates of fixed-term exclusions in primary and secondary schools are amongst the lowest in Wales. There have been no permanent exclusions from primary schools in the last three years and very few from secondary schools. The average number of days lost due to all exclusions is around the average for Wales

The percentage of learners remaining in education post-16 is average when the low level of deprivation is taken into account. The proportion of learners who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) post-16 is just above the Wales average, which is much higher than would be expected given relatively low levels of deprivation in the Vale of Glamorgan overall. However, this proportion has steadily improved recently.

The proportion of young people actively involved with the Youth Service is much better than the average for Wales.

While the proportion of pupils engaging in physical activities is increasing, participation rates are still below the Wales average for all indicators. The outcomes for children and young people accessing school-based counselling and advocacy services are good.

Young people, including those from vulnerable groups, contribute well to decision-making at local and strategic levels.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Adequate

Support for School Improvement: Adequate

The authority generally supports and challenges its schools adequately. Officers follow a clear, structured process and use a wide range of school data well to focus on the key issues in schools. Officers generally categorise schools appropriately and agree suitable levels of support. As a result, school and local authority target-setting processes are good and set high expectations for schools.

However, officers do not evaluate provision and leadership in schools well enough and rely too heavily on school performance data to categorise schools. There is too much variation in the quality of the work of officers and quality assurance of their work is not robust enough to make sure that they challenge schools consistently. As a result, a few underperforming schools are not identified quickly enough by the authority or by the regional consortia that the Vale belongs to..

The local authority closely monitors agreed action points from officers' visits and it co-ordinates suitable support where required. However, in a minority of reports, action points lack sufficient clarity and timescales, and in a few cases support does not appropriately match the greatest needs of the schools concerned.

Over the current inspection cycle, a low proportion of schools have needed follow-up after inspections. However, one primary school has remained in special measures for two years and three of the eight secondary schools have been placed in monitoring categories by Estyn over the last 12 months.

The authority leads and supports a range of useful initiatives that reflect national priorities. There are suitable support programmes to improve pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy and there is good support for the Foundation Phase.

There is limited professional development for existing headteachers and their leadership teams, although the authority provides satisfactory support for new leaders in schools. However, this is not always consistent in its delivery. Officers provide good training and development sessions for school governors. However, in general, governors do not receive enough training to support them in evaluating and challenging the quality of provision and leadership in their schools.

Support for Additional Learning Needs: Good

The authority has made good progress since the last inspection. It has produced a useful strategy for supporting pupils with additional learning needs. It has also strengthened the range of specialist provision available to pupils by improving the capacity and skills of staff within schools as well as providing effective outreach support. Outcomes of this include pupils with a diagnosis of autism receiving specialist support from a local special school.

The authority has made good progress in reducing the number of statements for pupils with special educational needs over the past four years. Appeals to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales are low and none have progressed to a full hearing. Parents report being generally satisfied with the support that the authority provides for their children.

The local authority has a good relationship with schools, which it has used to develop resource base provisions for pupils with particular needs in mainstream settings.

The authority has started delegating financial resources to schools for them to manage the provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. As a result, just over half of pupils with statements of special educational needs are educated in mainstream schools. All schools understand the reasons for allocating and ceasing additional support for individual pupils.

There are good, comprehensive opportunities for school staff to develop their knowledge and understanding of additional learning needs. Courses are highly valued by staff and have contributed well to improving the quality of provision for pupils.

Additional learning needs services work effectively with each other. They share information about pupils well and monitor their progress effectively.

A recent restructure of the service has resulted in better communication between additional learning needs services and the school improvement team. The authority has a wide range of data relating to the outcomes of pupils with additional learning needs. However, the overall analysis of this data is under-developed and, as a result, it is not clear how well the authority uses data to support and challenge schools.

The local authority has recently established a parents' forum that has received good training and information on a range of relevant additional learning needs issues. Parents report that they are kept well informed on the progress of their child. However, they have found it difficult to access information that helps them understand how the additional learning needs service works and what support they are likely to receive from their child's school.

Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Adequate

The local authority's arrangements for monitoring and evaluating wellbeing are generally satisfactory but aspects are not yet fully developed. The local authority is currently developing a comprehensive Wellbeing in Education strategy to enable officers to co-ordinate services that support social inclusion and wellbeing more effectively.

The authority meets the needs of specific groups of vulnerable learners well. This includes effective support for looked-after children and tailored packages for those at risk of disengagement from education.

There is a wide range of good provision for learners who need behavioural support. The authority provides appropriate training on managing behaviour and physical restraint.

Attendance has improved recently. However, the authority's approach to analysing attendance data and setting targets for schools is not robust enough. The authority collects a good range of data but does not analyse or use it well enough to inform targets and evaluate the impact of the work of local authority officers. As a result, they do not know which initiatives are the most effective in improving attendance.

Schools and officers have worked well together to reduce permanent and fixed term exclusions.

The authority's initiatives to keep children and young people in education, employment and training have not been effective enough. The authority recognises this and is currently developing a new strategy in partnership with all relevant parties with the aim of addressing this issue.

The youth service engages well with many young people and provides a wide range of effective programmes. There is good partnership work with the youth offending service to support those at risk of either disengagement or involvement in the youth justice system.

The authority's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no major cause for concern. Arrangements in education provision have recently been reviewed and extensively revised. Because of this revision, the reporting and monitoring arrangements for safeguarding in schools are effective. However, not all education provision falls under the same monitoring arrangements, which makes it difficult to ensure that senior management have a clear and consistent view of how well safeguarding procedures are carried out across the directorate.

Access and school places: Good

The authority has low numbers of surplus places in both primary and secondary schools. Since 2010, the authority has closed one secondary school site and undertaken a programme of withdrawing demountable classrooms and reallocating surplus spaces for community use. This has led to a reduction of over 1,000 places. Agreed and fully funded plans, as set out in the authority's school investment programme, will lead to further reductions in the total capacity of the authority's schools. These plans commit the authority to an investment of almost £75 million in its school buildings over the next four years. They also ensure that the authority is better able to meet the immediate demand for Welsh-medium provision. However, the authority's analysis of the impact of increasing demand for such provision is not sufficiently robust for it to guarantee that it will be able to meet this demand in future.

The authority has appropriate systems in place for forecasting pupil numbers and the requirements for school places using a suitable range of data. Asset management planning is effective and informs the authority's maintenance programmes well. This means that even though they have very low numbers of surplus places almost all pupils obtain places at their first preference school.

The authority has appropriate formalised 'managed moves' arrangements in place. A managed move is a carefully planned transfer of a pupil from one school into another, either to help a pupil make a fresh start or as a strategy to support the pupil in order to prevent a permanent exclusion. One of the main benefits of this is that there is agreement on aims and success criteria, rather than reliance on informal discussions between schools.

The authority has undertaken an appropriate Child Care Sufficiency Assessment, which it reviews annually. There is a good range of nursery places available, most of which are provided in schools. The authority also works well with non-maintained early years settings in areas where it identifies a need for additional provision. It supports these settings effectively and the family information service provides a suitable range of information to parents and carers. The authority evaluates the standard of provision effectively across all settings and the quality of provision is generally good.

There is a good range of youth support services available within the authority, which allows young people to access their entitlements. Useful action plans linked to the recently adopted youth support services strategy and an appropriate analysis of need allow the authority to co-ordinate these services well.

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

Elected members and senior officers know the important challenges facing education in the authority well, and are committed to improving the pace of change. Strategic and operational plans reflect the vision and priorities of the council and appropriately prioritise education services for children and young people. However, performance measures are not robust enough to improve the monitoring of progress and achievement, or identify the impact on learners well enough.

Senior elected members have appropriately taken up governor posts in a few of the schools that are underperforming, in order to improve the quality of challenge to the headteacher and leadership team. However, the use of elected members as school governors is not co-ordinated well enough at a strategic level to ensure that all schools improve consistently.

The local authority's strategic risk register does not capture a wide enough range of key education-related risks, such as the risks associated with establishing the new joint education service at a time of underperformance in some of the authority's secondary schools.

The authority's use of scrutiny includes the review and challenge of policy development as well as cabinet decisions. However, the boundaries between scrutinising policy and proposing policy are not always clear enough. This has the potential for compromising scrutiny's function for objectivity. Senior leaders are improving scrutiny by holding individual low-performing schools to account.

Officer reports to scrutiny contain detailed performance data, including outcomes at individual school level. However, performance analysis relies too heavily upon comparisons to the Welsh average rather than comparison with other authorities with a similar socio-economic profile in Wales or England. This level of comparison does not challenge the authority well enough to aim for the highest performance. This means that scrutiny is not able to hold officers and schools to account effectively.

The authority's Welsh in education strategic plan is generally fit for purpose. The local authority is appropriately revising aspects of the plan to take account of the increasing demand for Welsh medium education.

Quality improvement: Adequate

The authority has generally satisfactory processes for self-evaluation and performance management. However, plans are not consistent and do not always show milestones, quantifiable targets and links to corporate and strategic plans clearly enough. The self-evaluation report is generally appropriate; however, a few sections are too descriptive and do not provide evidence to support all assertions made, nor always evaluate the impact of strategies well enough.

Performance management is undertaken appropriately. Performance against local and national comparators is reported to the directorate management team on a monthly basis and to scrutiny committees on a quarterly basis. Exception reports help the directorate management team to follow up on priorities and targets.

The quality of planning throughout the authority's services and teams is not consistent and does not always include quantifiable targets, milestones and identified resources.

Overall, the authority consults with headteachers, staff and other stakeholders appropriately using surveys and partnership working groups; however, consultation with children is under-developed. Recent outcomes of consultation include proposals for development of a youth cabinet, a post of youth mayor and a plan that seeks to address issues that are of concern to headteachers. The authority carries out consultations appropriately in English and Welsh and takes account of diversity.

Changes to the services provided to schools are evaluated by a board of officers and headteacher representatives, which was set up as a response to the last inspection in 2010. It is now also a useful forum for looking at other services provided to schools and making proposals to meet future demands.

The authority has been too slow in using the full range of its statutory powers to improve schools that are underperforming. However, it has issued informal warning letters to two schools where performance has raised concern. It is now waiting to see whether the schools have improved against performance measures before taking further action.

The authority has made variable progress against the recommendations of the last Estyn inspection report. It has not fully addressed all recommendations and other identified shortcomings, in particular those dealing with the inconsistent rigour of challenge to all schools and lack of clarity over how funding arrangements will assure better value for money.

Partnership working: Adequate

The local authority plays an effective role in strategic partnerships in the Vale of Glamorgan. Through the local service board, it has successfully reviewed partnership structures, bringing together co-ordination of all partnership activity into the Chief Executive's department. This has improved collaboration between partners and increased the focus on shared priorities.

The children and young people's partnership and the learning and skills partnership report regularly to the local service board and there are strong links to the other key strategic partnerships. However, standards in education are not reported routinely to the local service board or the children and young people's partnership. This leaves partner agencies without a clear idea of the progress the authority makes with its education work or how they can best contribute to improving standards.

Partnership activity has progressed well and there are many examples of successful multi-agency projects. These include work with children and young people who

offend, good post-14 learning provision that has improved attainment for vulnerable groups, and 'Families First' preventative work. However, the authority does not always have a good enough strategic overview of how well this type of activity affects learning. The local authority and its partners have not yet been effective enough in reducing the numbers of young people aged 16 or older who are not in education, employment and training (NEET).

The authority recognises these shortcomings and has appropriately commissioned work to identify the benefit of its partnership activity and whether it is helping to achieve the priorities of the community strategy.

Children and young people have access to a good range of youth support services. However, partners have been too slow to produce a strategy for this area of work and effective co-ordination has not been driven strategically enough.

Communication about partnership activity is good. There is a useful corporate partnership team newsletter and relationships with the voluntary sector are particularly good. However, engagement with schools is limited and citizen engagement is underdeveloped.

Resource management: Adequate

Financial management for education is generally good, and officers have a good knowledge of the financial position, with suitable actions taken as a result of monthly budget monitoring. However, not all teams fully understand all of the financial risks and management processes. This means that they may not always follow the appropriate processes to ensure good accountability. Elected members are appropriately involved in the budget setting process, and monitor the budget regularly.

The provision of financial support to schools is good. The authority monitors and challenges schools' budget deficits and surpluses well. However, a very small number of schools remain with substantial balances. This position has improved from having very high school reserves in 2010-2011 to just above the average for Wales in 2011-2012 and the authority is anticipating further reductions during 2013-2014 as schools deliver their planned actions.

Welsh Government figures show that delegation rates remain the highest in Wales, and the authority is considering options to further increase delegation. The school budget forum reviews elements of the schools funding formulae annually, thereby ensuring that they reflect changes in circumstances. This regular review represents good practice.

Most schools choose to purchase a range of corporate support services, and schools have evaluated the quality of these as being generally good. However, the authority does not always know the cost of providing these services to schools.

The authority's approach to evaluating the outcomes of services and initiatives is inconsistent and not always of a high quality. It lacks robust systems to make judgements on the value for money of its provision. However, given the comparatively low level of spending within the education budget and the adequate outcomes overall, the education service provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

Farrukh Khan	Reporting Inspector
Mark Champion	Team Inspector
Gerard Kerslake	Team Inspector
Robert Davies	Team Inspector
Iwan Roberts	Team Inspector
Huw Davies	Team Inspector
Rachael Bubalo	Team Inspector
Karen Lees	WAO
Gareth Morgans	Peer Inspector
Lynette Jones	Nominee

Copies of the report

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Glossary of terms

National Curriculum

Expected National Curriculum levels

- By the end of the key stage 1, at the age of seven, learners are expected to reach level 2 and the more able to reach level 3.
- By the end of the key stage 2, at the age of eleven, learners are expected to reach level 4 and the more able to reach level 5.
- By the end of the key stage 3, at the age of fourteen, learners are expected to reach level 5 and the more able to reach level 6 or level 7.

Core subject indicator in all key stages

The core subject indicator relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh first language, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum. Learners must gain at least the expected level in either English or Welsh first language together with mathematics and science to gain the core subject indicator.

External examinations at key stage 4 or post-16

Core subject indicator – as above.

Level 1 qualification – the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.

The Level 1 threshold – learners must have gained a volume of qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs at grades D to G.

Level 2 qualification – the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.

The Level 2 threshold – learners must have gained a volume of qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.

The Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics – learners must have gained level 2 qualifications in English or Welsh first language and in mathematics as part of their threshold.

Level 3 qualification – the equivalent of an A level at A* to C.

The Level 3 threshold – learners must have gained a volume of qualifications equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.

The **average wider points score** includes all external qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age – for example at age 16 or 18. To calculate this, the total points gained by all learners in the cohort is divided by the number of learners.

The **capped average points score** only includes the best eight results for each pupil from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at age 16.

All-Wales Core Data sets

Schools and local authorities may refer to performance relative to their family of schools. These families of schools have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.