Inspection of
Newport City Council
Access and Inclusion Services
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1. Introduction

Local education authority (LEA) inspections are carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. They contribute to, and comply with the requirements of, the Wales Programme for Improvement¹.

Each LEA inspection usually focuses on at least one major area of activity that has already been the focus of a review by the LEA. Prior to the inspection, Estyn agreed with the LEA that the inspection would focus on the following aspects of the authority’s role in providing access and inclusion services:

- asset management planning;
- provision of school places;
- admissions to schools;
- education otherwise than at school;
- support for school attendance;
- support for behaviour in schools;
- promoting race equality and combating racism;
- health and safety;
- looked-after children; and
- home-to-school transport.

The areas of activity were inspected in November 2004. The inspection team comprised an inspector from the Audit Commission’s local education authority inspectorate and three inspectors from Estyn. The team examined documentation and interviewed senior managers and service officers. The inspectors held meetings with elected members and representative headteachers. The inspectors also visited a sample of primary, special and secondary schools in order to gain the views of staff and pupils who use the services.

¹ Wales Programme for Improvement: Guidance for local authorities (Circular 18/2002), National Assembly for Wales, 2002
The inspection team is required to make two key judgements. These judgements are:

(1) **How good is the LEA’s performance in respect of the area of responsibility that is being inspected?**

The LEA’s performance in discharging its responsibilities is rated on a four-point scale as follows:

- **excellent** - good with outstanding features
- **good** - good features and no important shortcomings
- **fair** - good features outweigh shortcomings
- **poor** - many important shortcomings

(2) **Will the LEA’s performance improve in respect of the area of responsibility that is being inspected?**

The prospects of improvement are rated on a four-point scale:

- **excellent** - improvement prospects are good, with significant improvements already in place
- **promising** - improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers
- **uncertain** - some good prospects, but barriers in important areas
- **poor** - many important barriers to improvement

The inspection team’s findings in relation to access and inclusion services are summarised in Section 3 of this report.
2. Background

The city of Newport has a population of around 140,000. It is the third largest urban area in Wales. Four of the city’s twenty wards are among the one hundred most deprived\(^2\) in Wales. Overall, the population of the city is in the upper quarter for most indicators of deprivation although five wards are among the one hundred least deprived. The proportion of pupils entitled to free schools meals in 2002-2003 was 21% compared with the Welsh average of 18%.

The city has many different and varied cultures. The main ethnic minority communities in Newport are Pakistani, Bengali, Somali and Yemeni and the main languages spoken are Urdu, Punjabi, Bangladeshi, Arabic and Somali. In all, just over two thousand pupils have English as an additional language. A growing number of asylum seekers have been dispersed to Newport. At present, there are around 170 asylum seeker pupils in 18 primary and six secondary schools. These pupils speak a range of 25 languages and a growing number arrive with psychological and special educational needs in addition to their language requirements.

Around 25,000 pupils attend maintained schools in the authority. There are four nursery schools, 12 infant schools, 12 junior schools, 29 primary schools and eight secondary schools. There is one Welsh-medium primary school. The authority also maintains a special school, a pupil referral unit and an education unit attached to a hospital. Ten primary schools and two secondary schools have units catering for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties.

Since 1997, the improvement in pupils’ attainment in all indicators in key stage 1 and key stage 2 has been greater than that for Wales as a whole. Standards of attainment in these stages are above the median in benchmark groups in more than one half of schools. Over the same period, performance in key stage 3 and key stage 4 has been more variable and there has been slower progress. Overall, attainment in these key stages is generally at or below the Wales average. In 2003, the biggest improvement was in the reduction in the percentage of pupils leaving school without qualifications, which reduced from 5.1% in 2002 to 1.1%. During the same year, in key stage 4, the proportion of pupils in Newport gaining 5 A*-G qualifications was greater than in any other urban authority in Wales.

Access and inclusion services in the authority are delivered through a range of services within the directorate of education, lifelong learning and leisure. Over the past year, several senior officers have left the service, including the corporate director with responsibility for the services and the head of inclusion services. In response to these vacancies and to strengthen and coordinate approaches within the present structure, the authority has:

- seconded a senior manager, from another authority, as acting head of inclusion;

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\(^2\) This is calculated using the Index of Multiple Deprivation, published by the Local Government Data Unit –Wales. This is a weighted average of indicators which assess a population’s income, housing, educational qualifications, health, housing, child poverty and access to services.
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November 2004

• allocated direct line management responsibilities for access and inclusion services to the Chief Education Officer; and

• increased the membership of the senior management team by including two senior advisers from the school improvement service.

In May 2004, the Council's Cabinet considered proposals for re-structuring education services in Newport. The re-structuring aims to integrate and co-ordinate central support services with school improvement services more effectively so that inclusion and achievement are joint aims for the whole service. The proposals for re-structuring education services were amended in November following consultation with key partners. The revised proposals have been not yet been formally approved by the Council’s Cabinet.

Funding

The total revenue budget for the education service for 2003-2004 was £95m, net of expenditure funded by specific government grants. Expenditure on education as a percentage of the total council budget was 44%, which was above the Wales average of 42%. This expenditure places Newport in 5th position out of the 22 Welsh authorities. The level of expenditure for the education service has increased over the past year. Newport’s education grant funding has dropped significantly from £447 per pupil in 2002-2003 to £190 per pupil in 2003-2004, but still remains slightly above the Wales average of £183 per pupil.

The Local Schools Budget in Newport was well below the Wales average level in 2003-2004. Funding per primary pupil was £2,871 compared with the Wales average of £3,089, while funding per secondary pupil was £3,713 compared with the Wales average of £3,923. However, the delegation rate to schools at 80.9% of the Local Schools Budget was slightly above the Wales average of 79.8%. The result on the actual funding delegated to schools, the Individual Schools Budget, was that the average funding per primary pupil in Newport was £2,393, which is slightly less than the Wales average of £2,439. The corresponding figure per secondary pupil was £3,257, which is very close to the Wales average of £3,265.

Newport has a high central spend on special educational needs (SEN) and a very high central spend on strategic management, compared with other authorities in Wales. However, central spend on access and on school improvement services is comparatively low. Newport is ranked 19th out of the 22 Welsh authorities for expenditure on access. Expenditure on access services per pupil is only 70% of the Wales average level. While this expenditure has decreased over the past year, central expenditure on SEN has increased sharply although some of this additional SEN spending is used to promote inclusive practice. Within the authority, the low home to school transport spend contributes to the low overall spend on access services. These lower transport costs are partly a result of the urban nature of the authority; fewer pupils require free transport from home to school.
3. Summary: Access and Inclusion Services

The scoring chart displays information in two dimensions, one for each of the two key inspection judgements. The judgements are represented by the location of the black circle in relation to the descriptors at the left-hand side of the chart and at the foot of the chart.

The LEA’s performance in relation to access and inclusion services is **fair**.

Good features of the LEA’s performance are:

- the clarity of vision and direction given to the integration of education services;
- the links between service plans and the authority’s aims for access and inclusion;
- the partnership and consultation with schools, which informs decision making;
✓ the success of projects to re-engage pupils in education, raise standards and enable them to gain qualifications; and

✓ good progress in implementing improvement plans following previous inspections of service areas.

The areas that require attention are:

× ensuring the timely and effective implementation of plans to re-structure education services;

× the collation and use of robust data on attendance;

× low levels of school attendance;

× high levels of permanent and temporary exclusions;

× support for re-integrating pupils after exclusion;

× behaviour support for key stage 3 and the transitional arrangements, between key stage 2 and key stage 3, for behavioural support;

× extending partnerships with stakeholders; and

× the collation and use of comparative and financial data to inform service delivery and improvement.

Access and inclusion services have promising prospects for improvement.

Factors that are likely to support improvement are:

✓ elected members and officers show high levels of commitment and expertise to deliver planned improvements;

✓ the validity of the authority’s judgements about the quality of services;

✓ better co-ordination of the work of the school improvement and access and inclusion services;

✓ the good account taken of the views of headteachers following consultation;

✓ the progress made in reducing the number of pupils leaving school without a qualification;

✓ the good measures taken to strengthen arrangements between the school improvement and access and inclusion services; and

✓ the authority’s good track record of managing change.
Factors that are likely to impede improvement are:

- the limited use of consultation and challenge in the review of services; and

- weaknesses in improvement plans, including:

  1. insufficient attention to raising attendance; and

  2. success criteria that do not focus enough on the effects of improvements on outcomes for pupils.
Recommendations: Access and inclusion services

In order to secure the improvements that are needed, the local authority should:

(1) ensure that plans for re-structuring the education service are implemented effectively;

(2) make certain that the actions identified for key stage 3 are implemented as a priority and give particular attention to arrangements for behavioural support at the transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3;

(3) develop further its strategies and plans for improving pupils’ attendance rates and reducing the number of exclusions;

(4) extend consultation and partnerships to include a wider range of stakeholders;

(5) challenge the way services are delivered and make more use of financial and comparative data to inform service delivery; and

(6) improve action planning to ensure that it focuses on clearly measurable outcomes and service improvement.
4. Findings: Access and inclusion services.
How good is the LEA’s performance?

Are the authority’s aims clear and challenging?

Overall, the authority has a clear vision, sense of purpose and direction for education and lifelong learning. This vision is in line with the policy of the Welsh Assembly Government and is reflected in the authority’s plans, such as the education strategic plan and the supplementary education strategic plan. The authority’s plans link well into the national policy framework, including the Plan for Wales, The Learning Country, Extending Entitlement and the ‘Communities First’ Plan for Wales.

The work of the access and inclusion services is directed by appropriate mission statements and aims, which reflect the authority’s vision and priorities. Within these services, key plans, such as the school organisation plan, set out clear principles and strategic objectives.

The cabinet member with responsibility for Children and Young People’s Services and other elected members are well informed of the work of the directorate. They display a clear understanding of the main priorities in the authority and have a good grasp of the key work relating to access and inclusion issues. The authority’s overview and scrutiny committee appropriately provides challenge to the work of the services.

The authority has plans to re-structure education services to co-ordinate inclusion and school improvement services more effectively. The aims of the plans are to:

- provide a suitable structure for integrating school improvement and inclusion services;
- respond to the need for a lead director for children and young people’s services, as recommended by the Welsh Assembly Government through the Children’s Rights guidance; and
- establish clearer accountability and line management of service officers.

The authority has responded very well to the findings of consultation with schools on its early proposals to re-structure education services. The most recent proposals for service re-structure have taken good account of the views of headteachers and governors.

The review of access and inclusion services did not include fundamental challenge to the need for these services. The review did not consider fully whether other providers could better deliver the services, although some improvement plans identify the need to consider alternative models of service delivery in the future.
Do the authority’s policy, provision and relationships meet these aims?

Senior officers provide good leadership. There is a strong sense of direction towards new strategies to improve access and inclusion services. Short-term arrangements to manage the service, in the absence of a head of service, have been appropriate and work on developing policies and strategies has been taken forward. These aspects have helped the authority to make good progress recently in improving the co-ordination of services. However, despite these improvements, the work of various service areas to promote inclusion and secure access is not yet as closely co-ordinated and integrated as it might be. Most recently, the authority has produced a draft policy on ‘Achievement through Inclusion’, which sets out the authority’s strategy to take a fully integrated approach to the work of education services. This work provides a good basis to inform and direct further improvement.

Service officers show high levels of expertise and commitment to the further development of inclusion issues. Projects, such as ‘Include’, and ‘Mentor for Success’, for pupils in key stage 4, are successful in re-engaging pupils who have either been excluded or are at risk of losing their school place. The education otherwise than at school service (EOTAS) has been successful in bidding for funding from the European Social Fund to help develop these projects.

Performance management is becoming well established within the authority. There are sound procedures for monitoring the delivery and quality of the work of services. The overview and scrutiny committee is kept well informed and this committee provides challenge to the service.

Service plans identify objectives for teams and individuals that relate clearly to the directorate’s priorities and, where appropriate, to the overall aims of the authority. In some instances, services use clear and measurable performance data to measure the effectiveness of initiatives provided for schools. For example, the ‘Include’ project includes an analysis of the effects of the project on students’ qualifications and destinations. However, the use of performance data to measure effectiveness is not consistent across all services.

Within access and inclusion services, officers have developed partnerships with a range of suitable agencies. In particular, improved joint working has led to increased capacity of the local Community and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to respond to requests for consultation on children’s mental health needs. The Group for Refugees and Asylum Seekers is another good example of multi-agency working. Through Cymorth, partnerships have developed a range of project initiatives including targeted support for a small number of schools to develop nurture groups. The authority is closely monitoring this project with a view to creating a sound evidence base to inform future developments. While these partnerships are developing well, the authority has identified the need for closer working with a wider range of agencies.

The EOTAS service has developed the work of its forum well and established effective links with a wide range of agencies and providers. Together with schools, this service area has also achieved significant success in raising the achievement of
young people and ensuring that they gain qualifications before leaving school. Projects such as ‘Passport to Opportunity’ have been particularly effective in this respect. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) has established a service level agreement with all schools and has allocated staff to each of the authority’s secondary and primary school cluster groups to support schools better.

Schools have high regard for the work of the authority in promoting health and safety. The authority provides clear policies, information, guidance and advice on risk assessment procedures.

The authority meets its responsibilities for looked-after children. There is a clear and coherent strategy to promote the educational achievement of children in public care. While the authority collects and analyses data, such as exclusion rates, attendance and attainment, it does not analyse the effectiveness of intervention to strategically plan its preventative work.

Over several years, the authority has made available to schools a training programme on positive behaviour management. This programme of training has now been extended to include learning support staff, midday supervisors, bus drivers and escorts. The quality of the training has been highly rated by schools and others who have participated, and has helped school staff to improve their classroom management of pupils. However, the training has not been fully effective as there has not been a corresponding decrease in the rate of permanent or fixed-term exclusions. The authority recognises this disparity between training and its effect on the exclusion rate.

The authority, in conjunction with partners, has developed a variety of good support initiatives and alternative curriculum opportunities for pupils at key stage 4 to participate in vocational courses and work experience. Schools are generally very supportive of these initiatives. However, there is no coherent strategy to offer adequate levels of appropriate support for pupils in key stage 3, who are in danger of becoming disaffected.

The authority does not have adequate provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and places significant numbers of these pupils out of county. The Complex Needs Panel, comprising education and social services officers, has begun to review the placements of some of these pupils, but, to date, has not re-integrated any pupils into provision within Newport. The panel has not been able to recruit officers from the health service to this important forum. As a result, the health service does not contribute to the funding of costs of provision for individual pupils who are placed out of county.

The authority provides good leadership and support to schools on race equality policies and procedures for tackling all forms of racism. There are good-quality training programmes and support for curriculum development on cultural diversity, such as the Creative Arts Project.

The authority maintains up to date information about the condition, sufficiency and suitability of school buildings. There are appropriate links between asset
management planning and other plans, such as the authority’s education strategic plan.

The authority’s accessibility strategy for 2004-2007 sets out how it intends to improve access to:

- the physical environment of schools;
- the curriculum; and
- written information by schools.

Following a survey of school buildings, the authority has established a rolling programme of work to ensure that accessibility is not a barrier preventing pupils from attending local schools in their community.

The administration of nursery, primary and secondary school admission procedures are appropriate and meet statutory requirements. The LEA’s admission booklet to parents is updated regularly and provides comprehensive information in an easily accessible format. Newport’s local admissions forum ensures that local admissions authorities consult each other and co-ordinate arrangements effectively.

The authority is providing better information than previously about the costs of delivering the service and evaluating the impact of the provision. However, financial monitoring of the service is presently under-developed.

**How does performance compare?**

Since 1997, improvement in pupils’ attainments in key stage 1 and key stage 2 has been greater than that for Wales as a whole. More than one half of schools perform very well in relation to similar schools in Wales. However, there has been slower progress in key stage 3 and key stage 4, where attainment is generally at or below the Wales average. While there have been some improvements, overall, these gains have not been consistently sustained. The proportion of pupils leaving school with no qualifications was 5.1% in 2002, which placed the authority in 20th position out of the 22 Welsh authorities. However, in 2003, there was a very significant reduction to 1.1%, due to the effect of inclusion strategies and improved vocational curriculum options. Provisional results for 2004 indicate that this progress has been maintained.

Over the past four years, there has been an overall increase in the number of pupils permanently excluded from maintained schools in Newport. In 2002-2003, the authority had the fourth highest rate of fixed-term exclusions and the eighth highest rate of permanent exclusions in Wales. The authority recognises that the rate of temporary and permanent exclusions is high, despite the promotion of a system of assertive discipline throughout all its schools. In addition, there is not enough support for re-integrating pupils after exclusion, or after placement at the Pupil Referral Unit. In a few primary schools and in some secondary schools, support for specific pupils whose behaviour is very challenging, is inadequate. Arrangements for
the transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3, for pupils already receiving support for behavioural reasons, do not provide pupils with a consistent approach.

Over the past four years, absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in the authority’s maintained secondary and special schools has stayed at around the same level of just under 11%. This percentage is higher than the Wales average level for the same period and in contrast to an overall improving trend nationally. In 2003-2004, the authority had the fifth highest rate of unauthorised absence from secondary and special schools in Wales. Figures for authorised and unauthorised absences in primary schools were also above the Wales average.

The schools that responded to a survey conducted by the Audit Commission during 2004 have mixed views of the authority’s support for access and inclusion. The survey places the authority in the top 25% of all English and Welsh authorities in the following areas:

- support for meeting the needs of pupils with English as a second language;
- the effectiveness of support for health and safety; and
- support for combating racism.

These perceptions were matched by the inspection findings.

However, the survey places the authority in the lowest 25% of all English and Welsh authorities in the following areas:

- the transparency of the asset management process;
- support for promoting attendance;
- management of re-admission processes for excluded pupils;
- support for looked-after children; and
- the reliability of primary home to school transport.

Generally, these perceptions were matched by the inspection findings. However, school staff who were interviewed during the inspection indicated that schools were very satisfied with the support they received for looked-after children and recognised that, whereas there had previously been difficulties relating to home-to-school transport for pupils of primary school age, the reliability of transport had improved.

In the review, the authority made some use of the all-Wales benchmarking data, as well as information in statistical briefs produced by the Welsh Assembly Government, in order to compare its own performance with that of others. Generally, however, comparison with others was limited. The authority recognises the need to collate more comprehensive, robust data, especially on school attendance rates.
In 2003-2004, 98% of parents seeking a primary placement for their child received their first choice preference and 95% of parents seeking a secondary placement for their child received their first choice preference. The authority complies with the code of practice on admissions to schools; parents may appeal against a decision to an independent admission appeals committee. Over several years, most primary and secondary admissions appeals have been unsuccessful.

In April 2004, there were 1062 surplus places in the primary sector, representing eight per cent of the primary pupil population, and 393 surplus places in the secondary sector, representing four per cent of the pupil population. This surplus capacity is below the Wales average. The authority has considered the effect of increasing surplus places resulting from falling rolls on the provision of school places and has consulted with those concerned. A recent report to cabinet on school places identifies the financial implications of continuing surplus and makes a suitable range of recommendations.

Over the past two years, Section 10 inspections of schools within the authority, have judged the quality of accommodation to be good or better in 80% of schools. This proportion is considerably higher than the national average.

The authority has not yet developed ways of demonstrating effectively that it is achieving value for money through its service delivery. However, corporate finance officers and education budget managers are working more closely together to improve the integration of service and financial planning and to identify resource implications. The authority has recognised the need for robust data to support budget setting and acknowledges that more work needs to be done to make financial planning fully effective.
5. Findings: Access and inclusion services.

Will the LEA’s performance improve?

Is the authority’s self-evaluation process likely to drive improvement?

Before the review was undertaken, the authority had already recognised the need for change of its organisation of access and inclusion services. In May 2004, the cabinet considered proposals for the management structure of education services. Schools were consulted on these proposals and their views provided useful and timely information, which informed the authority’s review of access and inclusion services.

The scope of the review was suitably broad across a range of service areas and the authority managed the review process well. Service officers received good support and training, and had a clear understanding of how they would contribute to the review. Each service team produced a self-evaluation report and an improvement plan to an agreed format. Service leaders helped in editing drafts and this approach supported a sense of collective ownership. The reports contributed to a whole-service evaluation of access and inclusion services, enabling leaders and managers to reach clear and realistic conclusions. From this work, the authority identified eight crosscutting themes; these themes are integrated in improvement plans, with useful cross-references.

The authority has developed a strong partnership with schools and has consulted them widely as part of the review process. Schools are well informed about the outcomes of the review. Consultation with established partnerships is clear and transparent. The authority consulted focus groups of elected members and headteachers and sought the views of an external consultant on the review process and findings. However, despite these consultations and the effective management of the review process, there was not enough use of the best value principles of consultation, comparison and challenge to inform the review. Consultation with wider groups of stakeholders, such as voluntary groups and pupils, did not inform the review findings.

In some aspects, the authority has compared its performance with that of other authorities in Wales. It has also used available benchmarking data, for example in its education strategic plan. However, in general, comparisons in the review have been limited in scope, and the authority has not compared itself with other similar authorities in the United Kingdom. In particular, the authority did not fundamentally challenge how the services are delivered or consider alternative models of service provision.

In the authority, transport is provided for pupils in mainstream schools using contract vehicles and public transport season tickets. Transport is made available for pupils with special educational needs through a range of provision. Tendering for these contracts is in line with the authority’s standing orders. The authority does not yet
have a full programme of robust contract monitoring to verify the quality of this provision.

The authority has in the past reviewed its route organisation and considered the viability of procuring its own fleet of vehicles. The service’s improvement plan recognises the need to consider alternative transport arrangements and to determine the benefits of providing continuity of service. This work will be essential to ensure that the authority maximises the cost-effectiveness of the transport function, through more periodic re-assessments of its routes and consideration of alternative methods of service delivery.

**How good is the planning for improvement?**

In undertaking the review, the authority has evaluated performance honestly and openly across access and inclusion services. The review’s conclusions and overall judgements on the work of the service are accurate and valid. The priorities in the improvement plan arise from the review and focus appropriately on the service’s aims to integrate and improve access and inclusion services.

Individual service improvement plans translate these aims into specific actions. The plans include timescales and success criteria, and identify the officer responsible for implementing the actions and the resources required. The improvement plans are linked to almost all of the key themes identified by the review of access and inclusion services.

The authority has identified school attendance as a high priority area in its review, but this aspect is not fully reflected in all improvement plans. In a few improvement plans, the actions to be taken are not ambitious enough and refer to minor functions of the service. In other plans, success criteria are not measurable and there is not enough reference to the effect of actions on inclusion issues, such as judging the effect of training on attendance issues by pupils’ absence rate. In several areas, such as attendance, data is not robust or comprehensive enough to enable services to engage fully in preventative work and to use quantitative data to measure success.

**Will the authority deliver the improvements?**

At all levels within the authority, there is a strong commitment to the improvement of access and inclusion services and to the principle of raising pupils’ achievement through inclusion. In particular, senior officers have played a significant role in advancing strategic policy on access and inclusion and improving collaboration across service teams.

The good relationships and mutual respect between the authority’s officers and senior staff in schools helps to promote a culture in which effective partnership is delivering an improved service. For example, schools are working with the authority on a policy to transfer, on an equitable basis, pupils who are in danger of exclusion. The authority also appropriately, amended its proposals for re-structuring education services when consultation with schools indicated that they did not support the changes.
The authority is effective in helping schools to improve their capacity to meet pupils’ learning needs. This work is a sound basis on which to build schools’ confidence and ability to respond to inclusion issues.

The authority can demonstrate progress in the work of a number of service teams, since their last inspection. These improvements include:

- the management and monitoring of minor works projects;
- work with a neighbouring authority to extend provision for pupils with additional learning needs;
- comprehensive health and safety guidance to schools;
- systems to track the progress of the achievements of ethnic minority pupils;
- good alternative curriculum arrangements for pupils in key stage 4; and
- better tracking of pupils without a school place.

Most recently, the authority has introduced measures to strengthen arrangements for co-ordinating the work of the school improvement service, and access and inclusion services. These measures include the greater involvement of school improvement officers in access issues, such as monitoring pupils’ attendance during their visits to schools. The authority has also made recent progress in developing more sophisticated budget-setting arrangements for access and inclusion services. These arrangements show promise for future work.