Quality and Standards in Education and Training in Wales

A Report on the Quality of

Flintshire Local Education Authority

School Improvement

May 2007

by

Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local education authorities (LEAs);
- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- youth and community work training;
- LEAs;
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies;
- offender learning; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of Jobcentre plus.

Estyn also:

- provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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:

Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court
Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2007: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background to the authority</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How good is the LEA’s performance?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic management</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for school improvement</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the local authority’s performance improve?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authority’s response to the report findings</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix 1</strong>  The grade profile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix 2</strong>  The inspection team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The inspection

1 In April 2006, a six year cycle of Local Education Authority service inspections, under section 38 of the Education Act 1997 and the Children Act 2004, began. The inspection framework for this cycle is on the Estyn website www.estyn.co.uk.

2 This inspection took place from 14 May 2007 to 18 May 2007. The focus of this inspection is school improvement. Before the inspection, Flintshire County Council undertook a review of its education services and produced a self evaluation report as part of its own review process.

Key judgements

3 The inspection team makes two key judgements about each service. These are:

(1) How good is the local authority's performance?

4 The local authority's performance in discharging its responsibilities is rated on a four-point scale as follows:

  Grade 1  good with outstanding features (***)
  Grade 2  good features and no important shortcomings (**) 
  Grade 3  good features outweigh shortcomings (*)
  Grade 4  shortcomings in important areas

(2) Will the local authority's performance improve?

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

  Grade 1  improvement prospects are good, with significant improvements already in place
  Grade 2  improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers
  Grade 3  some good prospects, but barriers in important areas
  Grade 4  many important barriers to improvement
Key questions

6 In order to make the two key judgements, inspectors evaluate the authority’s performance in relation to each of four key questions:

- How effective is the authority’s strategic planning?
- How effective are the authority’s services?
- How effective are leadership and management?
- How well do leaders and managers monitor, evaluate and improve services?

7 These four key questions and the evaluations are set out in the findings section. They are recorded as grades, using the four-point scales set out at (1) and (2) above. All of the grades are included in the Grading Profile.
Background to the authority

Flintshire is situated in the north-east corner of Wales and is made up of coastal, rural and urban areas. The county has six major settlements: Deeside, Buckley, Flint, Holywell, Mold and Saltney. Two-thirds of the population lives in these six areas.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation\(^1\) indicates that, overall, Flintshire has a lower level of deprivation than two-thirds of other areas in Wales. However, there are small pockets of high deprivation in both urban and rural areas. Higher Shotton and Greenfield are among the 10% most deprived wards in Wales.

Flintshire is one of the most industrial areas of Wales. The local economy is currently buoyant. Manufacturing accounts for 38% of all jobs, with agriculture, construction and retail also making a significant contribution. The unemployment rate of 1.8% is low when compared with the rest of Wales. However, 16% of residents are in low-skilled, low-paid occupations and the county has a low number of people with degree equivalent qualifications.

The overall population of Flintshire has been increasing over recent years and is now about 150,000. Flintshire has a predominantly white population, with a very low representation of residents from minority ethnic communities. Just over 1% of pupils in schools in Flintshire are from minority ethnic backgrounds. There has been a recent increase in the number of people coming from Poland and other new European Union countries to live and work in Flintshire. At the time of the last census (2001), just over 21% of the population had some knowledge of Welsh, compared with the average of 29.4% for Wales.

Political governance

Flintshire is governed by 70 county councillors. The Executive Committee is made up of nine majority party (Labour) councillors, including the Leader and Deputy Leader. Each Executive Member is responsible for one of the council's nine areas of policy making. Responsibility for the school improvement service is within the remit of the Executive Member for Education and Children’s Services.

There are seven Overview and Scrutiny committees that hold the Executive to account, review policies and recommend improvements. The Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out this role in relation to the work of the school improvement service.

Schools in the authority

Flintshire Local Education Authority (LEA) maintains 75 primary schools, 12 secondary schools, three special schools, one nursery school and one pupil referral unit. Welsh-medium education is provided in one secondary and five primary schools.

---

\(^1\) The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation measures the overall level of deprivation in local authorities in Wales. The index covers seven aspects of deprivation: income, employment, health, education, housing, physical environment and access to services.
In January 2006, the number of pupils on school rolls was 24,889. The proportion of all pupils entitled to free school meals (10.5% in January 2006) is well below the average for Wales (16.1%) and is the third lowest of all councils in Wales.

Corporate structure

Flintshire County Council is organised into seven directorates, one of which is the Education, Children’s Services and Recreation (ECSR) Directorate.

Over the past year there have been significant changes in Flintshire’s corporate structure and staffing, with further changes anticipated. At the time of the inspection, an Acting Chief Executive and an Interim Director of ECSR were in post.

The ECSR Directorate is organised into four functional areas, each led by an Assistant Director. These are:

- school services;
- development and resources;
- children’s services; and
- libraries and recreation.

A strategy and performance improvement unit supports the work of all four areas.

School improvement service

The school improvement service is provided jointly by school improvement officers, inclusion service staff and curriculum support advisers. An Assistant Director for School Services is responsible for managing all school improvement officers, curriculum support advisers and inclusion service staff.

School improvement officers are linked with specific schools. Their role is to work with schools to monitor and evaluate standards of achievement and quality of education, and to provide support and challenge to enable schools to improve. School improvement officers also help to implement national and local initiatives to improve teaching and learning in schools.

The inclusion service is an integral part of the school improvement service. Specialist learning and behaviour support teachers, inclusion welfare officers and educational psychologists provide support for attendance, behaviour and additional learning needs.

The curriculum support element of the service is shared with Conwy and Denbighshire LEAs. The service provides curriculum support in most subjects of the National Curriculum and in religious education. Flintshire is entitled to 52% of the shared service. The authority pays for this service from its school improvement budget.
Funding

24 The Welsh Assembly Government’s standard spending assessment (SSA)\(^2\) per head of population for Flintshire County Council is the fourth lowest for local authorities in Wales. Within this, the education component (the education indicator-based assessment (IBA)\(^3\)) amounts to £94.9 million for 2006-2007. This represents an average of £3,954 for each pupil, which is the seventh lowest level of IBA per pupil in Wales.

25 Flintshire County Council has set overall budgets for managing and delivering its services close to its SSA. In contrast, the net education budget\(^4\) for 2006-2007 was set at 2.3% below the education IBA. Consequently, the total net education revenue budget per pupil in Flintshire is £3,863, which is below the national average of £3,995 per pupil, and is the fourth lowest of the 22 councils in Wales. The shortfall between the authority’s education budget and its IBA increased further to 3.2% in 2007-2008.

---

\(^2\) SSA is the means by which the Welsh Assembly Government distributes Revenue Support Grant to local authorities.

\(^3\) Education IBA is that part of SSA relating to the delivery of education services. Education IBA is not intended as a spending target, and councils are free to spend at levels above or below IBA, in accordance with their priorities. The level of the education IBA reflects the indicators that contribute to the allocation formula, including deprivation and sparsity.

\(^4\) The net education budget excludes income from specific grants.
Summary

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

Scoring chart

Flintshire LEA: School improvement

How good is the local education authority’s performance?

Grade 1

Grade 2

Grade 3

Grade 4

Grade 4  Grade 3  Grade 2  Grade 1

Will the local education authority’s performance improve?

How good is the LEA’s performance?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

27 The good features of the local authority’s performance are:

✓ pupils in all key stages attain standards in the core subjects\(^5\) that are consistently higher than the national average;

\(^5\) The core subjects are mathematics, science, and either English or Welsh as a first language.
pupils’ attainment in National Curriculum assessments at key stages 1 and 2, and in key stage 4 GCSE examinations, has improved significantly over the past five years;

the percentage of pupils who attain five or more A* to G GCSEs is the highest in Wales, with consistently high performance across all secondary schools;

the rate of attendance of pupils in secondary schools has been the highest in Wales for the past two years, and exclusions from these schools are reducing;

the high quality of the strategy for school improvement that is demonstrated in the very good Single Education Plan (SEP) and well-linked strategies, policies and plans;

the priority given to improving teaching and learning and the high quality guidance provided for schools in Flintshire Aspirations for Learners, Assessment for Learning and the Inclusive Classroom;

the good range of performance data and clear procedures for monitoring, support, challenge and intervention that effectively support schools’ self-evaluation and improvement planning;

the effective support that quickly raised standards in two schools that inspectors had judged to have serious weaknesses;

the quality of partnership working with teachers and other practitioners that is raising standards in key priority areas, including early years education, basic and key skills, personal and social education, health education and teacher assessment;

the way that school improvement and inclusion officers work closely together to raise standards of achievement, attainment, attendance and behaviour of less able and socially vulnerable pupils;

the innovative and successful work of the Athrawon Bro service in raising standards in Welsh and bilingual competence;

the very good work to extend pupils’ learning opportunities in music, physical education, sport and their access to libraries; and

the very effective support and training for all aspects of leadership and management in schools, especially through the Investors in People programme.

The following areas require attention:

- pupils’ attainments in National Curriculum assessments at key stage 3 and in gaining five or more A* to C GCSEs are below the levels expected for schools and authorities in similar social and economic circumstances;
the criteria for support and intervention do not give enough prominence to standards, do not target support in inverse proportion to success and do not make clear schools’ entitlement to resources;

- the quality of curriculum support is not always consistent, and does not always match schools’ needs closely enough;

- the use of performance data to inform the target-setting process is not as rigorous or as consistent across all schools as it could be; and

- there is not enough information about the cost of the service to enable the authority and schools to judge its value for money.

Will the local authority’s performance improve?

**Grade 3: Some good prospects, but barriers in important areas**

29 Factors that are likely to support improvement:

- senior officers and elected members demonstrate clear commitment to school improvement, and provide effective leadership for education;

- the service is delivered by enthusiastic, knowledgeable and highly experienced officers, who have the trust and confidence of schools and other key partners;

- the good, and improving, communication and consultation with schools on strategy and policy that has enabled the authority to manage strategic change effectively;

- the thorough self-evaluation report identified strengths and areas for improvement that broadly match inspection findings;

- the authority has made good progress in implementing recommendations from previous inspections of access and inclusion;

- there is a good track record of successful implementation of key national initiatives, such as the basic skills strategy;

- the authority has made a good start in increasing its capacity to support secondary school improvement, in developing effective 14-19 partnership work and in planning to raise standards in key stage 3;

- senior officers and elected members use the performance management framework effectively to monitor key performance indicators and progress in meeting targets in key strategic plans; and

- the authority is beginning to take appropriate action to address the shortcomings in its understanding of value for money.
The factors that are likely to hinder improvements are set out below:

- senior officers have very high workloads and too many operational responsibilities, which limits the authority’s capacity to focus on key strategic priorities and increases the risk of failure to sustain the current rate of progress;

- few plans identify the staff time and funding needed to implement key actions;

- the performance management framework is not used consistently well by all teams within the service;

- elected members do not have enough information about the performance of individual schools to enable them to monitor pupils’ performance or to evaluate the work of the service; and

- the authority has not fully addressed the recommendations made at the last school improvement inspection to include more specific and measurable success criteria in service plans and to improve the transparency of school improvement service costs so that schools can judge its value for money.
Recommendations

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

R1 rationalise the workloads of senior officers to ensure that there is more time to focus on key strategic priorities for school improvement;

R2 refine the criteria for school support and intervention in order to target more resources towards schools where standards fall below expectations;

R3 use performance data more rigorously in order to improve the consistency of the target-setting process across all schools;

R4 clarify schools’ entitlement to resources for school improvement and align support more precisely to meet schools’ needs; and

R5 strengthen the arrangements for officers and elected members to measure the service’s efficiency, value for money and impact on outcomes for learners by:

- using the performance management arrangements more consistently across the service;

- including more detail about costs and intended outcomes in service plans; and

- providing elected members with more detailed information about the performance of individual schools.
Findings

32 The two judgements for the field inspected are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How good is the LEA’s performance?</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the prospects for improvement?</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How good is the LEA’s performance?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Strategic management

33 The authority’s strategy for education is clear, coherent and effective. Its vision, aims and objectives for education clearly reflect national priorities and local needs. There are very good links between corporate and directorate strategic plans, the Single Education Plan (SEP) and school improvement service strategies and operational plans.

34 The authority has a good strategy for school improvement that is very clearly set out in the Single Education Plan. The SEP is a very good document that shows exceptionally well how the strategic priorities for education contribute to corporate and directorate priorities, and how these priorities will be delivered by the education service working in partnership with schools and other providers.

Flintshire Single Education Plan 2006-2008

The Single Education Plan provides a clear strategic direction for the authority and a good basis for further development of the Children and Young People’s Plan that will be required in 2008. It is clearly linked with the authority’s Corporate Plan for 2006-2010.

The plan is well organised according to an appropriate set of cross-cutting themes: strategic management, raising standards, inclusion, access (meeting learner and community needs), targeting and managing human resources and customer focus.

The plan provides a succinct and accurate analysis of performance within each theme and identifies key strategic improvement priorities. Areas for improvement are supported by more detailed action plans, each of which contains a clear objective together with targets that are specific, measurable and challenging.

The plan places a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of vulnerable and less able learners. Strategies to improve behaviour, reduce exclusions and promote attendance are appropriately included within the overall strategies to raise standards and promote inclusion. The focus on these priorities has already had a positive impact on pupils’ standards in literacy, numeracy, attendance and behaviour, and on their overall attainment at GCSE grades A* to G.
Strategic plans for school improvement contain a wide and appropriate range of activities to deliver the priorities that are set out in the SEP. The primary and secondary school improvement strategies are comprehensive and ambitious. These strategies, and the supporting operational plans, are very detailed. They cover a wide range of national and local priorities, including implementation of the foundation phase in the early years, developing basic skills, moderating assessment at key stage 2 and key stage 3, transition planning and improving teaching and learning.

The strategic vision and planning to improve teaching and learning across all schools, through the development of Flintshire Aspirations for Learners, is of high quality. This local initiative is very well regarded and is beginning to transform teaching and learning in primary schools.

Each element of the school improvement service has an operational plan showing the actions to be taken to meet key strategic objectives. These plans show clearly who is responsible for each action, and the intended timescale, but do not specify the relative priorities of actions, the intended outcomes or costs of actions. This means that the service cannot be sure that it has enough resources to deliver all of its priorities, and is not able to make secure judgements about its overall value for money.

The quality of the authority’s partnership working is good. The Early Years partnership work is already having a positive impact on the standards and quality of provision across the authority. The 14-19 network partnership has established a good strategy for developing provision for young people across the authority and has secured the commitment of key partners to helping to implement planned changes. Through regional work, a number of services for schools, such as the Schools’ Library Service and the Music Service, have achieved greater efficiency and effectiveness.

There is a strong partnership and effective communication between the authority, schools and other key partners. This ensures that partners understand and support key strategic educational priorities and enables the authority to make effective decisions.

There is a good and improving relationship between the authority and schools that is based on mutual trust and respect. Schools have trust and confidence in the authority, and value its open approach to communication and consultation. A range of working groups helps schools and officers to work together to develop new ideas and share good practice. Occasionally, the authority does not involve schools early enough in strategic planning.

The authority has appropriate arrangements for consulting service users about key strategies and policies. In particular, the arrangements for parents, teachers, governors and pupils to comment on the special school reorganisation strategy were very effective.

The authority is committed to ensuring that financial resources are well matched to strategic priorities. Overall budget control is good. However, expenditure on education is below the education IBA for the authority, and overall is low relative to that of other authorities in Wales. Also, there are inconsistencies in the way the authority records its financial data that make it difficult to interpret year on year variations in costs.
The authority is not currently in a position to assess the value for money provided by the education service. Senior officers and elected members are well aware that the overall level of education funding is low when compared with other authorities. However, there is not enough information to enable them to compare the costs of specific services, such as school improvement, with the costs in other authorities. In this respect, Flintshire is in a similar position to many other authorities in Wales.

The authority is carrying out a Base Budget Review with the aim of achieving a better match between spending and corporate priorities. The first phase of this work did not reach a conclusion. The authority has recently started phase two of this review, with a narrower and more manageable focus on specific areas of high expenditure.

In addition, the authority is auditing actual needs and costs within the education service, in order to find out whether the gap between its actual expenditure and the education IBA is reasonable or otherwise.

The Base Budget Review and the education financial review have the potential to provide officers and elected members with clearer information on comparative costs. The authority intends to complete work on both reviews before setting the budget for 2008-2009.

Support for school improvement

The overall performance of pupils in compulsory education in Flintshire compares well with national figures. The percentage of pupils gaining the core subject indicator is consistently above the national average at all key stages.

The following chart compares the performance of pupils in Flintshire schools in 2006 with that of pupils throughout Wales in attaining the core subject indicator (CSI) in National Curriculum teacher assessments and in GCSE examinations.  

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key stage</th>
<th>Flintshire</th>
<th>Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The core subject indicator shows the percentage of pupils who attain the level expected of them in mathematics, science, and either English or Welsh as a first language.
In 2006, in comparison with figures for performance in the CSI in the other 21 authorities in Wales, Flintshire was seventh in key stage 1, ninth in key stage 2, seventh at key stage 3 and fifth in key stage 4. There has been steady improvement since 2003 in the percentage of pupils gaining the core subject indicator at key stages 1, 2 and 4, despite a dip in at key stage 2 in 2005.

At key stage 3 the outcomes are more mixed. The percentage of pupils attaining the CSI at key stage 3 in Flintshire has shown the third highest improvement rate in Wales between 1997 and 2006 (13.9 percentage points). Standards in English, music, art and design and technology have improved very well in the past three years. However, levels of attainment in mathematics, science and the overall CSI were lower in 2005 and 2006 than in 2004, and are now just below the level expected for the socio-economic profile of the area, as measured by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

Similarly, although the overall percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE is above the national average it is also just below the expected level for authorities in similar circumstances. In contrast, there has been a marked improvement over the past three years in pupils’ attainment of five or more A*-G GCSE grades, which is now the highest in Wales and exceeds the expected level.

There are marked variations between secondary schools in the percentage of pupils attaining the CSI at key stage 3 and in their attainment of five or more A*-C grades at GCSE. In too many schools, performance falls below the level expected for the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals. Value added data shows a similar pattern of variability between schools and underperformance in some schools. By contrast, almost all secondary schools are performing very well in the percentage of their pupils gaining five or more A*-G grades.

The percentage of pupils gaining two or more A-C grades in GCE AS and A level examinations in 2006 is just below the national average and well below the expected level. The authority is addressing this issue through its review of post-16 provision and by developing the curriculum for learners aged 14-19 years.

The LEA has clear and well-understood procedures to monitor and challenge schools’ performance. There is a well-planned programme of monitoring visits to schools that links effectively to schools’ self-evaluation and improvement plans. In particular, school improvement link officers review each school’s results in National Curriculum assessments and external examinations, together with targets for improvement, during the autumn term. This is followed up by carrying out a full annual monitoring review in the spring term. The autumn and spring reviews identify the priorities for support at authority level and in individual schools and inform future planning well.

Link officers from the authority know the strengths and areas for improvement of all schools well. Head teachers value the annual review process and the role of the link officer as a critical friend. Senior officers monitor and record schools’ progress and

---

7 Value added data takes into account each pupil’s prior attainment, gender and month of birth. It also takes into account a range of school context indicators such as the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, mean level and distribution of intake and demographic data to allow for the performance of ‘similar’ schools.
improvement very thoroughly and there is clear evidence of the impact of support, for example, on improved inspection grades. The rigour and challenge of reviews have improved significantly in the last two years but there are still some inconsistencies of approach. Recommendations for action in some schools focus too much on processes and not enough on desired outcomes in terms of improved standards.

The following chart shows the inspection grades for schools in Flintshire inspected by Estyn over the period 2005-2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider Type</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>KQ1</th>
<th>KQ2</th>
<th>KQ3</th>
<th>KQ4</th>
<th>KQ5</th>
<th>KQ6</th>
<th>KQ7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Buckley Southdown CP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>Ysgol Y Bryn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Broughton Junior School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Ysgol Bryn Garth</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Drury CP School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Broughton Infants School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>St Ethelwolds Primary School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Flint High School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Lixwm CP School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Ysgol Y Foel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>St Marys RC Primary School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Ewloe Green CP School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Merllyn CP School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Ysgol Terrig</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery and Primary</td>
<td>Ysgol Y Ddol</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authority has agreed criteria that trigger support and intervention by the school improvement service. As a result of the annual review, each school is placed on one of five stages. The criteria for determining the appropriate stage are comprehensive but they do not give enough importance to standards. In practice, the education service tries to provide as much support as it can to all schools if it has the expertise available, irrespective of the stage they are on. There is no clearly defined allocation of support according to stage and, although all schools receive support, it is not targeted sharply enough on schools that are underperforming.

The school improvement service has a good range of data on pupils' performance in the authority as a whole and in individual schools. The authority has improved the way it presents data to schools and has provided additional challenge and training to help schools to improve their use of data to set targets. Most schools set realistically challenging targets but there are some inconsistencies between schools in the rigour and methods they use to analyse their performance. Most schools do not use benchmark data or value-added data enough to improve their performance in comparison with similar schools.

The authority provided very effective support to remove two schools with serious weaknesses from the category within a short period of time. It achieved this by prioritising support on a small number of key issues. No school has been judged to be in need of significant improvement or special measures in the last two years. In addition to careful monitoring, the authority has introduced a traffic light system that effectively alerts officers at an early stage to schools that might cause concern and those that need immediate intervention.
60 The authority is working effectively to raise standards in many national priority areas, including early years, basic skills, literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), bilingual competence, personal and social education (PSE), health education and teacher assessment.

61 The authority is a pilot authority for the introduction of the Foundation Phase and is supporting this work with a good range of training for early years practitioners. There are good and improving links with non-maintained settings, SureStart and basic skills programmes. The authority has introduced several good initiatives and resources aimed at raising standards in the early years, including Talking Partners, the Forest School Leadership programme and Ticw, which develops the bilingual skills of young learners. Standards in most early years settings are good.

62 Programmes funded through the Basic Skills Agency have been particularly effective. The Catch Up and Maths Recovery initiatives are well planned and targeted where they are needed most. There is measurable improvement in pupils’ basic skills. These programmes have contributed to the improved standards in English and mathematics in key stage 2.

63 The authority provides a well-planned, effective service to schools that has helped to improve standards in information and communications technology (ICT). Support is well targeted, for example through analysis of key stage 3 attainment data. The ICT service provides schools with technical support, demonstrations of good practice, staff training, advice and support to develop curriculum planning. This work has had a positive impact on pupils’ achievements in ICT as judged in school inspections.

64 The Athrawon Bro service provides good support and training to teachers through a well planned and managed strategy. The service has introduced innovative and successful strategies, including the introduction of Helpwr Heddiw to assist with the development of everyday Welsh and Welsh as a second language. This work is having a positive impact on the development of bilingualism and on raising standards in Welsh in primary schools. Overall, the standards of bilingual competence across the authority are good. The authority and its schools promote Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig well. Learners have a good range of opportunities to learn about the culture and heritage of Wales.

65 There are well-developed initiatives that very effectively promote pupils’ health and well being. These include developments in personal, social and health education, the widespread introduction of the healthy schools’ initiative, programmes to improve physical health through participation in PE and sport, and the good provision of learning coaches for young people aged 14-19.

66 A particular strength of the school improvement service is the priority given to improving the quality of teaching and learning, including developing pupils’ thinking skills. The LEA has recently provided high quality guidance on teaching and learning for every teacher on Aspirations for Flintshire Learners, Assessment for Learning and the Inclusive Classroom. These materials set high expectations of good practice in all classrooms and are beginning to have an impact in primary schools. The authority has not yet formalised arrangements for putting the aspirations into practice more widely or for monitoring the impact of the guidance on standards at all key stages.
67 The authority has recently drafted a strategy to raise standards in key stage 3 which relates well to initiatives to improve teaching, learning, assessment and thinking skills. However, this work should have been started earlier, since raising standards at key stage 3 has been a national priority since 2002 and the percentage of pupils attaining the CSI in key stage 3 in Flintshire is not as high as it should be. The authority has made a good start to helping clusters of schools to improve their transition planning for pupils moving from primary to secondary schools.

68 Overall, curriculum support is well planned and is generally well matched to the priorities identified by the school improvement service and individual schools. The delivery of some aspects of curriculum support by advisers who are shared with two other authorities provides schools in Flintshire with access to a wider range of curriculum expertise than the authority could provide by itself. The quality of most curriculum support officers and advisers is good and some is very good but arrangements for the co-ordination, consistency and quality assurance of their work are not rigorous and systematic enough.

69 The historical model of allocated time for subject support is not always appropriate to the changing needs of schools and specific whole-school projects. Time allocations for support are not flexible enough to adapt to schools’ changing needs over a sustained period of time. Most funding for school improvement is held centrally and so most schools do not have resources to purchase support from elsewhere or to fund long term improvement projects from their own budgets.

70 School improvement and inclusion service officers work very effectively together on initiatives that have a positive impact on the behaviour, attendance and attainment of groups of vulnerable pupils and reluctant learners. The standard of attendance in secondary schools has been the highest in Wales for the past two years. There has been a significant decrease in the past year in the percentage of pupils excluded permanently or for longer fixed periods of time.

School improvement and inclusion service officers working together to improve standards

Specialist learning and behaviour support teachers, educational psychologists and inclusion welfare officers work closely with school improvement officers to design and implement a wide range of valuable initiatives that have made a clear difference to standards of achievement in the most vulnerable groups of learners.

Important initiatives include the provision of guidance for all schools on the Inclusive Classroom, the authority-wide Dyslexia Friendly Schools programme and work to improve pupils’ behaviour, attendance, motivation and self-esteem.

These initiatives have promoted high standards of achievement for vulnerable learners across the authority and have directly contributed to the authority’s high performance for pupils gaining five or more A*-G grades at GCSE, to the high rate of attendance and to the reducing rate of exclusions.
There is very good provision for Traveller children, the increasing number of pupils with English as an additional language and pupils with additional learning needs. A particularly good feature is the way that the inclusion service focuses on improving the attendance, teaching and standards of these pupils and measures their learning outcomes.

The authority recognises that more needs to be done to improve standards achieved by more able and talented pupils. It has recently put into place a strategy and resources to address this priority.

There is good support for schools to help them meet the needs of looked after children (LAC). The LAC co-ordinator has had a positive impact since being appointed full-time in December 2006. The education service has a better understanding of the needs, performance and progress of individual children who are looked after and is able to target support for schools accordingly. The authority has also appointed a designated learning coach for looked-after children.

The authority provides very good support to extend the learning opportunities for pupils. This is particularly good in music, the work of the Schools’ Library Service and in PE and sport.

**Flintshire Music Support Service**

The Music Support Service has had a significant impact on developing the musical ability of pupils in Flintshire. The service provides comprehensive instrumental and vocal tuition for pupils of all abilities, regardless of ability to pay.

At least 650 pupils take part each week in individual lessons, musical ensembles and county-wide concerts. The highlight of the year is the Flintshire County Music Concert, which takes place over two evenings to accommodate the increasing number of pupils who attend County ensembles.

Flintshire is one of the highest performing authorities in Wales with many pupils reaching nationally recognised standards of musical performance. The county junior and senior choirs, wind band and jazz band have been invited to attend the National Festival of Music for Youth 2007.

The Schools’ Library Service provides very good support to schools including a rich range of materials to enhance teaching and learning in subjects across the curriculum. It has had a very positive impact on standards of literacy and developing enthusiastic readers.

There is a comprehensive, well-managed and effectively-planned programme of physical education (PE) and school sports development that provides a wide range of programmes and activities for pupils of all ability levels across the authority. Levels of pupils’ participation and standards have increased significantly. Several pupils have attained national honours.

Training and support for leaders and managers is good at all levels. The LEA provides a range of programmes for headteachers, senior managers and subject
leaders in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government, the University of
Chester and Investors in People (iiP). The well-planned school and subject
leadership programme has improved the confidence and skills of leaders and
managers within schools. There is clear evidence of the impact of the programme,
including the progression of participants into leadership roles.

**Investors in People**

The authority has strongly encouraged schools to take part in the Investors in People
(iiP) programme as a means of improving the quality of school leadership and
management.

There is very high rate of attainment of the iiP award across the authority with almost
all schools (85) currently holding or working towards the award.

Head teachers share this good practice through the use of case studies both locally
and nationally.

Head teachers value participation in the iiP programme highly. They confirm that the
programme has had clear benefits for teachers and other members of staff, and that
it has increased the effectiveness of their schools.

### Grade 3: Some good prospects, but barriers in important areas

80 Key elected members, including the Leader and the Executive member for education,
understand the strengths and areas for development of the education service well.
The Executive member for education works closely with senior education officers to
set a clear direction and plan improvements for the service. Elected members are
starting to become more involved in improvement planning, for example through the
role of the Executive member in chairing the Inclusion Steering Group.

81 The Executive Committee receives regular reports on the education service and has
a good understanding of key issues and overall trends in performance. This helps
members to take difficult strategic decisions when necessary. For example, there has been positive progress following decisions taken to reorganise special schools in the area and to have a strict admissions policy to reduce overcrowding in certain secondary schools. Both decisions were made after consultation with a wide range of relevant people including schools, parents, elected members and officers.

82 The interim Director for Education, Children’s Services and Recreation has quickly built effective relationships with elected members and senior officers. He has identified relevant priorities, such as working more strategically and efficiently, and is working with managers to address these. Although it is unlikely that a new director will be in post this year, the service continues to work effectively and to implement planned improvements under the interim arrangements.

83 Senior officers provide strong leadership to develop and promote services that support local and national priorities. School improvement, curriculum support and inclusion service staff are enthusiastic, extremely experienced and very knowledgeable in their areas of expertise. In particular, they share and effectively promote a clear vision of education that promotes rich and stimulating learning experiences and includes all children and young people. Senior officers work closely with schools to achieve this vision through projects such as the Inclusive Classroom, thinking skills and healthy schools work.

84 The arrangements for formal partnership working are strong and increasingly effective, and provide a firm foundation for further progress. Education service managers make a strong contribution to the work of the Children and Young People’s Partnership and to the development of the Children and Young People’s Plan. However, there is more to be done to establish a shared vision and identity for the Education, Children’s Services and Recreation Directorate and, in particular, to improve the coherence of education and children’s services.

85 Overall the school improvement service uses a good range of evidence and feedback from schools and officers to support self-evaluation and planning. However, the self-evaluation arrangements are not regular and systematic, and do not involve elected members early enough in the process.

86 The self-evaluation report (SER) for this inspection is thorough and its findings broadly match those of the inspection team. The authority has clearly identified, in its Single Education Plan and in the SER, the need to raise standards in key stage 3, to make target setting more robust, to improve the use of data by schools and to raise standards in schools with the lowest performance relative to those with a similar percentage of free school meals.

87 There have been significant improvements in the authority’s performance management arrangements in recent years. Senior managers and elected members regularly monitor key performance indicators, check the progress in meeting milestones in strategic plans and challenge poor performance against targets. However, strategic plans do not contain enough detailed information about resources or outcomes for their success to be fully measured.

88 The Executive Committee and the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee receive informative reports on the education service’s work that help to increase members’
knowledge and understanding of overall pupil performance. However, elected members do not receive enough information to allow them to evaluate the work of the service in improving individual schools, to challenge the service’s performance or to judge its value for money.

89 Most teams within the school improvement service lack agreed performance indicators and so do not always manage service and individual performance well enough. A few services, such as the Schools’ Library Service, the Inclusion Service and the ICT unit, have clear performance indicators which they use well to monitor the quality of the service and to make comparisons with other local authorities.

90 Overall, the education service has improved steadily over the past four years and has made good progress in delivering planned projects. Services have been improved by increasing the capacity of the authority to support and challenge secondary schools and by introducing innovative work to improve teaching and learning.

91 The authority has not fully addressed the recommendations made at the last school improvement inspection to include more specific and measurable success criteria in service plans and to improve the transparency of service costs so that schools can judge its value for money. The authority’s capacity to improve standards in secondary schools, although improved since the last inspection, is still limited. As a result, work to develop and implement a Key Stage 3 Strategy is later than in most other authorities in Wales.

92 Although there are many good prospects for improvement in the authority’s work in support of school improvement, there are also barriers in important areas. The most significant of these barriers is the very high workload of senior officers in the ECSR directorate, and in particular within the school improvement service. This puts the authority at risk of being unable to sustain and improve on its current good level of service performance, particularly as there is no corporate strategy for recruitment, retention and succession planning.

93 Senior education officers are responsible for a wide range of strategic and operational areas, and take part in many corporate, directorate and service-level working groups. In addition, these officers make it a high priority to respond directly and immediately to queries and concerns raised by schools and parents, which include giving advice to schools on staffing issues and dealing with complaints from parents. This approach has enabled the service to maintain a strong emphasis on consultation and communication with service users, and to design and implement a good range of effective strategies. However, the continuing pressure of work has limited the time available for important management tasks, including performance management and evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.
The authority’s response to the report findings

The staff and members of Flintshire Local Authority wish to thank the inspection team for the thorough and professional manner in which they conducted the inspection. The inspection process has been a positive experience that has confirmed our belief that we provide good quality support to the Authority’s schools.

We are pleased that our self evaluation closely matches the findings of the inspectors.

We are proud to note that the inspection team acknowledged our overall performance with some outstanding features indicated in some areas.

Staff are pleased to note that their skills and dedication in providing valued support in delivering the school improvement agenda are recognised.

The report is very positive and highlights the good progress that has been made in the last few years.

We welcome the recommendations and it is the intention of staff and the lead member for education to incorporate the areas for improvement promptly into an action plan and into the Children and Young People’s Plan.

Flintshire Local Authority strives to offer ever higher standards in all areas of its work and build on its successes. We feel this report provides an excellent springboard for further development. The very positive findings of the report are a reflection of, and a worthy tribute to, the commitment of all staff, schools, partners and members associated with the School Improvement Service.
## Appendix 1

The grade profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key judgement</th>
<th>Education services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How good is the authority's performance?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the authority's performance improve?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key question</th>
<th>Education services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  How effective is the authority’s strategic planning?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  How effective are the authority’s services?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  How effective are leadership and management?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  How well do leaders and managers monitor, evaluate and improve services?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2

### The inspection team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sue Willan HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Reporting Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Hawkins HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Mackinder</td>
<td>Wales Audit Office</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jassa Scott HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne Walters</td>
<td></td>
<td>Additional Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon Murphy</td>
<td>Monmouthshire LEA</td>
<td>Peer Assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elwyn Davies</td>
<td>Flintshire LEA</td>
<td>Provider nominee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>