Quality and Standards in Education and Training in Wales

A Report on the Quality of Powys Local Education Authority

March 2007

by Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
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▶ 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.

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▶ 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.

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1 Context

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 5 to 16 March 2007. The focus of this inspection is on all of Powys County Council’s education services. Before the inspection, Powys local authority undertook a review of its education services and produced a self-evaluation report as a 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 judgments, 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?

These four key questions and the evaluations are set out in 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.
8 Powys is a large, rural county in mid-Wales with a population of 125,000. It is the most sparsely-populated county in England and Wales. Just over 20% of the population are Welsh speakers.

9 The Powys economy relies on a relatively narrow industrial base that includes sectors such as health, agriculture and education. There are many small businesses and a high proportion of unskilled occupations. Powys has the highest proportion of working-age adults in employment in Wales and it has a low unemployment rate compared with the rest of Wales. However, average earnings and household incomes are among the lowest in the United Kingdom.

10 In Powys, there are:

- 106 primary schools;
- 13 secondary schools; and
- three special schools.

11 There are special units in 13 primary schools, four pre-school assessment centres and three secondary schools have special units that provide for pupils diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

12 About three-quarters of the primary schools have fewer than 130 pupils and just over half have fewer than 90 pupils. The numbers on roll in secondary schools range from 1,070 pupils to 287. Eight of the 13 secondary schools have fewer than 650 pupils. The three special schools have 238 pupils in total. There are falling pupil numbers in primary schools and this trend is now starting to reach secondary schools.

13 The proportion of 16-year-olds who stay in full-time education at school or college is 78.3% compared with a Wales average of 75.5%. Just over half of these learners stay on in school. Despite this, the proportion of 16 to 19 year olds involved in education and training is among the lowest in Wales.

14 Overall, 930 pupils (4.48%) have statements of special educational need (SEN) compared with the Wales average of 3.21%. This is the highest rate in Wales. About one-fifth of the pupils in the authority’s schools have SEN. This is very similar to the Wales average. The authority educates a relatively high proportion of pupils with statements of SEN in ordinary classes in mainstream schools, and a correspondingly low proportion in special classes or units in mainstream schools. The school placement of pupils with statements of SEN in January 2006 was:

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About 60% of pupils with SEN in the authority’s schools have general or specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia. Almost 15% of pupils with SEN have social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The remaining 25% of pupils with SEN have more complex learning needs that are linked with communication, sensory and/or physical disabilities. This profile of need closely matches the all-Wales picture, though the number of pupils in special schools has risen sharply over recent years.

Over the last two years the number of pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) needs has risen from 60 in 2004 to approximately 150 in June 2006. This trend is set to continue, mainly as a result of new arrivals from Eastern Europe. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (9.2% in January 2006) is well below the average for Wales (16.0%). One hundred and forty five pupils are looked after by the local authority and there are 524 pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Organisation of the authority

The authority has 73 councillors. Most decisions are the responsibility of the Board which has 15 councillors who together reflect the political balance of the council. Members of the Board act as portfolio holders for key aspects of the authority’s work. There are two portfolio holders concerned with education – one for schools and pupil inclusion, and one for lifelong learning. Each year, the authority appoints a ‘Principal Scrutiny Committee’ and five ‘Policy and Scrutiny Committees’, one of which is concerned with learning opportunities. Each committee has 15 councillors who represent, as far as possible, a political balance. The ‘Learning Opportunities Policy and Scrutiny Committee’ carries out policy development and scrutiny reviews that are set out in a risk-based work programme. In addition to schools, pupil inclusion and lifelong learning, this committee also has responsibility for finance, corporate property and procurement, and children’s services.

Members and officers have made significant changes to corporate and political management arrangements during the last year. In May 2006, Powys councillors aligned themselves into political groups for the first time. The political balance is now as follows:

- Powys Independent Members (31);
- The Independent Group (Montgomeryshire) (22);
- Welsh Liberal Democrats (15);
• Powys Labour Party Group (4); and
• Non-aligned (1).

19 In addition to these changes, the authority has been developing the role of the strategic executive directors. It has introduced a programme, called ‘Aim High Powys’, which focuses on the delivery of seven key projects, including school organisation and modernisation.

Education services

20 One of the three executive directors in the authority has responsibility for education in addition to social services, leisure and recreation. This director takes on the statutory roles of director of education and director of social services. There are three heads of service involved with education, with respective responsibilities for schools, pupil inclusion and lifelong learning.

21 Because of significant budget pressures, the authority decided to reduce staff rather than cut services. As part of its strategy, the authority is revising its management structure to reduce costs and respond more effectively to the challenges facing it. In December 2006, the authority decided to reduce the number of executive directors from three to two and the heads of service from 22 to 16 to take effect from April 2007. There is no change in the executive director who has education in his portfolio, but the responsibilities for all education functions for children and young people’s services now rest with the Head of Schools and Inclusion, the Head of Children’s Services and the Head of Recreation and Leisure.

Performance of schools in National Curriculum assessments and public examinations

22 At all key stages, schools in Powys perform above the averages for Wales. Powys schools also perform well when compared with the performances of similar schools in Wales. There is a trend of improving performance over recent years.

23 The tables below show the distribution of Powys schools\(^2\) within the all-Wales Free School Meals Benchmark Quartiles for the Core Subject Indicator at each key stage.

Key stage 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of schools in</th>
<th>2004 (103 schools)</th>
<th>2005 (103 schools)</th>
<th>2006 (102 schools)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest Quartile</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Quartile</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 The number of schools whose results place them in the highest quartile at key stage 1 has increased by nine percentage points over three years. The number in the lowest quartile has reduced by 16 percentage points over the same period.

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\(^2\) Schools open during 2005-06 academic year
Key stage 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of schools in</th>
<th>2004 (101 schools)</th>
<th>2005 (102 schools)</th>
<th>2006 (102 schools)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest Quartile</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Quartile</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of schools whose results place them in the highest quartile at key stage 2 has increased by five percentage points over three years with the number in the lowest quartile reducing by four percentage points.

Key stage 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of schools in</th>
<th>2004 (13 schools)</th>
<th>2005 (13 schools)</th>
<th>2006 (13 schools)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest Quartile</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Quartile</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of schools whose results place them in the top quartile at key stage 3 has increased by 23 percentage points over three years with the number in the bottom quartile reducing by 23 percentage points over the same period.

Key stage 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of schools in</th>
<th>2004 (13 schools)</th>
<th>2005 (13 schools)</th>
<th>2006 (13 schools)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest Quartile</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Quartile</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</table>

The number of schools whose results place them in the highest quartile at key stage 4 has increased by 15 percentage points over three years with the number in the lowest quartile reducing by 16 percentage points.

Attendance

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Unauthorised absences</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Unauthorised absences</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attendance levels in both primary and secondary schools have remained above the Wales averages. However, overall attendance at secondary level has remained relatively constant while that for Wales has improved.
Permanent and fixed exclusions from secondary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>1.6(^3)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29 The rate for permanent exclusions rose steadily in the few years leading up to 2004-2005, but it fell slightly in 2005-2006. However, the rate for permanent exclusions still exceeds that for Wales. The rise in the rate of fixed-term exclusions of five days or fewer fell in 2005-2006 compared with previous years, while that for six days or more has fallen steadily over the last few years.

The authority’s review of education services

30 In preparation for the inspection, the authority undertook a review of its education services using the authority’s project management and review procedures. Senior officers and elected members carried out the review and it included consultation and challenge from key stakeholders. The review covered all the authority’s education services:

- strategic management;
- support for school improvement;
- promoting social inclusion and well-being;
- Additional Learning Needs (ALN);
- access and school organisation; and
- support services.

31 The Council accepted the report on the review in December 2006.

Children and Young People’s Plan 2008

32 The authority agreed in April 2006 that the executive director with responsibility for education and social services would be the lead director for children and young people’s services. The lead director has overall responsibility for the creation of the Children and Young People’s Plan. The portfolio holder for Children and Young

\(^3\) Rate is number per 1,000 pupils
People is the authority lead member. The authority is reviewing partnership working and it proposes that the Children and Young People’s Partnership is supported by four groups to plan and coordinate the work:

- schools and lifelong learning;
- family support;
- vulnerable young people; and
- health.

The schools and lifelong learning group would also be responsible for the Young People’s Partnership. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership will report to the family support group.

**Funding**

The Welsh Assembly Government’s Standard Spending Assessment (SSA)\(^4\) per head of population for Powys County Council for 2006-2007 was well above the average for local authorities in Wales. Within this, the education component (education Indicator-Based Assessment (IBA)\(^5\)) amounted to £88.1 million. This represents about £4,300 for each pupil in Powys schools. This level of IBA is well above the average for Wales, reflecting the fact that a high proportion of the county’s population lives in small, rural communities and that, as a result, education services are more costly to deliver than in less sparsely populated areas.

In both 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, the authority set its total revenue budget for managing and delivering all its services at a level marginally below SSA. In contrast, the net education budget for 2005-2006 and for previous years was set at a level above education IBA. In 2006-2007, however, the authority was unable to maintain this level of expenditure on education because of the need to spend significantly more on social services. As a result, the education budget was set at 97.9% of education IBA. This level of funding by the authority nevertheless yielded a net education budget per pupil for 2006-2007 of £4,209 compared with an average of £4,094 for Wales as a whole. Including grants, spending on schools, whether delegated or controlled centrally, amounted to £4,096 per pupil compared with an average of £3,916 across Wales.

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\(^4\) SSA is the means by which the Welsh Assembly Government distributes Revenue Support Grant to local authorities.

\(^5\) Education IBA is that part of SSA relating to the delivery of education services. Education IBA is not intended as a spending target and authorities are free to spend at levels above or below IBA, in accordance with their priorities.
3 Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How good is the local authority's performance?</th>
<th>Will the local authority's performance improve?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for school improvement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting social inclusion and well-being</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Learning Needs (ALN)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and school organisation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategic management

36 The way the authority carries out its strategic planning and decision making has improved significantly over the last year. However, many of its developments are still at an early stage. Elected members are committed to making the changes that are needed in education, though they have not provided a strong enough lead on issues concerned with inclusion and school organisation. Senior officers provide high quality leadership, but this has yet to fully impact on improving inclusion and Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

37 The authority’s arrangements to manage recent changes have led to uncertainty about leadership and the provision of support services, and a weakening of stakeholders’ trust and confidence in the authority. There is good partnership working in preparation for the Children Act, through working jointly with other authorities and in the local 14-19 network. However, the authority does not work well enough with mainstream schools to improve services for children with ALN and challenging behaviour.

38 Performance management arrangements have improved over the last year, but they are not implemented consistently enough. The self-evaluation report that was produced for the inspection is comprehensive, detailed and evaluative. It clearly identifies strengths and areas that need improvement.

39 There are some good prospects for the strategic management of the authority’s education services. There is strong leadership from senior officers and lead members, and there are positive developments in the way that the authority operates as a corporate body. However, these developments are at an early stage, and are yet to be delivered and have their desired effect.

Support for school improvement

40 The authority has a clear strategy for school improvement that is well understood by its schools. Support is well planned and targeted at those schools that have been identified as needing most help. The service provides a good balance between support and challenge, and it has been effective in reducing the number of schools
that need most help. There is good quality analysis and use of performance data and the authority provides very good support to schools on self-evaluation and target setting. The school improvement service provides a good range of expertise to support primary schools. The level of support available to secondary schools has increased since the last inspection in November 2005. However, the authority has not convinced schools that it will have the capacity to maintain the current level and quality of the service’s support throughout the county.

41 The authority provides a good range of courses for schools’ senior and middle managers. It also provides a good programme of support for school governors, but take up is variable.

42 There are good prospects for the school improvement service and significant improvements are already in place since the last inspection in November 2005.

Promoting social inclusion and well-being

43 There is a well-structured system for monitoring, evaluating and promoting the attainment of looked-after children, but this system is not used consistently. The authority addresses child protection issues effectively through the work of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board.

44 The authority has appropriate systems for identifying pupils at risk of social exclusion. It has suitable procedures for monitoring the education of pupils who are educated at home. However, these procedures are not implemented consistently and the authority does not know the total number of these children. The authority does not have an appropriate policy for working with Gypsy Traveller children. The authority has provided schools with an appropriate model race equality policy and action plan, but it has not monitored its implementation or provided suitable additional support.

45 The authority appropriately targets schools that have below average attendance. Standards of behaviour in Powys schools are good overall; they are very good in primary schools. In general, the authority does not provide good enough support to help schools reduce the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions.

46 Improvement prospects are good in promoting social inclusion and well-being. The authority had been slow in addressing some recommendations in the Estyn inspection report on behaviour and exclusions in 2003. However, it has made marked improvements over the last six months and there are clear and well-considered plans for further improvement.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

47 Most children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) receive good provision and achieve good standards in learning and behaviour in mainstream and special schools. There is high-quality professional advice and support for most pre-school and school-age children with SEN, especially those with the highest level of need. The authority has clear procedures and criteria for intervention, but these
are not well understood by schools. Support services, officers and SNAP Cymru⁶ provide good support for parents and carers. The authority provides good advice and guidance to schools with pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL), but there is not enough support for teachers and teaching assistants.

48 Overall, the arrangements for early intervention are underdeveloped. There is not enough appropriate provision for the small minority of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in secondary schools. The authority has made slow and limited progress in meeting the accessibility requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

49 Improvement prospects are good for pupils with ALN. The authority had been slow in addressing some recommendations in the Estyn inspection report on SEN in 2002. However, it has made marked improvements over the last six months and there are clear and appropriate plans for further improvement.

Access and school organisation

50 The authority has the third highest proportion of surplus school places in Wales and this number is rising. Its progress in addressing surplus places has been slow.

51 The backlog on the maintenance of schools is increasing. The age, nature and condition of many primary school buildings limit the range of educational facilities that can be provided in them.

52 The authority has a firm commitment to modernise its schools in order to remove surplus places and improve buildings. It has embarked on an ambitious modernisation programme and there is a good understanding of the nature of the challenge that such a programme presents. The programme has a clear and agreed policy, and is supported by a project management approach. The authority has earmarked the funds to implement the modernisation programme.

53 Overall, the authority has clear, effective procedures for admissions which ensure that nearly all parental preferences are met. The authority’s provision for home-to-school transport is of generally good quality. There is not enough monitoring of the effectiveness of arrangements for health and safety, and home-to-school transport.

54 There are some good prospects in the authority’s work on access and school organisation, particularly as a result of the recent Board decision to implement the first stages of the school modernisation programme. However, there are many uncertainties and the authority has not had a significant impact on reducing excess places and improving buildings to date.

Support services

55 Service level agreements for the services that are offered to schools on a traded basis do not reflect the volume, standard and cost of the services provided. The

⁶ SNAP Cymru is a voluntary organisation that offers information, advice and support to families of children and young people who have, or may have SEN and/or disability.
changes in the organisation of the delivery of these services, such as those for human resources and financial support, have the potential to bring greater uniformity in terms of service planning, customer focus and monitoring. However, they have yet to result in the expected improvements.

56 Primary schools, in particular, are too dependent on the authority’s support for the management of their budgets. Financial information provided for managers of some services is not detailed enough to support planning. Funding delegated to maintain school buildings is not keeping pace with the backlog and management of the funding and the programme is weak. The catering service is improving its financial position, though many school kitchens do not meet modern standards.

57 The authority’s website includes an education section containing a reasonable range of information for the public and for schools, but the material is not well enough organised or up-to-date.

58 There are some good prospects in the authority’s work on support services, but the recent rationalisation has not been fully implemented and schools are unclear about how the new arrangements will work.
4 Recommendations

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

R1 ensure the delivery of the school modernisation programme in order to provide suitable accommodation and reduce surplus places;

R2 work with schools, staff and other key partners to restore their confidence and trust in the authority;

R3 undertake a thorough audit of need and provision for Additional Learning Needs and inclusion, and improve the match of service capacity to need;

R4 increase schools’ capacity for early intervention for children with Additional Learning Needs and for those with behavioural difficulties;

R5 ensure that support services help schools and service managers to develop their own capacity to manage resources; and

R6 maintain the focus on school improvement while addressing the demands of the Children Act.
5 Findings: How good is the authority’s performance?

Strategic management:
Grade 3 - good features outweigh shortcomings

Leadership

60 Elected members are committed to making the changes that are needed in education. Nevertheless, they have not provided a strong enough lead on issues concerned with inclusion and school organisation. Recent developments in the structure, purpose and operation of the authority’s committees and a programme of training for members are starting to improve the way that members work. The lead members for education and children services have a secure and full understanding of the key priorities, strengths and weaknesses in the education services.

61 The chief executive, executive director, heads of service and principal officers provide effective leadership and clear direction. They have developed an appropriate vision for future services that meet national priorities and local needs. However, in the areas of inclusion and ALN this has yet to have a significant impact on the delivery of services. The establishment of a single directorate for education and children’s services has led to productive developments in meeting the requirements of the Children Act.

Strategic planning

62 The authority’s overall planning processes provide a clear strategic direction for the authority’s work. However, these processes are not fully embedded in all services, teams and individuals.

63 The local strategic partnership has appropriately identified lifelong learning, which includes education at schools, as a key priority in its community strategy and the authority has a suitable corporate priority to ‘develop a learning county’. In recent years, the authority has replaced education as its main priority with the need to improve social services and this has been reflected in the funding of education. However, the authority has minimised the impact on schools of this transfer of resources.

64 The priorities in the Corporate Improvement Plan appropriately influence those of the education department, which are set out in detail in the Single Education Plan (SEP). The priorities take account of local needs and are based on a number of review activities, such as risk assessments and self-evaluations.

65 Powys’ SEP contains a clear and honest appraisal of the current situation, and sets out appropriate aims, objectives and actions to address identified shortcomings. It provides a clear strategic direction for the education service and takes very strong account of national and local priorities. The plan represents a sound basis for developing the Children and Young People’s Plan for 2008 and there is a clear statement on how the themes in the SEP relate to other requirements for planning for children’s services.
Most of the service area business plans have a clear link to corporate priorities and many of the objectives that are listed in the SEP. Overall, there is undue variation in the quality of these plans. About half have clear and specific outcomes, performance measures and purposeful actions. A minority of the plans do not address all the issues identified in the relevant sections of the SEP and a few plans do not provide a sound basis for improvement.

The school funding formula contains a number of historical elements that no longer ensure that resources are targeted where they are most needed. The authority’s S52 statement lacks detail.

In general, the authority has well-established and substantial arrangements for consulting on a wide range of issues, including the development of policies and plans. These arrangements work well for school improvement and school organisation, but they are underdeveloped for some issues concerned with ALN, inclusion and support services.

**Partnerships**

Partnership working varies too much in its impact and effectiveness. The promotion of partnership working is one of the stated key roles for senior officers and lead members. There are ambitious and farsighted proposals to improve the effectiveness of current partnership working and to deliver integrated services for children and young people in response to the Children Act. The authority is beginning to plan well for inclusion and ALN with key partners, such as social services and the Local Health Board. Many of these strategies are at early stages of development and are yet to have an impact.

The authority has worked well with five other authorities on a wide range of topics including performance management for teachers, in-service training and workforce remodelling. The authority is starting to use this partnership to provide some brokered school improvement services.

The authority has provided a strong lead for the development of the local 14-19 Network, which is making slow but steady progress. It has ensured the engagement of all schools and the college, and led to some collaborative provision for key stage 4 pupils. The authority has worked well in partnership with the local college to review the provision of post-16 education and training across the county. This work has resulted in a preferred option for how the learning network should be organised in the future.

As part of the Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership, the authority has worked well with the voluntary sector in securing provision for three-year old children. However, schools have been insufficiently involved in the Young People’s Partnership and they do not make effective use of the available support.

The recent changes to the leadership at heads of service level have led to uncertainty, resulting in a weakening of the trust and confidence of stakeholders, especially schools and key partners. Schools are unclear about the way that they receive a wide range of support services. Schools are concerned that the recent
changes to the structure of the education service together with shift of resources to social services has weakened the position of education in the authority. A recent positive development to address this issue has been the addition of headteachers on the corporate management team.

74 The authority does not work effectively in partnership with mainstream schools to improve services for pupils with ALN and address challenging behaviour.

Performance management and self-evaluation

75 The authority is developing its good performance management arrangements which are improving its ability to monitor and report progress against key priorities. Though still developing, the corporate planning cycle is beginning to link effectively the elements of risk assessment and improvement planning. The balanced scorecard approach\(^7\) at a corporate level is helping to bring a sharper focus to the authority’s ability to monitor performance. Education services are starting to develop their own scorecards, but this process is not yet complete.

76 There is a good link overall between performance management arrangements and the stated aims and objectives of service areas. However, the monitoring of service business plans is inconsistent across the different education service areas. Performance management is well established and effective in school improvement and in the ‘Aim High’ project on school modernisation, but it is underdeveloped in ALN, inclusion and in services supporting schools. Managers in these areas do not have enough information about costs, expenditure and outcomes of provision to evaluate the quality of services.

77 There have been some significant improvements in the scrutiny function over the last year. However, the work is still at an early stage and it is yet to be fully effective. The new committee structure has introduced a more focused approach to scrutiny, including the establishment of a work programme based on risk assessments and performance measures. Existing reviews, such as the SEN review, and projects, such as the ‘Aim High’ project on school organisation, have been reported to the relevant committee or the Board.

78 The education service has established a firm tradition of conducting thorough reviews of its services and functions. The self-evaluation report that was produced for the inspection is comprehensive, detailed and evaluative. It has clearly identified strengths and areas that need improvement.

**Support for school improvement:**
**Grade 2 - good features and no important shortcomings**

79 The authority has a clear strategy for school improvement that is well understood by all its schools. The school improvement service (SIS) is led effectively by a principal school improvement officer and consists of a team of 10 school improvement officers (SIOs) who have an appropriate range of experiences and expertise. Seconded

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\(^7\) The balanced scorecard is a tool for measuring an organisation's performance against its strategy and objectives. It focuses on a broad, but limited range of important measurements.
teachers who are responsible for specific subjects and areas of work support the SIOs. The quality of support provided by the team is good and schools are very satisfied with the support they receive. However, the authority has not convinced schools that it will have the capacity to maintain the current level and quality of the service’s support throughout the county. The service compares its costs and outcomes with other authorities through an all-Wales benchmarking group. The net cost of the SIS is £43 per pupil which is well below the Wales average of £76. This indicates that the service compares favourably with other authorities and provides very good value for money.

Support, monitoring, challenge and intervention

80 Officers and schools have a good level of understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and the authority, particularly of those aspects that are statutory and those that are not. The school improvement service has produced a comprehensive handbook for schools, which sets out clearly the respective roles and responsibilities of officers and provides guidance on what schools can expect. The services provided in this way include target-setting, monitoring and supporting schools, supporting governing bodies, analysis and use of data, handling complaints, maintaining school premises and enabling effective transition. They also include complying with health and safety matters, and implementing the policy on ALN.

81 The authority has an effective and well-organised system for monitoring the work of schools that helps promote schools’ own self-evaluation. The SIS carries out a thorough review meeting with schools in the autumn term of each school year. Schools receive a report that contains information on its performance in National Curriculum assessments and/or external examinations. SIOs complete an annual review report with the school. SIOs provide schools with a good balance of challenge and support. The monitoring system helps to determine the level of support, challenge and intervention required for each school.

82 A recent positive development has been the opportunity for governors of each school to join the headteacher and SIO in the annual review meetings. As a result, governors are becoming much more knowledgeable about the performance of their school and are, where necessary, better equipped to challenge the headteacher about it. However, the opportunity to attend these meetings is not always taken.

83 In the schools that have been targeted as needing most support, the SIS works in partnership with schools to establish a clear and specific raising achievement plan. Where necessary, SIOs and seconded teachers provide extra support. At the end of the year, the SIS conducts a thorough review of the support and intervention provided for each school, and determines how much further support is required in the following year. The number of schools that require this targeted support has reduced in recent years as a result of this support.

Curriculum support

84 There is good, and sometimes outstanding, support in a range of topics to improve pupils’ learning. The very good provision includes the creation of the Powys Learning Team, which is developing thinking skills and assessment for learning, and
the work carried out to support literacy, numeracy and early years education. The SIS also provides very good support for projects such as the Eco-schools and healthy schools initiatives, and the ‘Physical Education and School Sport’ (PESS) programme. The underachievement of boys is being tackled effectively through a series of initiatives that include ‘Catch Up’ and acceleration programmes in literacy and numeracy.

85 The authority offers a comprehensive programme of professional development activities designed to meet the needs of all staff. There is a coherent and very well-organised training programme. Where there are shortfalls in expertise, for example in art and music, the authority has successfully arranged support from other sources.

86 The authority’s Welsh Education Scheme provides a clear picture of the challenges facing the authority. There is good support for pupils who are new to Welsh-medium schools. There are suitable planned changes to the Athrawon Bro service so that it will provide support for mainstream teachers rather than teaching the pupils themselves. This is a positive development that will help meet the targets set in the Welsh Education Scheme to increase the number of Welsh speakers. At present, the Athrawon Bro service does not provide enough support according to the greatest need in both Welsh-medium and English-medium schools.

87 The authority’s support for early years work is managed well. There are improving links between the SIS and the authority’s inclusion and ALN teams in order to ensure wider support for children. The authority coordinates effectively the arrangements for support, training and monitoring of the provision for early years. A referral panel with a cross section of representatives manages the extra support that is required. There are productive links with the Basic Skills Agency.

Support for managers and leaders

88 There are good continuing professional development opportunities for school managers. Training partnerships have been established and recent courses, such as that for middle managers, provide suitable accreditation. The authority supports courses in the leadership development programme, for example the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH). Experienced headteachers support new headteachers very well through an effective mentoring system organised by the SIS. This allows new headteachers to settle into their new roles quickly, effectively and with confidence.

89 Training and support for governors are good. The SIS carries out a thorough analysis of governors’ needs, which it meets through a comprehensive training programme. The service effectively monitors and evaluates the quality of governor training and its impact. However, too few governors attend training sessions.
90 The recently appointed senior officer and the re-structured ALN and inclusion team have a coherent vision and clear plans for the services. However, processes for planning and monitoring expenditure on the inclusion services are currently under-developed. A framework for planning and monitoring expenditure is being developed to replace the existing system, which is not robust enough to enable officers to challenge schools to ensure that the delegated money is spent appropriately. Managers are not clear about how much the inclusion service is spending on the various elements of provision.

Meeting statutory duties and the needs of specific groups of pupils and young people

91 There is a well-structured system for monitoring, evaluating and promoting the attainment of looked-after children (LAC), but the authority does not use these systems consistently. The SIS has appropriate plans to extend the annual review to include monitoring the outcomes for LAC, but these have yet to be implemented. LAC receive appropriate priority for school admissions, including placements at the Complementary Education Centres (CECs). The authority ensures that LAC have a consistent school placement, but this results in some children travelling long distances to and from school. A good start has been made in improving joint working between the education services and children’s services. The co-ordinator for Personal Education Plans is working effectively with schools to improve the co-ordination of multi-agency provision for LAC.

92 There are appropriate plans for the development of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board. Existing procedures for child protection have been in place for some time and there has been suitable training for schools and officers in their use. However, some officers and schools are not clear enough about when to implement procedures. The authority is aware of this issue and is taking appropriate steps to address it.

93 The authority has recently discovered that about 40 staff, mostly peripatetic music teachers, work in schools without having undergone checks by the Criminal Records Bureau. The staff concerned are no longer working unsupervised with children, while they await clearance. There are suitable arrangements to prevent this happening again.

94 The authority has generally suitable systems for identifying pupils at risk of social exclusion and these are improving through better joint working between the education services, social services and the Local Health Board.

95 The authority has suitable procedures for monitoring the education of pupils who are educated at home, but these are not implemented consistently. As a result the authority is not clear about how many pupils are being educated appropriately at home.
The authority does not have an appropriate policy for working with Gypsy Traveller children. However, the Education Welfare Service provides good support to encourage Gypsy Traveller children living on the Welshpool site to attend school regularly.

The authority has provided a model race equality policy and action plan to all schools. However, the authority does not carry out its duties to monitor:

- incidents of racial harassment;
- schools’ progress in producing their own policy and action plan; and
- the links between the race equality policy, action plan and the school development plan.

The authority has made slow progress in improving the accessibility of schools, as required by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Disabled children are not always able to gain access to their local mainstream school.

Support for attendance at school

Attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools are above Welsh averages. The Education Welfare Service makes good use of its resources to help schools deal with attendance issues and effectively targets schools that have below average attendance. However, the authority has not made adequate arrangements to cover for long-term staff absence in the Education Welfare Service. This has meant that some schools have not received the support they need to improve welfare and attendance issues.

Support for behaviour in schools

Standards of behaviour in Powys schools are good overall; they are very good in primary schools. There is good provision for pupils of primary school age with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The authority’s introduction of the Webster-Stratton Programme has had a positive impact on the behaviour of younger children and on schools’ abilities to manage challenging behaviour more effectively. The Powys Mediation Service responds quickly to requests for intervention, and offers effective advice and support for pupils, teachers and families. However, not all schools are aware that this service is available.

The authority does not provide well enough for secondary school pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The lack of effective provision contributes to the high rates of exclusion from secondary schools and to the corresponding increase in demand for placement of pupils with SEN in the two CECs. The limited availability of the Educational Psychology Service and poor access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) add to the problem. Until recently, there has been a lack of leadership and management of the behaviour support

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8 The Webster-Stratton Programme is for parents with children who have significant behavioural and related problems.
service, due to senior staff absences. This has resulted in a reduction of the advice, support and guidance on managing behaviour for secondary schools.

102 The authority has been slow to register the provision at the CECs with the Welsh Assembly Government, despite the recommendation from the Estyn inspection in 2003. The CEC does not have a formal management structure and there is no system for ensuring that it provides value for money. Accommodation and learning resources are unsatisfactory. Despite this, the Complementary Education Service provides many excluded pupils with good support and individual teaching that enables them to progress in their learning, and improve their behaviour and attendance. However, the service is not equally accessible across the county. The service also provides appropriate home tuition for children educated otherwise than at school, including some sick children, LAC and Gypsy Traveller children. The service is beginning to provide additional support for local mainstream schools.

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<th>Additional Learning Needs (ALN):</th>
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<td>Grade 3 - good features outweigh shortcomings</td>
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Meeting statutory duties

103 The authority meets all the statutory requirements of the SEN and Disability Act (2001). Assessments and statements of SEN are appropriately detailed and clearly specify the provision that schools must make from their delegated SEN budgets and the additional resources that the authority will provide. The authority’s officers give suitably high priority to attendance at reviews of the pupils with highest levels of need, especially those placed out-of-county.

Provision for pupils with ALN

104 The proportion of pupils with statements has remained high over the past three years. This reflects a lack of capacity in the schools to provide effective support at School Action and School Action Plus\(^9\). The authority’s arrangements for early intervention for pupils with SEN are limited, but improving significantly. The introduction of Extended School Action Plus and the ALN moderating panel has enabled the authority to make a faster response to requests for additional support. The authority’s new SEN guidance clearly specifies how the authority and schools are expected to respond to different levels of need. However, this guidance has not been circulated to schools, and so many teachers do not understand the new system.

105 The authority provides high-quality professional advice and support for most pre-school and school-age children with SEN, especially those with the highest level of need. As a result, most pupils with SEN achieve good standards in learning and behaviour in mainstream and special schools.

106 There are effective arrangements for identifying and assessing the needs of pre-school children that take full account of the authority’s ‘Early Years and Childcare

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\(^9\) School Action and School Action Plus are different types of additional support that schools provide for pupils with SEN.
Development Partnership’ provision. The ‘Educational Psychology Service’ and ‘Sensory Support Service’ work closely with the Local Health Board to contribute to multi-agency assessments in the early years.

107 Most pre-school children receive effective support within local community settings. However, the purpose, provision and management of the authority’s four pre-school assessment centres are neither clear nor consistent across the authority. Very young children sometimes travel inappropriately long distances to receive this provision, and the distance from home limits parents’ and carers’ opportunities to be involved in their children’s education.

108 The authority provides effective support for pupils with severe and/or complex needs and disabilities in its three special schools and in special classes in mainstream schools. The ‘Sensory Support Service’ provides good support for pupils with hearing, vision and multi-sensory impairment. The special school outreach teaching service is starting to help mainstream teachers to meet a wider range of needs.

109 The authority has developed very good bilingual resources for pupils with learning difficulties. The authority’s Dyslexia Friendly Schools and ‘Catch Up’ materials are outstanding examples of work that has helped to build the capacity of mainstream schools to meet pupils’ SEN.

110 In general, there is not enough specialist support to help mainstream secondary schools meet the SEN of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The authority does not have suitable special school provision for these pupils and the CECs are not resources appropriately to educate pupils with statements of SEN.

111 The authority provides schools with timely and helpful initial advice about the EAL needs of newly-arrived pupils, and with funding that enables them to employ teaching assistants. However, there is too little ongoing specialist teaching or guidance for schools to help them to continue to meet EAL needs.

112 There is emerging good practice in monitoring outcomes for pupils with ALN, for example in the work that SIOs do to monitor the levels that pupils with SEN attain in National Curriculum assessments. However, the authority does not have a coherent picture of the wider outcomes for pupils with ALN, or of the costs of provision relative to the level of need. The authority does not take enough account of feedback from parents and pupils when evaluating provision for pupils with ALN.

Work with parents and carers

113 There is good support for parents and carers of pupils with ALN. The ‘Educational Psychology Service’, the ‘Sensory Support Service’ and ‘Powys Mediation’ provide good advice and guidance that helps parents and carers to understand and manage their children’s special educational needs effectively. Officers work closely with parents and carers whose children need statutory assessment. SNAP Cymru provides effective support for the relatively few families that access the service. The ‘Education Welfare Service’ provides good support for vulnerable families, including those newly arrived in the area from other countries.
## Access and school organisation:
### Grade 4 – shortcomings in important areas

### Provision of school places

114 In 2003 there was a 19.1% surplus capacity in primary schools and 9.9% in secondary schools. By 2005, this has risen to 27.5% in primary schools (the third highest in Wales) and 16.4% in secondary schools (the tenth highest). This is a significant increase. Current forecasts of declining pupil numbers indicate a further increase in surplus places in the near future. The authority also has a large number of small schools which are expensive to run and maintain. The average class size in primary schools in 2006 was 21.3. This is the second lowest in Wales and well below the Wales average of 24.2.

115 The authority has an effective system for forecasting the number of secondary school pupils. The model used in primary schools is developing well. For primary schools, when the predicted figures for January 2006 are compared with the actual numbers, it shows that the model overestimated the number by 2%. The authority is currently in the process of re-calculating the capacity data for each school in line with the Welsh Assembly Government’s revised capacity formula. This work will be completed by April 2007.

116 The authority has been slow to tackle surplus places in schools. In 2005 it closed two schools, while in 2006 another school closed. However, this had a very little impact on reducing the overall proportion of surplus places. There are a significant number of empty places in 46 of the 106 primary schools (43%) and in three out of the 13 (23%) secondary schools. The authority calculates that this is costing them about £4 million a year.

117 The authority has embarked on an ambitious school modernisation programme to tackle surplus places and improve school buildings. The reorganisation of the management of the authority and the formation of political groups have given fresh impetus to this process. The authority has acknowledged publicly that the current position has to change. Political group leaders, lead members and senior officers support the strategy for modernising schools and recognise that they must set a clear direction. There is a good understanding of the nature of the challenge that the school modernisation programme presents. This new political will from members and the recent Board decision to support the schools’ modernisation programme are positive features. The authority has earmarked the funds to implement the modernisation programme.

118 The appointment of a project manager to help the process of modernising schools is having a significant impact. The authority has a number of activities under way to support the school modernisation programme, including:

- good project management methodology;
- a clear and agreed policy on the organisation of primary schools;

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[^10]: Capacity that is over 25% of the numbers on roll
• a working party developing a policy for secondary schools; and

• effective use of external consultants to look at post 16 provision.

119 However, the authority currently has not yet identified the capacity required to implement the necessary changes.

Asset management planning

120 The authority’s asset management plan is not up-to-date. The processes for asset management are generally good at a day-to-day operational level. However, the lack of an agreed strategy for school re-organisation has hindered the authority’s long-term planning of assets and resources. The authority has clear plans to use its School Buildings Improvement Grant (SBIG) of £13 million, supplemented by its own capital building programme, to build a new school and remodel another one.

121 The 2006 condition survey of schools estimates that £65 million worth of repairs are needed to improve the condition of schools. This figure has risen from £40 million in 2004. At present, there is little information on the suitability of school buildings. Many primary schools have limited or no outdoor play facilities for under-fives or provision for physical education. Many primary schools are not suitable for modern education because of their layout, design and facilities.

122 The arrangements for ensuring health and safety are in place. Schools are getting better at understanding their health and safety responsibilities. The authority has provided clear guidance and good quality training for headteachers and governors to identify and fulfil their specific responsibilities. However, the authority is not doing enough to monitor the schools that have not received the training or do not buy in to the property service level agreement.

Admissions to schools

123 The authority’s schools admission service is effective in the secondary sector. There are suitable plans to centralise primary admissions in order to improve and ensure consistency in the implementation of the admissions criteria. The authority provides parents and carers with clear and comprehensive information about the policy and arrangements, including that for parents and carers who may choose to send their children to a school in a neighbouring authority. An admissions forum has been set up, but this has not been properly constituted. Otherwise, the arrangements for admissions and appeals conform to the Welsh Assembly Government code of practice. Overall, the authority adheres successfully to its policy and criteria. All parents who request an appeal are able to receive one and appeals are completed in good time.

Home-to-school transport

124 The authority has a clear policy about home-to-school transport. The policy is more generous than is required by law, for example, in providing free transport for eight to eleven year old pupils residing over two miles from their catchment area school and for post-16 students.
The authority is the second highest spender per pupil in Wales on home-to-school transport. This is mainly because Powys covers the largest geographical area, but there is also a general lack of competition for the provision of school transport. The authority has recently had difficulty in managing the home-to-school transport budget. This has been caused by the use of more taxis for transport to special schools and because new tenders have come in at a much higher price when contracts have been cancelled.

The authority is conducting a cross-service review of all transport across the county. The work completed thus far makes good use of the authority’s procurement unit to deliver some efficiency savings and has identified a significant reduction in the number of routes. The authority’s clear guidelines and contracts with transport companies help to ensure that vehicles comply with legislation. One shortcoming of the review is that the social service department has not taken any part in it. As a result, opportunities to share vehicles and reduce costs may be missed.

The authority monitors the quality of vehicles and their punctuality through occasional spot checks. However, it does not have enough officers and resources to monitor health and safety matters, and pupils’ behaviour on buses in a systematic way.

Support services:
Grade 4 - shortcomings in important areas

Services to support schools

Service level agreements (SLAs) contain brief details of each of the services available for schools to buy. However, SLAs do not contain information about the volume of service available or offer schools a choice in where they can obtain these services. They also do not have enough information about the standard of service that schools should expect and past performance against those standards.

Most SLAs are helpfully grouped together to form a core package of services, but they are also available individually. The prices charged for individual SLAs do not reflect, in all cases, the cost of providing the service, so that in these cases schools are paying less than they should. In addition, service providers do not know which schools have chosen to buy the service, so schools may receive support and advice without paying for it. The authority has recognised that a review of SLAs is necessary ahead of the 2008-2009 budget, and that they need to clarify the respective responsibilities of schools and the authority.

Following the recent reorganisation, schools now receive financial advice and advice about human resources (HR) from the authority’s corporate services rather than from the education service. It is too early to assess the impact of this change, but the new arrangements have the potential to bring greater uniformity in terms of service planning, customer focus and monitoring. However, staff delivering a few of the services do not yet have enough expertise to take account of the specific context and requirements of schools. Further imminent reorganisation will result in other aspects of financial and HR support being delivered by the business and performance units for each directorate. There is the potential for confusion about the division of responsibilities in these areas and about whom to contact about particular issues.
Corporate services for education, including schools

131 Charges made by corporate services to the central education budget are not based on transparent criteria and there are no clear service standards. The education strategic management budget (where such charges should be reported) for 2006-2007 fell by over 20% compared with the previous year, but it may not reflect the true costs to the education service of the corporate services it uses.

a) Finance

132 Primary schools are too dependent on authority support for the management of their budgets. The training provided in these areas has been limited. The proportion of primary schools with deficit budgets is too high and continues to increase, with over one third of primary schools setting deficit budgets for 2006-2007. A small minority of these schools has been in this position for over three years. The authority is beginning to take a firm line with the schools that set deficit budgets, but schools with significant surpluses are not challenged enough.

133 Nearly all schools rely on the authority to process invoices and payments on their behalf. Schools cannot access the authority’s financial management system electronically, and therefore rely on paper-based reconciliation of their accounts. The time taken to process invoices means that monthly budget summaries sent to schools are not always up-to-date. This contributes to schools’ dependence on the authority for managing their financial resources.

134 The financial information provided for service managers is of limited value for monitoring expenditure and planning future provision. Budget headings in the areas of ALN and inclusion include too broad a range of expenditure to form a useful basis for managers to identify and address the causes of overspending. Aspects of the ALN budgets are overspent significantly on a regular basis. As with schools, education service managers do not have direct access to the authority’s financial management system. There is also too much variation in their knowledge and understanding of resource management in the fields for which they are responsible.

b) Human resources (HR)

135 The authority’s HR service is developing gradually from a low base. At a time when the school workforce is reducing as pupil numbers fall, schools report that the quality of HR advice remains too variable. In the past, weak advice has contributed to the need for costly industrial tribunals. The authority is updating key policies, but many of those currently available on its website are out of date. The authority plans to offer training for heads and governors as policies are revised.

136 Schools report that contracts for new employees take too long to be processed, resulting in delayed or inaccurate payment of salaries. New software is improving the links between payroll and HR. When all information has been entered, it will improve the HR data available to managers to monitor aspects such as sickness absence. Later this year, the system will become web-based, enabling schools also to access information about their staff.
c) ICT

137 The authority provides good support for the installation and use of school management systems. Arrangements for the secure transfer of data between schools and the authority are effective. The speed of internet connections in schools varies considerably, mainly because of the hilly landscape. The authority has investigated alternatives, but no cost-effective solution has yet been found to ensure more consistent speed.

138 The authority’s website includes an education section containing a reasonable range of information for the public and for schools. There is, for example, a useful summary for parents of the Single Education Plan. However documents intended for schools are not well organised and many are out-of-date. The intranet is under-used and schools do not have access to secure areas to access documents such as reports by SIOs or financial reports.

Property-related services

139 The authority appropriately offers schools the option of pooling their delegated repairs and maintenance funding and, in return, manages the maintenance programme on their behalf. About three-quarters of schools take up this option. Schools with newer buildings tend not to join the scheme, reducing the total available for repairs across the county.

140 The authority has delegated landlord and tenant responsibilities for school buildings to its schools. Schools are therefore responsible, in principle, for all repairs. In practice, however, the funding delegated for repairs and maintenance is insufficient to address the repairs backlog in schools and the authority funds some major repairs through its capital programme.

141 The maintenance budget is frequently used up before the end of the financial year. Much of it has been used recently to undertake a wide range of statutory health and safety testing and the resulting remedial work, further limiting progress in addressing the maintenance backlog.

School meals

142 The take-up of school meals is generally high. Menus have improved over the last few years in quality and increasingly use local produce. Area managers make unannounced visits to schools to monitor the quality of school meals and the management of the service within the school. The number of meals served each day is, nevertheless, falling as numbers on roll decline in the county’s schools. The cost of providing school meals exceeds income in the high and increasing proportion of small schools. The school meals service has taken effective steps to reduce the deficit accumulated over recent years.

143 Eleven of the 13 secondary schools use the authority’s catering service. The take-up of free school meals in these schools varies across the county, reflecting, in part, the availability of alternative sources of food at lunchtime. Only one school has established a cash-free payment system that helps reduce the perceived stigma attached to the receipt of free meals.
About 70% of primary schools have kitchens. The lack of investment in their fabric and equipment adds further to the repairs and maintenance backlog in schools.
Findings: Will the local authority’s performance improve?

Strategic management:
Grade 3 - some good prospects, but barriers in important areas

145 There are some good prospects for the authority’s strategic management of its education services, but there are barriers in important areas. Many of the promising planned activities are at an early stage of development or have yet to take place and, therefore, there is a degree of uncertainty attached to them.

146 Overall, the significant developments in the way that the authority operates have benefited the strategic management of its education services. The developments in planning, scrutiny, project management and performance management have the capability to make the authority more effective in converting plans and strategies into action. However, these developments are at an early stage and have yet to have their desired effect.

147 The leadership of senior officers is likely to help secure the necessary improvements to the education services. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the range of the authority’s education services. They have set out a clear vision for the future and identified promising strategies to achieve it. Despite these good features, schools and key partners are unclear about the direction of the authority and there is a great deal of uncertainty.

148 Elected members are committed to making the difficult decisions that are needed to improve the services. They have responded effectively to the need to address funding shortfalls in social services and have taken the first step in the school modernisation programme. The emergence of political groups, the improving scrutiny function and the stronger lead from the Board have the potential to make the authority more resolute in the areas that require difficult decisions. However, all these developments are still at an early stage of development and have yet to produce the planned results.

149 The authority is gradually developing a medium-term financial strategy, with financial and business planning becoming better aligned. However, the impact of recent reductions in central capacity and the below-average growth in schools’ delegated budgets have not been modelled in sufficient detail. While officers are aware of the options available, there is no clear strategy in place to meet the capital requirements of the school modernisation programme.

150 The authority is taking action to address a number of areas in which spending has exceeded budgets in recent years. Reviews of home-to-school transport, and ALN and inclusion funding are underway, but it is too early to judge their success. Careful analysis of overspending in the catering service has led to a reduction in the projected deficit. However, the number of primary schools spending at levels beyond their delegated budgets continues to grow gradually.
Support for school improvement:
Grade 1 - improvement prospects are good, with significant improvements already in place

151 There are good prospects and significant improvements are already in place in the authority’s work in support for school improvement. The authority has a well-established service that challenges schools to do better and targets its support on those the school that need it most. Since the Estyn inspection in November 2005, the authority has made very good progress in addressing the recommendations.

Promoting social inclusion and well-being, and ALN:
Grade 2 - improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers

152 Though the authority had been slow in addressing some recommendations in Estyn inspection reports on behaviour, exclusions and SEN, marked improvements have taken place over the last six months and there are good prospects for further improvement. These good prospects include the innovative and far-reaching vision for organising children’s services through the Children and Young People’s Partnership, and the clear and well-considered plans for managing inclusion and ALN within the authority. Officers have clear understanding of the weaknesses in the authority’s work in these areas. Plans are already starting to have an impact, for example in reducing the rate of statementing and the number of exclusions.

Access and school organisation:
Grade 2 - improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers

153 There are good prospects for improving the authority’s work on access and school organisation, though there a few uncertainties. The authority has a firm commitment to address the issues of surplus places and inadequate buildings and this is reflected in the ‘Aim High’ project on school modernisation. The authority has a good understanding of the nature of the challenge that it faces. The plans for school modernisation have the potential to bring about significant improvements to the quality of school buildings while at the same time reducing surplus places. In the past, the authority has not taken sufficiently robust action in dealing with the issues concerned with surplus places and the quality of school buildings. However, the recent decision by the Board to implement the school modernisation programme is a significant step forward.

Support services:
Grade 3 - some good prospects, but barriers in important areas

154 There are good prospects in the authority’s work on support services, but there are some uncertainties. The recent rationalisation of the way the authority provides these services has the potential to make them more efficient and effective. However, the rationalisation has not been fully implemented and schools are unclear about how the new arrangements will work. The major structural and staff changes that are taking place have the potential to disrupt service provision. These changes have had a negative impact on staff morale and on schools’ confidence in the authority’s ability to improve. Though the new and leaner structure is designed to meet identified priorities, it is not yet fully operational.
Powys County Council welcomes this inspection as an external evaluation of its current performance and prospects for the future. The timing of the inspection coincided with considerable restructuring of the Council. It is recognised that the inspection outcome is variable in terms of gradings. The Council is confident that recent changes to the structure of the local authority in the Schools and Inclusion service and partner services will lead to improved outcomes for children and young people. The Council is also particularly pleased that the inspection team have acknowledged the work that has been undertaken in order to implement the requirements of the Children Act 2004 in a child centred and seamless way.

The Council is pleased that recent improvements have been recognised and will use the recommendations and areas for development identified in the report as a basis to ensure that all service areas perform to the high standards of the school improvement service.

An action plan will be produced to address the recommendations of the report. This will link to the Children and Young People’s plan.
## 7 The grade profile

### Authority inspection grade profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>How good is the local authority's performance?</th>
<th>Will the local authority's performance improve?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting social inclusion and well-being</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Learning Needs (ALN)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and school organisation</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support services</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key question</th>
<th>1 How effective is the authority’s strategic planning?</th>
<th>2 How effective are the authority’s services?</th>
<th>3 How effective are leadership and management?</th>
<th>4 How well do leaders and managers monitor, evaluate and improve services?</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Strategic management</td>
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8 The composition of the inspection team

The inspection team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigel Vaughan HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Reporting Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arwyn Thomas HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Roberts HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Willan HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terry Williams AI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farrukh Khan HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huw Lloyd Jones</td>
<td>Wales Audit Office</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>Powys County Council</td>
<td>Nominee</td>
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