Inspection of

Torfaen Local Education Authority

Access and school organisation

October 2006

by Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
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- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- LEAs;
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of Jobcentre plus.

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1 Context

The Inspection

1 In April 2006, a cycle of LEA inspections under section 38 of the Education Act 1997 and the Children Act 2004 began. The LEA inspection cycle covers the period from April 2006 to March 2012. The inspection framework for this cycle was published on Estyn’s website (www.estyn.gov.uk) in May 2006.

2 The inspection took place in October 2006. The agreed scope is the field of Access and school organisation. Torfaen LEA undertook a review of these services and produced a self-evaluation report.

3 The findings are reported using the sections of the framework relating to access and school organisation.

4 The inspection team makes two key judgements about each field. These are:

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

5 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?

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

Key question 1: How effective is the authority’s strategic planning?

Key question 2: How effective are services and how does performance compare, including value for money?

Key question 3: How effective are leadership and strategic management?

Key question 4: How well do leaders and managers at all levels monitor, evaluate and improve services?

These four key questions and the evaluations are set out in Section 4 (Findings). They are also recorded as grades, using the four-point scale set out at (1) above. All grades awarded for the judgments and key questions are set out in Section 5 (Grading Profile) of this report.

Background to the authority

Torfaen is the most easterly of the Welsh valley authorities, stretching 12 miles from Newport and the M4 motorway in the south, towards the Brecon Beacons in the north. The geography of Torfaen is that of a self-contained valley with three distinct centres of population, namely Cwmbran in the south, Pontypool in the centre and Blaenavon in the north.

Torfaen covers an area of approximately 12,580 hectares with a population of 90,967 according to the 2001 Census. Over half of the population lives in Cwmbran in the south of the county. The population density of Torfaen at 724 persons (2001 census) per square kilometre is much higher than the Wales average of 141. The trend in the estimated Torfaen population shows a decline in the number of children aged 0-4 from 6,400 in 1991 to 4886 in 2005, but with more under the age of one year than in any year since 1998. However, the number of people aged over 65 increased from 14,100 to 15,300 over the same period. The number of over 80s also increased from 2,800 to 3,600. However, the number of people of working age remained stable between 1991 and 2001.

The Office of National Statistics figures show that 97.9% of the population of Torfaen are classed as White British, while the other 2.1% are made up of another 14 ethnic groups. According to the 2001 census, 11.1% of the population of Torfaen were Welsh speakers. The population of working age people who speak Welsh is 17%, compared with 21% of the people in Wales.

Schools in the authority

The school population is 15,781. The authority maintains 36 primary schools, eight secondary schools, one special school and three nursery schools. Three of the schools are Welsh-medium: two primary and one secondary. Only 28% of the pupils in the secondary Welsh-medium school come from Torfaen. Coleg Gwent provides education for some of the 16 to 19 age groups on the Pontypool campus.
13 Attainment in Torfaen, at all key stages, is below the Welsh average. However, Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data shows that when compared with similar schools across Wales over a five year period, Torfaen is in the top 20% of authorities. FFT data shows the value added to children’s achievement during key stage 3 and how the actual achievement of pupils at the end of key stage 4 compared with what the pupils were expected to achieve.

Access and school organisation service

14 In 2006, the Council reorganised its senior management into two tiers. The first tier of management is a team of five strategic and corporate directors responsible for shaping strategy and policy through working in partnership with elected members. The second tier of management is a team of five operational senior managers responsible for the line management of staff, budgets and performance against service delivery targets. A cabinet style system replaced the former committee system. The Education Service is led by a Chief Education Officer who is responsible for:

- pupil support and partnerships;
- learning and community participation;
- resources;
- forward planning and performance; and
- human resources and governor services.

15 Access and school organisation services fall mainly under the resources and forward planning and performance elements of the Education Service. However, asset management and financial planning responsibilities are managed corporately by the corporate director of resources.

Funding

16 The Welsh Assembly Government’s Standard Spending Assessment (SSA)\(^1\) per head of population for Torfaen County Borough Council is the seventh highest for local authorities in Wales. Within this, the education component (the education Indicator-Based Assessment (IBA)\(^2\)) amounts to £64.3 million for 2006-2007. This represents an average of £4,006 for each pupil, which is below the average level of IBA per pupil in Wales.

17 Torfaen County Borough Council has set overall budgets for managing and delivering its services at a level in line with the SSA but with education budgets below the

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\(^1\) SSA is the means by which the Welsh Assembly Government distributes Revenue Support Grant to local authorities.

\(^2\) 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.
education IBA level. The net education budget\(^3\) for 2006-2007 was set at a level representing only 96.3% of the education IBA. The total net education revenue budget per pupil in Torfaen is £3,858, the third lowest of the 22 councils in Wales.

18 Although the net education revenue budget per pupil is relatively low it has risen by 14.3% between 2004-2005 and 2006-2007. This increase is above the average across Wales. This reflects a similar above average rise of 15.2% in the overall SSA per head of population and in the Education IBA during this period.

19 The Council has a significant capital programme for the maintenance and development of schools for 2006-2007 the capital budget for education is £10m. This amounts to £62 per head of the total population, which is the fifth highest in Wales.

\(^3\) The net education budget excludes income from specific grants.
20 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**

**Torfaen LEA: Access and school organisation**

How good is the LEA’s performance?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
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Will the local authority’s performance improve?

Access and school organisation - How good is the LEA’s performance?

**Grade 3: Good features outweigh shortcomings**

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

- clear, comprehensive information about schools provided for parents;
- an effective central admissions system, that respond promptly to parents’ enquiries;
- good monitoring and evaluation procedures that have led to improvements in school transport;
the high priority given to training escorts and school transport contractors;

good practice in moving towards collaborative early years services in preparation for the Foundation Phase and for Flying Start;

effective working protocol with social services for looked-after children;

elected members taking effective measures to address the issue of surplus secondary school places in North Torfaen;

comprehensive support and training on health and safety matters; and

ensuring that schools have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in relation to building maintenance issues.

22 The following areas require attention:

- a corporate strategic plan that includes clear targets to address surplus school places across the authority;
- the inclusion of 14-19 arrangements in corporate strategic planning;
- capacity issues in terms of staff and financial resources;
- an Asset Management Plan that is not yet completed;
- limited progress on delivering the previous five year plan; and
- the financial ability of the authority to intervene appropriately in a crisis.

Access and school organisation – Will the local authority’s performance improve?

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

23 Factors likely to support improvement:

- recent decisions by elected members that have helped to reduce surplus primary places across the authority;
- effective consultation about school reorganisation with learners, schools, the wider community and parents;
- effective leadership of the Education Service with senior officers leading initiatives and developments well; and
- effective short-term budget management.
Factors that are likely to hinder improvement are:

- inadequate corporate strategic planning to address the issue of surplus places and asset management;
- lack of a corporate medium term financial plan and capital programme;
- the strategic director and lead member for children and young people have unclear roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability that hamper planning and decision-making;
- the draft corporate plan does not provide corporate and strategic objectives in relation to the areas of this inspection; and
- inconsistent application of performance management arrangements across the authority.
3 Recommendations

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

R1 make sure that corporate plans include coherent and comprehensive strategic objectives for improvement;

R2 make sure that senior officers and strategic managers have clear and well understood roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability;

R3 establish a strategic programme of whole authority school reorganisation that will reduce surplus school places;

R4 agree priorities for investment in school assets, linked to the capital programme;

R5 complete education and corporate asset management plans; and

R6 improve performance management arrangements to ensure:

- clarity of objectives and targets;

- clear and appropriate performance indicators;

- consistency in planning at all levels; and

- effective systems of reporting, monitoring and review of performance.
4 Findings

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

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<th>How good is the LEA’s performance?</th>
<th>Grade 3: good features outweigh shortcomings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will the local authority’s performance improve?</td>
<td>Grade 3: some good prospects, but barriers in important areas</td>
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Key Question 1: How effective is the authority’s strategic planning?

27 Torfaen’s community strategy clearly identifies the authority’s overarching aims and vision. The values and principles are expressed through a number of themes:

- health and wellbeing;
- safe community;
- education and training for life;
- economy, jobs and businesses;
- environment and transport;
- housing and homelessness; and
- working together and active citizenship.

28 Appropriately, the draft corporate plan develops these themes to state what the authority will do in partnership with Heddlu Gwent Police, Torfaen Local Health Board and Torfaen Voluntary Alliance to work towards meeting the values and principles of the community strategy.

29 The Single Education Plan (SEP) has five strategic priorities which reflect well the core principles of the authority:

- to raise achievement for all;
- to ensure exclusive practice;
- to develop community participation;
- to promote health, wellbeing and safety of learners; and
- to ensure the provision of a high quality, efficient and effective education service.
The strategic priorities in the Single Education Plan are linked well to national priorities of raising standards in schools, tackling social disadvantage and sustainability.

Overall, access and school organisation do not have a clear enough place in the authority’s strategic planning. The authority recognised a weakness in the corporate strategic planning caused by traditional barriers between services. Consequently, it recently undertook a corporate review which was carried out by external consultants. As an outcome of this review, new officer structures were introduced. Appropriately, a strategic director and lead member for children and young people were appointed in response to the requirements of the Children Act 2005. However, the respective roles, responsibilities and accountability of the strategic director and lead member for children and young people are unclear. This hampers planning and decision-making. Chief officers are reviewing their services to ensure the authority will be able to deliver the corporate priorities. However, the new draft corporate plan does not include corporate and strategic objectives about access and school organisation.

Chief and senior officers, headteachers and elected members with key responsibilities within the authority have a clear understanding of the challenges that the authority faces in reducing surplus places and improving school buildings. Officers and members recognise the need for change and are fully committed to introducing asset management planning as a strategic approach to dealing with school buildings. The new corporate structure should provide for coherent planning processes, including risk assessment of operational plans. However, financial planning processes have yet to align with these. This means the authority is not fully aware of the resource implications of the planning processes in relation to tackling surplus places and building maintenance requirements.

Offices and the lead cabinet member for children and young people carried out extensive consultation with stakeholders on proposals for school closures and mergers. This process included meetings with school councils to seek the views of children and young people. As a result of this consultation, the authority is confident the plans for change are acceptable to the majority of people involved. Also, the authority considers that there is a collective ownership by schools of the authority’s strategy for reducing surplus school places. This outcome of this effective consultation has put the authority in a good position to make the necessary changes.

The authority has not yet completed an Education Asset Management Plan or a corporate Asset Management Plan. In addition, the authority lacks coherent strategies, policies and plans on how to improve its corporate and education assets.

The authority does not have an effective medium-term financial plan to support its financial planning at directorate level. It also lacks a clear medium-term capital strategy indicating how sufficient resources will be applied to match strategic priorities. Priority has been given to the development of major individual projects, including the development of the ‘Power Station’ (a centre for adult learning and community education) and a £12.5m project to reorganise secondary education in North Torfaen. These projects have used most of the allocated capital funding for 2005-2006 to 2007-2008. As a result, there are limited resources for other essential school building work. The capital and revenue funding available for the other schools
in the authority has been inadequate to carry out an appropriate programme to maintain school buildings in good condition and to fulfil the authority’s statutory duties.

36 Appropriately, the authority has used an external consultant to give experience and capacity to project managing the North Torfaen Project, which is currently being developed on time and on budget.

Key Question 2: How effective are services and how does performance compare, including value for money?

The provision of an appropriate range and number of school places

37 Overall, Torfaen has a significant number of surplus places. In 2006, the percentage of unfilled total capacity in primary schools in Torfaen is 18.9%, which is above the all-Wales figure of 17.7%. In secondary schools, the percentage is 7.1%, which is well below the all-Wales figure of 13.6%.

38 The 2004 review of primary schools resulted in the authority closing one school and merging two infant and junior schools. The proposal to close a further school was not supported by the Welsh Assembly Government. This school changed its status to become a voluntary aided school. However, the authority has made progress in removing some of its surplus places. Despite this, the rate at which this is happening is not keeping pace with falling rolls.

39 The Single Education Plan 2006 gives a target of reducing school places to 15% by 2011. However, the service organisation and development plan has a figure by 2010 of 1848, a reduction in projected surplus places in primary school level from 26% (2416) to 20%. There is therefore lack of clarity about targets for reducing places. A modernisation group, of officers and elected members is responsible for setting clear and achievable targets for the reduction of surplus places. However, this group is in the early stages of development. Therefore, it is too early to judge its effectiveness or to identify clear outcomes from its worth.

40 The authority has taken positive steps to reduce surplus places in secondary schools in North Torfaen. Treveithin secondary school, which needs substantial capital investment, is to be closed in summer 2007. The closure has been managed effectively and the transfer of pupils in a series of staged moves is going smoothly. The authority is spending significant amounts on substantial improvements to buildings and sites in West Monmouthshire and Abersychan schools that will take these pupils. This project has cost over £12m and left little capital funding available to support work to address surplus primary places or under-capacity in Welsh-medium secondary education.

41 Elected members have made difficult decisions on school closures and mergers. They have demonstrated a clear commitment to taking actions to address surplus places. Even so, the authority does not have a strategic plan to address school places, or an Asset Management Plan that links to the Unitary Development Plan.
42 There is a good plan developed by representatives from schools, further education and higher education institutions regarding 14-19 education. However, so far this plan has not been incorporated into corporate strategic planning. This means that the local education authority has not planned for the financial resources needed for the provision.

43 Headteachers support the authority’s proposals for rationalising school places. However, they recognise that the authority must make improvements to the way they prepare any future proposals for school closure to reduce the risk of further objections being upheld by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Asset management planning and the education capital programme.

44 The Council has not maintained accurate up-to-date information about the condition, sufficiency and suitability of all the school buildings. Condition surveys were carried out in 1999-2001 and incorporated in a proposed five-year programme of works in 2002-2003. However, little progress was made on delivering the plan. As a result, the plan was revised, incorporating uplifted estimates based on the earlier condition surveys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital Investment Requirement</th>
<th>£m</th>
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<tr>
<td>Condition surveys (using uplifted 1999-2001 surveys)</td>
<td>22.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Discrimination Act</td>
<td>6.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asbestos removal</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety glazing</td>
<td>0.15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£35.8</strong></td>
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45 As a result of expenditure related to statutory duties and urgent building requirements only £0.5 million of allocated capital was left for school mergers and building maintenance for 2006-07. This amount excludes the North Torfaen project of refurbishing two secondary schools to accommodate pupils following the closure of Trevethin School. A small amount of work under ‘duty of care’ requirements was funded through a share of a corporate £0.3m allocation for asset maintenance.

46 Some progress has been made however. At the time of the inspection, the authority:

- was receiving updated condition surveys (externally commissioned);
- had circulated suitability and sufficiency surveys for completion by schools; and
- was arranging fire risk assessments.

47 Appropriately, the authority will use the information from this work to complete its Education Asset Management Plan for inclusion within a corporate Asset Management Plan.

48 A corporate Capital Programme Review Board, chaired by the corporate director for resources, will use the Asset Management Plan to consider the priorities for the capital programme for the coming years. The programme will go to the Strategic
Management Team and then to elected members for ratification. In addition, the developing closer working between the departments and corporate property staff should bring the cohesion that is lacking to corporate plans for education capital requirements.

49 There are good links between education and other council services. Work with the planning department has led to agreement with developers that they will build a new 210 place primary school and a 52 place nursery in South Sebastopol. Close links between education and social services have supported the development of an integrated children’s centre at Hollybush Primary School.

50 The cost of revenue repairs and maintenance is funded from individual schools’ delegated budgets or from a ‘revenue repairs and maintenance’ budget held centrally. However, the Council’s condition data suggests that this has been insufficient to maintain schools in good repair. The forward programme of authority repairs and maintenance is not agreed with schools. The authority gives priority to ‘duty of care’ commitments. Other work, even if included in plans and commitments made to schools, gets delayed when the budget has to be used for emergency repairs. This is because there are no contingency or emergency funds set aside to deal with emergencies.

51 The authority does however, operate an effective help desk to facilitate emergency repairs. Officers work well with schools to minimise problems for pupils. The authority has made good use of commissioned consultants to increase capacity and expertise in project management. It has also entered into a strategic partnership with a national building contractor to help obtain greater certainty about costs. It is too soon to see the results of this work, but the partnership is likely to help reduce financial risks to the authority. The authority has learnt from the problems it experienced with the ‘Power Station’ project. There are now clear reporting processes to an Education Capital Programme Management Board and corporate Capital Programme Review Board. Current work is largely being delivered without significant delays or overspending.

52 The authority has clearly defined policies for health and safety and school security in place. There is clear understanding of the respective responsibilities of the authority and schools themselves. An Education Health and Safety Officer, appointed in 2005, has contributed well to the development of clear policies and procedures and support for schools on aspects of health and safety and risk management.

53 Officers and elected members are beginning to make good use of comparative cost data and information on general education funding by the Welsh Assembly Government to evaluate the quality and cost-effectiveness of the services they provide. Officers participate in Association of Directors of Education Wales (ADEW) benchmarking groups and use the comparative cost information at the Budget Forum.

Admissions to schools

54 Admissions processes are good. The authority manages admissions to schools efficiently and consults other neighbouring local authorities when planning, delivering
and reviewing admissions. The arrangements for admissions and appeals meet the requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government Code of Practice. The policy of managing all admissions and transfers centrally helps the authority to provide a fair service to all parents.

55 The authority produces a bilingual admissions booklet each year that provides helpful information, is clearly written and of good quality. In addition, the authority provides a good service for parents for whom English or Welsh is an additional language and for parents who have additional needs, such as vision or hearing impairment. An officer from the Gwent Ethnic Minority Support Service team or the Inclusion Service, contacts the family to make home and school visits to help parents on admissions matters.

56 The authority has clear admission procedures for early years children. Appropriately, the majority of three and four year olds are able to attend their parents’ preferred settings. Places for part-time educational provision are provided by schools, playgroups, daycare and child minders.

57 The authority has effective procedures to make sure that children who are looked-after by the local authority are promptly provided with school placements that meet their individual needs.

58 The number of permanently excluded pupils is low. This is, in part, the result of good opportunities supported by the Youth Access programme for pupils in key stages 3 and 4. However, the authority has so far failed to resolve the considerable funding risks which are likely to have a significant impact on the future of this provision. A good range of advice and support is offered to schools when a pupil is at risk of exclusion. An example of this support is an effective scheme to transfer primary aged pupils at risk of exclusion to another school. However, the authority has so far failed to secure the collaboration of some secondary school headteachers in a similar process. Combined with the cut in services provided through the Youth Access programme, this reluctance has resulted in the number of fixed-term exclusions of secondary age pupils rising almost doubling in the last twelve months from 228 to 402 occurrences.

Home-school transport

59 The authority manages its home-school transport service well. Effective monitoring and evaluation procedures have led to improvements in quality and further reviews. These include:

- a designated officer to monitor contracts;
- good liaison by officers with schools and contractors;
- regular email communication between the authority and schools;
- monitoring of behaviour on buses;
- enlisting parents’ views and comments; and
- liaison with transport services and the police to ensure an appropriate quality of vehicles.

60 The authority acts on feedback from contractors and renegotiates contracts in response to identified changes and needs.

61 The authority’s response to the Welsh Assembly Government’s health and safety guidelines has been positive. The authority has been proactive in improving the safety of its home-school transport. In particular, the authority introduced seat belts in its buses before legislation made it compulsory, and stopped using double-decker buses. The authority appropriately gives high priority to training its drivers and escorts and ensures that they have up-to-date Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks.

62 The authority shares good practice with other authorities through a Welsh Assembly Government group and through attendance at conferences. The transport policy document is the result of sound research and effective collaboration with other authorities.

63 The authority’s home-to-school transport policy exceeds statutory requirements by providing free transport for pupils aged eight years and under who live more than 1.5 miles from their catchment school. The statutory limit is two miles. In reviewing the criteria for receiving free transport, the authority analysed patterns of attendance in relation to free transport and found that rates of absenteeism varied between different schools. However, attendance rates were higher when pupils received free transport to school. This important factor led the authority to retain the existing criteria for free transport. In addition, the authority gives season tickets that can be used on public transport to secondary pupils so that they are able to participate in after-school activities.

Co-ordination of early years

64 The Early Years and Childcare Partnership have made good progress towards preparing for the implementation of the Foundation Phase and for the ‘Flying Start’ initiative for children aged 0-3 living in disadvantaged areas of the authority. Services with responsibilities for early years provision collaborate effectively to ensure that parents have access to a suitable range of nursery provision in the independent and maintained sectors.

65 The authority consults with the health service on the provision of places. In addition, the authority takes into consideration the housing stock and developments in Torfaen when planning early years provision. The service works closely with the Children’s Information Service and other agencies to ensure information for parents about early years provision is kept up to date.

**Key Question 3: How effective are leadership and strategic management?**

66 Senior elected members have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the issues related to access. Members are committed to the ethos of service improvement. Previous inspections have highlighted the need for members to
engage more fully in monitoring and challenging the service. In response to this, the authority arranged a comprehensive programme of training for members. These training sessions are generally well attended.

67 The roles and responsibilities of the lead officer and lead member for children and young people are not yet clear. There are no agreed joint objectives for children and young peoples’ services that can enable progress to be measured. Despite this lack of clarity, there are examples of good partnership working across directorates in relation to vulnerable children and young people. Work between education and social services regarding specialist provision for children and young people with very challenging behaviour, mental health problems and complex medical needs, is a good example of cross-directorate working. An effective planning and monitoring group ensures that funding for costly out-of-county specialist placements is shared between statutory partners. The authority has also successfully engaged health providers in the partnership arrangements.

68 The authority is very committed to regional-working arrangements. It has worked well since local authority reorganisation in 1996 with other authorities in the former Gwent authority to provide a range of joint services for schools, including those for pupils with hearing and vision impairment.

69 The quality of leadership provided by senior officers in the education service is good. They work purposefully towards realising corporate aims and the objectives in the Single Education Plan. These officers demonstrate strong commitment to improving the quality of education and to raising the achievements of learners. They plan service developments in a cohesive, strategic manner, for example, the review of special educational needs services has taken account of the need to rationalise school places.

70 Officers have worked hard to make sure that there is a good relationship with schools. Headteachers appreciate opportunities to participate in the transparent planning and monitoring of service developments. This climate of mutual trust and respect has helped the authority in planning the programme of rationalisation of school places.

71 Following the re-structuring of the authority, the roles, responsibilities and accountability of some senior officers and strategic managers are not clear. As a result, planning and decision-making in some aspects of the service are not effective enough. These aspects include:

- the clarity of arrangements for resourcing and implementing 14-19 network plans; and

- the development of basic skills in the draft Corporate Plan does not link well to the plans in the Single Education Plan.

72 Despite the uncertainties about corporate strategic roles, education officers understand the new structure well and are well informed about developments.
Key Question 4: How well do leaders and managers, at all levels, monitor, evaluate and improve services?

73 Performance management arrangements are not consistent across different services of the authority. Elected members, chief officers and senior managers are unable to monitor progress in terms of outcomes, timescale and cost implications. The authority recognises that this is an important area requiring development. A number of improvements are already in place to help members develop accountability and further expertise, including a structured training programme and weekly seminars.

74 During 2005, elected members engaged in a process that identified a small set of priorities intended to guide the production of a corporate plan for 2006-2007. The identified priorities do not directly relate to the areas under review and at the time of inspection, a final corporate plan had not been agreed. The authority therefore lacks a key component of its performance management framework.

75 In response to comments from Wales Audit Office and previous LEA inspections, the authority has established processes for monitoring aspects such as school improvement that are covered by nationally-reported performance indicators. The authority has been less effective in developing local performance indicators in other service areas.

76 Monitoring by senior officers has focused on the delivery of actions rather than on measuring improved outcomes. For example, the delivery of the North Torfaen Project is well monitored but the progress in delivering a reduction in surplus places and the required programme of repairs and maintenance are not effectively monitored.

77 There has been no regular reporting to members on the performance of the admissions service or the home-to-school transport service.

78 The Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee has a work programme that includes quarterly financial monitoring. Until recently, performance monitoring was only on a ‘by exception’ basis. This was inadequate. As a result, the programme for 2006-2007 has been improved so that members of the scrutiny committee will receive reports on progress in key areas such as asset management, primary school places, and progress with the North Torfaen Project.

79 The Modernisation Group will seek to ensure the Education Asset Management Plan has been completed by December 2006. The group is beginning its work but has limited member involvement. It also has no financial parameters and has limited staff capacity.

80 The authority has a recently improved in some aspects of education such as school transport and inclusion. Presently significant changes are taking place intended to improve the school advisory service. However, limited capacity within the education service, together with vacancies in some significant posts, adds to the difficulty of the service delivering further improvements.
81 The central management of resource and financial planning, helped by the re-structuring of the authority, has the potential to bring better co-ordination to corporate strategic planning. This will help to make the necessary links between the provision of an appropriate number and range of school places, asset management and the educational capital programme. However the authority’s draft corporate plan does not provide corporate and strategic objectives in relation to asset management and surplus places. Nor does it set out medium-term financial plans linked to the educational capital programme. This is likely to hinder the ability of the service to make the necessary improvements.

82 The authority prepared a self-evaluation review for this inspection that provides useful signposts to other relevant documentation. However, the report is not analytical and fails to identify weaknesses. It does not set targets for improvement that are easily measured so that the authority knows if it is being successful. The report was agreed by the self-evaluation team, but not ratified by elected members.
5 The grade profile

Section 38 LEA inspection grade profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Judgement</th>
<th>Access and school organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How good is the authority’s performance?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the authority’s performance improve?</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Question</th>
<th>Access and school organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 How effective is the authority’s strategic planning?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 How effective are the authority’s services?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 How effective are leadership and management?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 How well do leaders and managers monitor, evaluate and improve services?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 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>Brenda Meredith HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Reporting Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Swain HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sw Roberts HMI</td>
<td>Estyn</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Fox</td>
<td>Monmouthshire County Council</td>
<td>Peer Assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Martin</td>
<td>Wales Audit Office</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Walker</td>
<td>Torfaen Education Directorate</td>
<td>Nominee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>