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Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales



WALES AUDIT OFFICE

SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

A report on the quality of the school improvement services provided by the EAS Consortium

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by

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Context

Regional profile

EAS provides school improvement services for a region of five local authorities: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen.

The number of pupils of compulsory school age in 2015 was 70,242. This represents 19% of all pupils in Wales. There are 245 maintained schools in the region, 15% of all maintained schools in Wales (PLASC, 2015).

The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age who are eligible for free school meals is 20.8%, which is higher than the national figure of 18.8%. This level of eligibility is the highest of the four regional consortia (PLASC, 2015).

In the region, 10% of people aged three and over say that they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 19% (2011 Census, ONS).

As of 31 December 2015, ethnic minorities account for 4% of the population in the region and this is similar to the Wales average.

As of 31 March 2015, 1,090 children in the region are looked after by a local authority and this represents 19% of looked-after children in Wales.

Performance profile

The rate of improvement in pupils' outcomes in South East Wales in a majority of indicators at key stage 4 has been faster than that across Wales as a whole over the last three years. However, since September 2012, just over one third of secondary schools have been judged good or better for standards in Estyn inspections. This is lower than the proportion across Wales and is the lowest proportion of the four regional consortia.

Over the last three years, teacher assessed outcomes in the Foundation Phase have been the highest of the four regional consortia. In addition, over three fifths of schools are in the upper 50% when compared to similar schools across Wales. At key stage 2, teacher assessed outcomes are similar to those across Wales. In addition, overall, performance compared to that in similar schools is average.

Since September 2012, around two thirds of primary schools have been judged good or better for standards in Estyn inspections. This is in line with the proportion across Wales.

The proportion of pupils gaining the expected level in the core subject indicator at key stage 3 has increased at a similar rate to that across Wales over the last three years. Performance compared to that in similar schools is generally average. Over half of schools in the region are in the upper 50% when compared to similar schools in Wales for the core subject indicator.

Overall, teacher assessed outcomes across the Foundation Phase, key stages 2 and 3 are more positive than performance at key stage 4.

At key stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving the level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A*-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics performance is the weakest across the four regional consortia. However, it has improved at a faster rate than that seen across Wales over the last three years. Performance in three of the five local authorities in the region is below the benchmark target set by the Welsh Government in 2015, although performance compared to that in similar schools is generally average. This represents an improvement over recent years.

The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals has improved at a slightly slower rate than that across the Wales over the last three years. In 2015, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals who achieve the level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A*-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics is the lowest of the four regional consortia. The gap in performance between girls and boys is slightly less than the gap seen nationally. However, the performance of boys and girls in both English and mathematics varies considerably across local authorities.

Performance in the average capped wider points score has increased at a faster rate than that in Wales, albeit from a low base. In 2015, performance in all the five local authorities in the region is below the benchmark target set by the Welsh Government. Less than half the schools in the region are in the upper 50% when compared to similar schools. In addition, over one-third of schools are in the bottom 25% when compared to similar schools for this measure. Performance in this measure is weak.

Performance in the level 1 threshold has improved at a faster rate than across Wales over the last three years. However, overall performance remains the weakest of the four regional consortia and the majority of secondary schools are in the lower 50% when their performance is compared to that in similar schools.

The proportion of pupils achieving five A* or A grades or at GCSE or equivalent has declined slightly over the last three years. For the last three years, the proportion of pupils achieving this measure has been the weakest in Wales.

At key stage 4, performance in mathematics has improved at a relatively faster rate than that of English compared to rates across Wales. In addition, performance compared to that in similar schools in Wales is generally more favourable for mathematics than for English. In both subjects, over half of schools are in the upper 50% when compared to similar schools across Wales. This represents an improvement on previous years. However, for English in 2015, around one third on schools are in the bottom 25% when compared to similar schools.

Attendance in primary schools is close to the Wales average but attendance in secondary schools is below average.

Recommendations

- R1 Consider the use of a wider range of performance indicators at school and regional level to ensure that the progress of all groups of learners is challenged and supported
- R2 Improve consistency in the quality of evaluation of school improvement activities throughout the service
- R3 Identify and manage risks more effectively

Main findings

Support for School Improvement: Good

The Education Achievement Service for South East Wales (EAS) has a strong vision for school improvement that is understood and shared by most schools across the region.

The South East Wales Intervention Framework sets out clearly the well-differentiated support and challenge that the EAS provides to schools. For example, high performing schools work together to monitor and review each other's schools while other schools in need of improvement have bespoke packages of support matched closely to their needs.

The EAS has a three-year strategy in place for implementing its school-to-school support programme. This is useful in helping schools to understand the self-improving system and how it will ultimately incorporate different aspects of school improvement work, for example literacy support.

The EAS has sound processes in place to support schools in need of improvement. The recent introduction of education improvement boards (EIBs), modelled on the Schools Challenge Cymru accelerated intervention boards, has helped to strengthen the monitoring processes for these schools. Through these boards, the EAS holds school leaders to account for the progress being made more robustly. Although it is too early to judge the impact of this work fully, schools involved have made improvements with renewed urgency. All schools in the red support category have suitable intervention plans that detail the improvements needed and actions to be carried out to bring about these improvements.

The EAS deploys challenge advisers effectively. There is a clear protocol for their work, proportionate to schools' needs. Challenge advisers undertake a good range of activities to provide them with a sound understanding of schools' strengths and areas for development, including analysis of data, observations of teaching and learning and scrutiny of pupils' work. Where appropriate, advisers provide support and challenge to improve pupil attendance. There is a robust process for quality assuring the work of challenge advisers. Senior leaders monitor their work well through activities such as joint visits to schools and the scrutiny of reports about schools. As a result, leaders identify underperformance quickly and address it effectively. This has led to improvements in the overall quality of challenge advisers' work, although in a few instances this is not yet consistently good.

The judgements that challenge advisers make about standards, provision and leadership in schools are generally accurate. As a result, the most recent school categorisation is robust and many pre-inspection reports provide an accurate picture of the school. The work of the challenge advisers helps the EAS's principal challenge advisers and senior leaders to be clear about strengths and shortcomings in schools. They share and discuss this information effectively with local authorities, particularly when schools are causing concern. As a result, local authorities are provided with sufficient information to support their use of statutory powers to intervene in these schools.

The EAS provides schools with a useful range of data and data analysis. There are useful systems in place to collect and analyse data at a school, local authority and regional level. The EAS monitors many headline performance indicators across the region carefully and uses this information well to inform priorities in the business plan. As a result, where there has been a specific focus on improving outcomes such as in English and mathematics at GCSE, standards have improved. Although the EAS takes an appropriate position on pupils being entered early for GCSE qualifications, challenge advisers do not always pursue this rigorously enough with individual schools to ensure that the use of early entry does not have an adverse effect on learners. Challenge advisers and senior leaders do not focus enough on the full range of performance data to ensure that all learners across the region are challenged to make good progress across a range of learning areas.

The quality of support through the medium of Welsh is satisfactory. The EAS has enough challenge advisers to work with its Welsh schools. The recent appointment of a Welsh adviser to the EAS Language, Literacy and Communication team has improved the support and guidance available to Welsh medium schools.

The EAS has effective arrangements to help schools to comply with the statutory requirements to moderate teacher assessments. Recent improvements to the evaluation of these arrangements ensure that identified schools are provided with additional support and guidance. However, in a few schools, teacher assessment remains unreliable. The EAS provides clear guidance to schools on the processes for setting and monitoring targets. During the last academic year, the EAS strengthened this work by introducing mid-year collections of progress against targets. This helps the service to identify potential underperformance within the academic year, which is then challenged.

The EAS has appropriate arrangements in place to broker support for schools in the non-core subjects. The service supports schools well to prepare for changes to qualifications at key stage 4.

The EAS provides strong support for the implementation of Welsh Government initiatives, such as the New Deal pioneer process. For example, the EAS helpfully assists with the organisation of national events hosted by schools from the region. As a result, school leaders and teachers have made successful contributions to the pioneer process in the early stages of this work. The EAS supports the work of Schools Challenge Cymru advisers across the region effectively.

The EAS provides a coherent range of training and support materials to raise standards in English and literacy. Schools receive details of the support available through the professional learning offer. In addition, the EAS has supported local authorities to address particular priorities, for example in working to improve pupils' standards in writing in Blaenau Gwent, or pupils' reading in Torfaen. However, although participation reports are positive, it is too early to evaluate the full impact of these strategies in raising standards.

In mathematics and numeracy, there is a similarly comprehensive professional learning offer. The plans to improve attainment in mathematics make suitable reference to research based approaches to improve teaching, for example to take

account of methods from Singapore. As a result of the support and challenge from the EAS, pupils' standards in mathematics at key stage 4 have improved notably since 2012, albeit from low starting points. The EAS has identified a group of schools with particularly strong practice in teaching and learning in mathematics. These schools act as hubs to provide effective school-to-school support for their peers. The EAS supports schools well to include a well thought through, strategic numeracy approach enabling pupils to make relevant use of their numeracy skills in science, technology and engineering.

Following internal reorganisation, designated senior staff have responsibility for ensuring that all strategies and support plans take sufficient account of the need to improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals, and those who are looked after by a local authority. As a result, the service has strengthened its commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils, for example through the 'closing the gap service offer'. This provides useful practical guidance and professional development opportunities for schools across the region. However, success criteria for aspects of the service offer are not always clear or measurable enough to enable the EAS to evaluate the impact of actions.

Challenge advisers monitor diligently schools' plans for their use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant. They ensure that the plans meet requirements and focus appropriately on improving outcomes for vulnerable learners. The provision for these pupils is beginning to improve their outcomes at each key stage. However, although the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals has improved slowly across the region at key stage 4, it varies notably across the five local authorities.

The EAS has developed a coherent approach to leadership development, which links closely to school improvement priorities. For example, following a needs analysis stemming from inspection recommendations, the service identified a shortfall in the skills of middle leaders in a number of secondary schools. As a result, the service devised a wide range of leadership courses, which focus well on developing the skills of departmental management, data analysis and self-evaluation. In addition, the EAS has included relevant accredited leadership courses as part of the comprehensive training provided for schools. These training programmes link well with recent national initiatives such as the New Deal pioneer schools and the strategy to develop a self-improving system. However, much of this work is at an early stage of development.

There are good opportunities for headteachers to develop their professional skills, for example through the EAS's peer evaluation programme for schools categorised as green, and more recently a few categorised as yellow. This enables headteachers from successful, often high achieving, schools to work together as a small group and visit each other's schools. During the visits, peers helpfully evaluate and challenge their colleagues' professional practice, supported by a challenge adviser and useful guidance from the EAS. The programme is building capacity for continued improvement in the most successful schools, and as a result enables the EAS to focus more challenge adviser resource in schools causing concern.

In addition, the EAS provides valuable opportunities for successful headteachers to work as part-time partner challenge advisers while retaining their posts as

headteachers. In this role, experienced leaders benefit from a comprehensive training and induction package alongside full-time challenge advisers, develop their skillsets, and continue their own professional development by challenging and supporting their peers. The EAS also brokers supportive arrangements between schools across the region to provide mentoring for less experienced headteachers. More recently, the service has supported local authorities well in establishing executive headteacher posts, where experienced headteachers lead more than one school.

The EAS provides strong support for school governors. Governors are provided with relevant and timely information about their school's performance, including analysis of financial data. There are good procedures for identifying governors' development needs and for facilitating appropriate mandatory and specific training, such as for developing school link governor roles for literacy, numeracy or additional learning needs. The governor support team and challenge advisers have developed a bespoke self-evaluation toolkit as an effective support and intervention tool for governing bodies. This has helped governors and school leaders to have a better understanding of their school's performance, provision and governance.

In a recent survey of governors, the EAS identified that there was significant variance in the information that headteachers provided for their governing bodies' meetings. As a result, the consortium provided clear and helpful guidance for headteachers about what their reports could contain. More recent surveys confirm that governors are now better informed, and as a result are asking more probing questions that successfully hold the school's leaders to account. However, it is too early to see the full impact of this work in improving outcomes for pupils in schools.

Leadership: Good

The EAS has developed into a well-led company that provides good education services on behalf of the five local authorities that commission it. The company has a clear vision and strong values that underpin its work. These are understood and shared by internal staff and stakeholders including schools, local authority officers and elected members.

The company board has taken appropriate action in the last 18 months to address previous weaknesses in its governance arrangements and to ensure that the EAS takes good account of the Welsh Government's National Model for Regional Working. For example, the minutes of board meetings and meetings of associated groups are now available to the public on the EAS website. The membership of the board has stabilised, and the board is now realising the benefits of operating as a company. In particular, this approach to providing a regional service is enabling the board to make decisions quickly and take swift action to address issues. For example, the founding managing director left the company for a new post in 2015 and, after consulting its stakeholders, the board quickly put in place effective internal, interim arrangements. Also, the board commissioned a review of its brokerage, intervention and support services and acted promptly on the recommendations in the review report by restructuring the leadership of these services to provide stronger capacity. The board holds the interim managing director to account increasingly effectively, although formal performance management arrangements for this role are not currently in place.

An Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has recently been established to work with the company board. Although it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of this committee, it provides an appropriate platform to advise the company board. The Joint Executive Group primarily represents the commissioning local authorities and effectively challenges the company board in the development and delivery of its business plan.

The current business plan builds well on the previous plan. Appropriate high-level priorities are identified based on a sound analysis of data and relevant strategic actions to address these priorities are set out. The EAS takes good account of national and local priorities in its plan. For example, EAS is providing strong leadership for the Welsh Government's New Deal programme to develop education professionals at all levels and EAS has tailored its work well to support the context of each local authority. Targets for improvement in the plan do not take enough account of wide range of performance indicators in order to fully measure progress in areas for improvement, such as the performance of vulnerable learners and more able learners.

Leaders in the EAS and the local authorities have developed trusting relationships that allow for effective mutual challenge of each other's work. This means that barriers to the successful delivery of the business plan are addressed quickly. The interim managing director has been in post for around six months. She has quickly developed strong working relationships with all those involved in the governance arrangements as well as other senior stakeholders such as local authority chief executives. She has managed the period of change since the previous managing director left effectively and taken advantage of opportunities to improve the company's operation further. In particular, she has streamlined communication with schools and brought additional clarity and rigour to several aspects of the daily work of staff.

Improving quality: Good

The EAS has procedures for self-evaluation and planning for improvement that are systematic, responsive and flexible, and provide the service with a platform from which to refine school improvement services to become more effective and efficient.

Self-evaluation is increasingly comprehensive and systematic, and is a regular part of the EAS improvement cycle. Service area leaders review progress half-yearly. The best examples of reviews are analytical and identify clearly the impact of actions in schools. A few evaluations are not sharp or specific enough. However, the senior management team offers appropriate challenge to team leaders and supports them well to improve their analyses. To provide a more frequent check on progress, self-evaluation is enhanced by the use of the 'FADE' approach, in which the capital letters stand for focus, analyse, do, evaluate. This offers a valuable tool to evaluate activities or themes from the business plan at interim points throughout the year. This approach is a recent introduction, and there is variability in the quality of reports, but there is now a consistent and regular focus on evaluating the impact and progress of the EAS's work. The FADE model provides a methodical framework for accountability, allows the service to modify intervention in a more responsive way, and is contributing effectively to the development of a culture of continuous improvement.

The self-evaluation report is succinct and provides an honest and accurate evaluation of the EAS.

The business plan draws suitably on the analysis of performance data and the outcomes of self-evaluation procedures. Valuable consultation with stakeholders has shaped the plan so that it reflects the collaborative approach that the EAS takes with its partners. The business plan has a suitable emphasis on medium term objectives and planned opportunities to evaluate the impact of work in progress. However, in a few areas, targets for improvement do not focus well enough on important areas for improvement, such as raising achievement in the capped points score. This means that it is difficult for leaders to monitor progress in these areas.

Service area plans and the overall strategic plan outline strategies that reflect well the Welsh Government's priorities of improving the quality of teaching and leadership, revising the curriculum and strengthening the qualifications framework. There is a clear strategic focus on increasing the capacity of schools to contribute to a self-improving system. Through these strategies, the plans provide a coherent structure to raise achievement in English, mathematics and Welsh, and to improve the outcomes for pupils disadvantaged by poverty.

The effective use of project management approaches helps the EAS to identify issues in particular areas of its work to improve schools. As a result, the service is working productively to improve provision and outcomes, for example in science and in the Welsh Baccalaureate.

Performance reports, progress reports and data analysis produced by the EAS provide stakeholders with information that is suitably transparent and accurate. The Joint Executive Group (JEG) and the company board scrutinise the delivery of the business plan with increasing effectiveness and an appropriate level of challenge. Reports to the JEG and the company board now identify risks and make suitable reference to the risk register. However, the formal identification and management of risk in the company are at an early stage of development.

Most performance management objectives link clearly to the priorities in the business plan. However, in a few instances targets are not precise enough to allow senior leaders to monitor progress efficiently.

The EAS has responded well to the recommendations for regional consortia in reports published by Estyn and the Wales Audit Office in 2015. The service has also used external surveys effectively to improve its quality improvement procedures.

Partnerships: Good

The EAS has a strong vision for partnership working, supported with high levels of commitment from elected members, senior leaders and strategic partners. Senior managers demonstrate significant commitment to developing strategic partnerships across most aspects of practice of the EAS.

The EAS has effective lines of communication with schools. For example, the consultation and engagement with headteachers through the regional headteacher

strategy group are working well to ensure that the EAS meets the needs of their schools. The EAS consults with a good range of formal consultative groups regularly, such as the regional governor strategy group, which ensures that governors are provided with relevant information and which is beginning to have a contribution to the development of new work.

There is good liaison and communication between the EAS and local authority senior managers and relevant officers. The EAS works effectively with directors, chief executives, elected members and external agencies to enable the delivery of joined-up programmes that improve outcomes and wellbeing for learners. There are good arrangements for sharing information between the local authorities and the EAS. For example, the useful monthly meetings of local authority and the EAS officers to discuss and share information about specific issues in schools enable appropriate and timely support to be provided to schools.

The EAS works well with the local authorities to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and to promote social inclusion and wellbeing. There is a beneficial working relationship between principal challenge advisers and local authority lead officers, which enables information about vulnerable groups of pupils and those with additional learning needs to be shared with increasing effectiveness. Purposeful collaboration between these services has led to helpful sharing of practice across the region. In addition, special schools and pupil referral units across the region are now working together and there is a more co-ordinated approach to policy development. However, the collation and analysis of data about vulnerable pupils are not used at a strategic enough level across the region to inform improvement planning.

The specialist human resource (HR) service within the EAS works collaboratively with the local authority HR services to offer valuable support and training to schools and challenge advisers. The collaborative working and the recent joint planning of the resource have led to economies of scale in the delivery of training across the region and the establishment of common policies and working practices. The close working of the EAS and local authority HR services with trade unions has resulted in the development of shared capability and performance management arrangements, improving the support that schools receive.

The EAS engages effectively with diocesan authorities, ensuring that there is a clear agreement about joint working and access to relevant information about its schools. They are appropriately involved in discussions and decisions about their schools. The EAS has trained its challenge advisers to improve their understanding of issues specific to church schools and has usefully developed the role of a link challenge adviser for church schools. The EAS has formally involved diocesan authorities in its governance arrangements and as a formal consultative group.

There has been an improvement in the sharing of information and working relationships between the EAS challenge advisers and the Welsh Government's Schools Challenge Cymru advisers, for example through regular school progress meetings and through sharing information more effectively with, and between, each other.

There are increasingly helpful links with providers of further and higher education. The EAS is proactive in seeking support from these partners, for example in developing approaches to the New Deal and Successful Futures to support schools. The EAS has worked well with its partners to develop a support programme for the Welsh Baccalaureate. The service has collaborated well with all schools with a sixth form in the region and with further education institutions to develop a programme of activity for more able learners. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these programmes on pupil outcomes.

Collaboration with the consortia in the other three regions in Wales is developing appropriately, with beneficial opportunities to share good practice and ideas. For example, challenge advisers have engaged in joint training with the Central South Consortium (CSC) to improve the quality of resources to support and challenge schools in order to improve outcomes for pupils facing the challenges of poverty. The EAS shares its work, where appropriate, with the other consortia, for example the pilot peer review programme for schools in the green support category.

Resource management: Good

The EAS has improved its capacity for financial management and this is now sound. Income and expenditure are monitored closely and information is reported well to the Joint Executive Group (JEG) and company board. There are recent, clear arrangements in place to demonstrate how resources are allocated to priorities and to identify the resources used for each element of the business plan and its detailed appendices. This provides a good basis to support improvement strategies. The information covers core funding, grant income retained to the company and generated income. The recently developed draft medium-term financial plan builds on this information and shows it helps to manage changes to income.

The core funding for EAS from local authorities has been at the level set out in the National Model for Regional Working, but the EAS and local authorities have agreed to a reduction of 3% in core funding for 2016-2017 alongside a reduction in grant income. Despite cost pressures, the EAS is maintaining its priority services. The EAS and local authorities have an appropriate agreement on the arrangements for any surpluses, which enables the EAS to retain surpluses up to 5% and re-invest into priorities with the agreement of the JEG and company board.

All Welsh Government grant funds that are retained for expenditure through the EAS are covered by the company financial arrangements. The EAS challenge advisers and other staff challenge schools over their plans for use of their grant funding, particularly the Pupil Deprivation Grant and the Education Improvement Grant, and the management of resources by schools is considered at meetings on schools causing concern.

Whilst lacking a written workforce strategy, the EAS has a reasonable understanding of future workforce needs and this has informed the business plan and the draft medium-term financial plan. The company is working well with its staff, local authorities and trade unions to harmonise terms and conditions and is strengthening its own capacity in this area with the appointment of a new Human Resources and Communications Manager.

Overall, the EAS is making good progress in establishing its approach to assess and report on value for money, although aspects are not yet refined enough. A recent

value for money report to the Joint Executive Group includes a high-level overview that notes above average performance improvement whilst funding has been reduced by 20.9% between 2012-2013 and 2016-2017. This approach considers appropriately the resources applied to the work of challenge advisers, school-to-school developments and training at local authority level, and notes the categorisation of each school at local authority level. This type of analysis enables the resources used and value for money to be considered in the light of future changes to categorisation of schools overall and for each local authority.

The service evaluation process, FADE, is applied to all elements of the business plan and was amended in April 2016 to include information on the costs of the work being reviewed and a value-for-money evaluation. Although this process provides a structure to enable consideration of the impact and relative value for money of specific services, this is in the early stages of development. The process of detailed resource planning and service review has already identified a small number of service areas where resources can be reduced and appropriate changes have been made.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

Mark Champion	Reporting Inspector
Jane McCarthy	Team Inspector
Tony Bate	Team Inspector
Sarah Lewis	Team Inspector
Fiona Arnison	Team Inspector
Farrukh Khan	Team Inspector
Robert Davies	Team Inspector
Richard Lloyd	Team Inspector
Steve Martin	WAO
Kirsty Bevan	Nominee

Copies of the report

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Glossary of terms

National Curriculum

Expected National Curriculum levels

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

Foundation Phase indicator (FPI)

Progress in learning through the Foundation Phase is indicated by outcomes (from outcome 1 to outcome 6). The Foundation Phase indicator (FPI) relates to the expected performance in three areas of learning in the Foundation Phase: literacy, language and communication in English or Welsh first language; mathematical development; personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity. Pupils must achieve the expected outcome (outcome 5) in the three areas above to gain the Foundation Phase indicator.

Core subject indicator in key stages 2, 3 and 4

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

External examinations at key stage 4 or post-16

Core subject indicator – as above.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All-Wales Core Data sets

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