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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 local authority education
services for children and young people**

in

**Bridgend County Borough Council
Civic Offices
Angel Street
Bridgend
CF31 4WB**

October 2012

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on their capacity to improve.

In these evaluations, we use a four-point scale:

Excellent

Good

Adequate

Unsatisfactory

The report was produced in accordance with section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Context

Bridgend is located in South Wales and it has borders with three other local authorities: Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan. The total population is 134,564.

In Bridgend, 9.7% of people over the age of three say they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 19%.

The employment rate in Bridgend is 71.7% compared to the Wales average of 66.7%. There are 17.6% of children living in workless households. Of the working population in Bridgend, 11.3% have no qualifications, which is lower than the Wales average of 12.1%.

The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 20.4%, higher than 19.3% nationally. This level of eligibility is the 14th highest in Wales, out of the 22 local authorities (PLASC 2012¹). Eleven of the 85 areas in Bridgend are now in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales (WIMD² 2011).

As of 31 March 2011, Bridgend had 325 children being looked after by the authority. There were 165 children on the Child Protection register. Ethnic minorities account for 2.3% of the population, lower than the Wales average of 3.6%.

The Welsh Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Bridgend County Borough Council in 2012-2013 is £1,641 per head, which is slightly below Wales' average. A net revenue budget of £235.5 million (excluding specific grants) has been set, which is 1.1% more than in the previous year and above the SSA.

The authority set a net education budget of £104.3 million for 2012-2013, an increase of 2% compared to 2011-2012, and equivalent to £4,499 per pupil, which is the second lowest in Wales. Primary schools' delegated funds are equivalent to £3,808 per pupil (including specific grants), the lowest in Wales. In the secondary sector, the delegated budget is £4,313 per pupil, compared to an average of £4,704 per pupil across Wales. Between 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, schools' delegated funds increased by 5.5%, in line with the expectations of the Welsh Government. Welsh Government statistics show that 80.4% of the funds available for schools are delegated, which is slightly below the Wales average of 81%.

The authority has spent £47.7 million of capital funds on education projects between 2004-2005 and 2010-2011. Considering the size of the authority, this expenditure increased from below average to be similar to the average across Wales during this period. However, capital expenditure increased significantly to £16.4 million in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, for which the forecast capital expenditure is £26.2 million. The authority has also secured a commitment from the Welsh Government's Twenty First Century Schools' programme to support further expenditure of almost £45 million over a six year period from 2014.

¹ PLASC is abbreviation for the Pupil Level Annual School Census carried out for all maintained schools annually by the Welsh Government.

² The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the official measure of deprivation in small areas in Wales. It is a relative measure of concentrations of deprivation at the small area level.

Summary

Overall judgement: Adequate

Current performance is judged as adequate because:

- the performance of schools in Bridgend at key stages 2 and 3 when taking the free-school-meals context into account is below the average for Wales;
- progress between primary and secondary schools as shown by value added data is significantly below average;
- attendance at too many primary and secondary schools is below average when compared to that of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks; and
- the percentage of pupils leaving full time education, employment or training has been well above the Wales average for several years and the proportion of Year 13 pupils whose destination is not known is more than three times the average for Wales.

However:

- performance improved significantly on three of the five indicators in key stage 4 in 2012, although the majority of these remain below the Wales average;
- the rates of fixed-term and permanent exclusions have reduced to below the Wales average so that the average number of days lost per exclusion is now the lowest in Wales;
- the additional learning needs (ALN) service provides good quality information, training, guidance and support to schools through close partnership working with a wide range of agencies; and
- learners in Bridgend participate well in a wide range of opportunities for physical activity, both at school and in the community, and take-up of specific schemes is above the national average.

Capacity to improve: Adequate

The local authority's prospects for improvement are judged as adequate because:

- the authority's evaluations of its education services and resources are not robust or consistent enough, with the result that it does not know how effectively its plans and actions help learners to achieve; and
- officers' reports to elected members have not always contained enough factual information and evaluative commentary to help members to understand and assess the impact of the authority's work upon learners, or to help them to identify areas for improvement well enough.

However:

- the authority is making good progress in developing integrated services and joint provision with key partners, such as health visitors, inclusion and behaviour support, housing and the third sector;

- financial management is sound and asset management is good; and
- the authority has a track record for the successful delivery of school modernisation projects.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve outcomes for learners, especially at key stages 2 and 3 by using individual pupil data to set more robust targets and by strengthening the rigour and consistency in the local authority's challenge to schools
- R2 Improve attendance in primary and secondary schools by continuing to develop the joint work between education welfare and family engagement officers
- R3 Strengthen self-evaluation in order to understand what is working well and what needs to improve in order to help learners achieve their goals
- R4 Improve the quality of information provided to elected members so that they can challenge the performance of the authority's services and schools more robustly
- R5 Continue to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

What happens next?

Bridgend local authority will produce an action plan to show how it will address these recommendations within 50 working days of receipt of the report.

Estyn is of the opinion that the authority falls into the category of follow-up activity and will require an Estyn monitoring visit. The date and focus of this monitoring visit will be determined by Estyn in due course.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

In 2012, the percentage of pupils gaining the Foundation Phase indicator is above the average for Wales. The percentage gaining the core subject indicator (CSI) improved in key stage 2 although it remained static at key stage 3. In both of these key stages, performance is below the average for Wales.

Performance improved on three of the five indicators in key stage 4 in 2012 although the majority of these remain below the Wales average. In 2012, the percentage of pupils leaving full-time education without a recognised qualification improved and is now better than the average for Wales.

When compared to performance levels of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks in 2012, performance was above average in the Foundation Phase and below average in key stages 2 and 3.

In key stage 4, performance was good on the two indicators that include English or Welsh first language and mathematics. However, on the other three indicators there were too many schools below the average and too few in the top 25% of similar schools.

In 2010 and 2011, each year Bridgend met only one of the Welsh Government's three benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal eligibility. Previously it had met all these benchmarks. Analysis for 2012 is not available yet.

Progress between primary and secondary schools as shown by value added data is significantly below average.

In 2012, the gap in performance between boys and girls was smaller than the average across Wales in all key stages except key stage 4. The gap in performance between learners entitled to receive free-school-meals and other learners was significantly smaller than the Wales average in key stage 4. Pupils from ethnic minority groups and those for whom English is an additional language generally attain in line with similar pupils across Wales. The performance of looked-after children is better than in Wales generally. The performance of pupils with additional learning needs is above the Welsh average in primary schools but below average by the end of key stage 4.

In 2012, performance in Welsh first language was above average in primary schools and below average in key stage 3. Performance in Welsh second language was better in key stage 3 than in other key stages.

Reading tests indicate that 24% of pupils leave primary school with reading ages below functional literacy. This is close to the figure across Wales. Appropriate short-term progress is made by pupils receiving additional support for literacy and

numeracy. However, the authority does not track pupils' progress well enough to know whether they maintain these gains over a longer period.

Learners gain a good variety of qualifications as a result of opportunities provided in non-formal and informal settings.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Attendance in primary and secondary schools is near to the average for Wales. However when compared to similar schools across Wales on the free-school-meal benchmarks for 2012, attendance is below average in the primary and secondary sectors.

The rates of fixed-term and permanent exclusions have reduced to below the Wales average. The average number of days lost per exclusion is the lowest in Wales. The proportion of young people who are successfully reintegrated into mainstream school after just one term of intensive support at a pupil referral unit (PRU) is increasing. The number of children and young people entering the criminal justice system has reduced significantly in recent years.

The percentage of pupils leaving full-time education at the end of Year 11 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has been well above the Wales average for several years, although it dropped to around the average in 2011. In 2011 the proportion of young people whose destination was not known was almost double the proportion in the previous year, whilst the proportion of Year 13 pupils whose destination is not known is more than three times the average for Wales.

Young people involved in youth service activities gain knowledge and skills and improve attitudes. Their attitudes and level of participation in volunteering and charitable work at school and in the community increase through the locally developed 'Citizenship Award'.

Learners in Bridgend participate well in a wide range of opportunities for physical activity, both at school and in the community, and take-up of specific schemes is above the national average.

Pupils and young people participate well in making decisions about their life in schools and local communities. However, they do not always contribute effectively to discussions about strategic issues within the county borough council.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Adequate

Support for School Improvement: Adequate

The authority generally supports its schools well. It is developing the level of challenge to schools to improve pupil outcomes. Officers have started to collect individual pupil data from all secondary schools and a few primary schools. They use this information well to help schools set more robust targets for pupils. However, these arrangements are relatively new and are not used consistently enough to help to improve the attainment of all pupils across the authority.

Link advisers give good support to schools to help them interpret a range of performance data. Overall the quality of link adviser reports varies too much, with a minority being too descriptive. The majority of link advisers make useful evaluations of standards and provision and leadership however not all advisers consistently provide an evaluation of the quality of leadership and management in the school.

The quality assurance of the work of link advisers is improving so that they apply consistent rigour in their challenge to schools.

The authority has a database containing a wide range of useful information, which is intended to provide an overview of school performance. However, the database is difficult to navigate. This impacts on the ability of officers to monitor the progress of all schools so that underperformance is identified at an early stage and intervention is applied effectively, especially with schools that are 'coasting'.

Estyn has identified that around a quarter of schools inspected since September 2010 need follow-up. One primary school is in need of significant improvement.

Most schools have a good understanding of where they fit within the authority's new categories of intervention and of the level of challenge and support they will receive. However, their understanding of their entitlements within the Partnership Agreement with the local authority is less secure.

Local authority officers support schools well to deliver the Foundation Phase through the provision of very high quality guidance materials.

A good range of initiatives focus appropriately on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, the authority does not analyse or share data from these programmes consistently enough to enable it to know which programmes are most successful at helping pupils to achieve the expected levels at the end of each key stage.

The authority provides good training opportunities for aspiring school leaders and effectively supports those new to headship. Officers provide good opportunities for governor training and development.

Support for Additional Learning Needs: Good

The additional learning needs (ALN) service provides good and sometimes very good quality information, training, guidance and support to schools. This is done through close partnership working with a wide range of agencies.

Historically Bridgend has had low numbers of statements for pupils with special educational needs, and the authority is making good progress in reducing these even further. This is achieved by giving pupils a good range of appropriate and specialised support in mainstream schools or in specialised provision. This specialised support ensures that nearly all pupils have early access to good quality services and support to meet their identified needs. However, a very small minority of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) do not always get early enough access to support their individual needs.

Line management arrangements for the education psychology service and the link advisers are different, which means that joint working is not always effective enough. The authority is aware of this and is undertaking a review to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and to improve the effectiveness of service provision.

There is a good and improving system in place to map service provision, pupil outcomes and service costs. The Planning and Reviewing In Partnership (PRIP) arrangements are effective in enabling the local authority to identify any under-performance by schools in key areas of ALN provision. This information is effectively shared between schools in the same cluster to inform best use of provision. These arrangements allow the authority to integrate most pupils successfully into mainstream settings with appropriate specialist provision.

The authority provides information that is of good quality for parents. Drop-in sessions provide good opportunities for parents to have direct access to services to discuss issues. Good relationships are in place with mediation and advocacy services. These services play a key role in helping parents understand the reasons behind decisions affecting their children.

Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Adequate

The authority has appropriate provision to ensure that all learners can participate well and benefit from their engagement in education and training opportunities.

The authority has a comprehensive behaviour support strategy and innovative multi-agency approaches for attendance, exclusion and behaviour. These are impacting positively on learner exclusion rates, but not so well on attendance.

Joint work by education welfare and family engagement officers on improving attendance is showing some evidence of progress, but it is too recent to evaluate the full impact of this joint work fully. However, overall improvements in attendance remain too variable and too slow.

An anti-bullying task group is addressing inconsistent practice across the authority well. The youth service is leading this work using staff training well to standardise practice. The authority does not record racial incidents effectively enough.

The local authority has a good range of support services and programmes for children and young people. Managers use data well to improve the effective targeting of these services. Good, targeted multi-agency initiatives provide effective support where it is needed.

The counselling service provides good support across schools and other formal and non-formal settings. This includes a pilot programme with primary schools. Preventative work and restorative justice by the youth offending service have reduced first time entrance to the justice system significantly. However, the service is not making enough impact on the core of re-offenders that remains.

Work to improve learners' ability to leave compulsory education and successfully enter into employment, education or training opportunities is not effective enough and

does not track well enough whether young people are in employment, education or training.

The local authority now has clearer policy and procedures relating to safeguarding. Improved systems ensure that the education service and partners have appropriate systems for criminal record bureau (CRB) checking and monitoring. A structured programme of safeguarding training for staff is monitored well to ensure that staff training is up to date.

Access and school places: Good

Since 2008, the authority's School Modernisation Programme has reduced the overall number of schools and delivered £1.2m in savings. In the primary sector the authority has a lower proportion of surplus places than the Welsh average. However, in the secondary sector the percentage of surplus places has been above the Welsh average for each of the three years up to 2011. Provisional data shows that this will still be the case in 2012 and that just over a fifth of places in the secondary sector are presently unfilled. No secondary schools are overfilled.

The authority will reduce surplus places further by September 2014 as part of its ongoing implementation of a major restructuring of secondary schools. It has undertaken an appropriate analysis of the impact of planned housing development on the population of all of its schools. The forecasts include actual impact from recent large housing developments on local schools, and show that surplus places in the secondary sector will fall further over the next ten years.

The opening of a new Welsh medium secondary school is increasing access well for Welsh medium education for pupils within the authority.

The authority's arrangements for assessing the capacity, suitability and sufficiency of its school buildings are good. Integrated working, both across the authority and with partners and stakeholders, on the development of school modernisation projects is good and the overall management of the School Modernisation Programme is very effective.

Admission arrangements are effective and only a very few parental preferences are not met. Procedures for the admission of looked-after children are good and a managed move protocol in the secondary sector is effective in addressing the needs of children at risk of being permanently excluded.

There is an appropriate range of early years provision, which meets the needs of children and their families. The authority monitors both the sufficiency and quality of this provision effectively.

Learners' access to youth support services is planned appropriately. There is a recently completed service profile and audit of needs, which gives a good overview of the range of youth support services within the authority. However, there is not enough analysis of this work for the authority to be fully confident that all learners' support needs are appropriately met.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?
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Adequate

Leadership: Adequate

The authority has long history of prioritising education for children and young people, with corporate leaders demonstrating a good understanding of education issues. The leader and the new chief executive display a sound appreciation of the need for ambitious and challenging targets to drive improvement more vigorously. The leader, the cabinet member for Children and Young People and the corporate director work closely together to lead services for children and young people.

Good, wide-ranging consultative processes support the development of strategies and plans for learners across the county borough. Strategic planning reflects local and national priorities well, with a consistent, clear line of sight of the priority given to services for learners throughout.

The authority has a clear vision to provide better integrated and more accessible services that meet learners' needs and improve outcomes. Leaders and managers demonstrate commitment and pro-active engagement with the changes to the way services are planned and delivered internally and with partners. The authority is making good progress in developing integrated services and joint provision with key partners.

However, the impact of services on the achievements and attainments of learners is not clear enough. The authority does not know well enough how plans and actions help learners to achieve their goals. This is because the analyses and evaluations of services and resources are not consistent enough or robust enough.

Reports to elected members have not always contained enough factual information and evaluative commentary to help members to understand what is working well or to help them to identify actions for improvement well enough. For example, performance data relating to individual schools is not routinely reported to members. As a result, members are not always able to scrutinise how effectively the authority is challenging the performance of individual schools.

The children and young people overview and scrutiny committee has established a task and finish panel to review secondary school performance. However, it is too early to judge whether this will be an effective forum to hold local authority officers and school leaders to account.

Quality improvement: Adequate

The authority's corporate performance assessment process works well at the highest level to monitor the performance of the Children's Directorate.

The authority consults with a good range of stakeholders who contributed to the self-evaluation process. However, the quality of contributions varies considerably and, although young people are consulted, their involvement in the self-evaluation is too limited. Self-evaluation in the third sector is at an early stage. The authority uses external sources and reviews well to support the objectivity of its assessment.

The self-evaluation report is comprehensive and captures the issues adequately. However, self-evaluation and the resulting report focus too much on outcomes and evaluations from separate projects and initiatives. There is not enough higher-level analysis of the qualitative impact of overall provision on learners. The authority does not always identify well enough the root causes of poor performance. In a few areas, performance criteria are not built into projects and services from the start, making subsequent evaluation of developing practice more difficult.

The self-evaluation report identifies accurately areas for improvement, and includes these appropriately in future plans. The Children's Directorate is also making good progress using outcome-based planning.

There is an improving system of individual performance appraisal that links well to Directorate priorities.

There has been regular reporting to cabinet on educational issues, but they have not always contained enough appropriate performance detail.

The authority responds well to the recommendations from previous inspection reports. It uses effective action planning to meet nearly all of these in full. This has resulted in improvements to practice, with ALN services in particular now making good progress.

The authority encourages well the development of professional learning communities (PLC) through cluster working. However, there is not enough routine sharing of best practice at all levels and the evaluation of the impact of PLC activity is at an early stage.

Partnership working: Good

Partnership working in Bridgend is good, with effective work between the local service board (LSB), the Delivery Board and the People Partnership Board.

The recently formed People's Partnership Board monitors routinely partners' involvement in and progress towards strategic partnership objectives. However, the impact of services is not always evaluated consistently enough and appropriate evaluation criteria are not always incorporated into the planning process well enough.

The authority has a good overview of the range and accessibility of support services for young people. The Youth Service leads on this with effective partnership arrangements that drive improvement of youth support services. It has shared its management information system with partners well, including the third sector, in order to improve data analysis and monitoring. However, its procedures for tracking young people who leave school without qualifications and not training or employment are underdeveloped. It is too early to see the impact of this.

There are good examples of provision mapping across partners. Good collaboration between partners has increased the range of provision for learners' individual progression routes, and there are well-established measures in place to ensure that learners are aware of the range of choices available.

Partnerships delivering priority work such as Team Around the Pupil, Parent and School impact positively on the support that learners receive. Management information systems help intervention workers to draw together effectively information about what support children are receiving.

The authority has a model for commissioning services that it needs from others. This is progressing well, but does not have a target date to be ready for use within the single plan. The resource model behind the authority's partnership plans is not fully defined, with the result that some partners, including the third sector, are unclear about what services they will be able to provide.

Resource management: Adequate

The authority provides appropriate resources to help deliver its priorities for children and young people. Financial management in the authority is sound and supported by appropriate medium term financial planning. The authority has a good record of identifying and delivering savings and efficiencies. Work has been undertaken to analyse the use of resources for partnership work but this is incomplete.

Asset management is good and the authority has a track record of successful delivery of school modernisation projects. The reorganisation and closure of 10 schools since 2008 has provided revenue savings and capital receipts, which have contributed to the education budget and helped fund further modernisation. A significant capital programme is currently being delivered and a fully funded scheme under the 21st Century Schools programme is in place for delivery between 2014 and 2020.

A workforce plan identifies appropriate actions for corporate priorities and for specific developments including the regional consortium for school improvement and the implementation of the inclusion strategy. A job evaluation proposal is currently at the ballot stage. Sickness absence in schools has reduced but is still above the levels of the best authorities.

Since 2008, the authority has provided education funding above the level designated by the Welsh Government. Significant levels of external revenue and capital funding have also been raised from a variety of sources. Despite this, net education funding per pupil is amongst the lowest in Wales. The authority provides schools with indicative three-year budget information, which assists their planning. Delegation of budgets to schools has increased to the level expected by the Welsh Government.

School balances are monitored by officers and, overall, are above the average for Wales. Support is provided to help schools manage their funding effectively.

The authority has acted well to minimise the costs of projects and has reviewed the funding for specific aspects of services such as ALN. However, evaluation of the value for money of commissioned and provided services is inconsistent.

Overall value for money for learners is adequate.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

Jane Taylor	Reporting Inspector
Stephen Lamb	Team Inspector
Alun Connick	Team Inspector
Iwan Roberts	Team Inspector
Rachael Bubalo	Team Inspector
Liz Miles	Team Inspector
Mark Champion	Team Inspector
John Maitland Evans	Team Inspector
Steve Martin	WAO
Karen I Evans	Peer Inspector
Arwyn Thomas	Peer Inspector
Richard Landy	Nominee

Copies of the report

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Glossary of terms

National Curriculum

Expected National Curriculum levels

- By the end of the key stage 1, at the age of seven, learners are expected to reach level 2 and the more able to reach level 3.
- 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.

Core subject indicator in all key stages

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.