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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

**Carmarthenshire County Council
County Hall
Carmarthen
Carmarthenshire
SA31 1JP**

March 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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This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh)

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Context

Carmarthenshire is located in South West Wales. It is bordered by Pembrokeshire to the west, Ceredigion to the north, Powys to the east and Swansea and Neath, Port Talbot to the south east. The total population is 180,717.

In Carmarthenshire, 46.5% of people over the age of three say they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 24.8%.

The employment rate in Carmarthenshire was 66.3% compared to the Wales average of 66.4%. There were 24% of children living in workless households. Of the working population in Carmarthenshire, 13.2% have no qualifications, which is higher than the Wales average of 12.1%.

The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals is 17.5%, lower than 19.7% nationally. This level of eligibility is the 7th highest in Wales (PLASC 2011). Only 5 of the 112 areas in Carmarthenshire are now in the 10% most deprived area in Wales.

As of 31 March 2011, Carmarthenshire had 260 children being looked after by the authority. There were 155 children on the Child Protection register.

Ethnic minorities account for 2.5% of the population, lower than the Wales average of 3.6%.

Financial context

The Welsh Assembly Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Carmarthenshire County Council for 2011-12 was £1,744 per head of population, which is a little above the average for local authorities in Wales.

In 2011-12, the authority set its education budget, net of grants, at £132.2 million. This was slightly below the education component within the SSA and represents £4,938 per pupil. This is above the Welsh average of £4,770 per pupil.

The authority's net education budget for 2011-12 was about 1.5% lower than in 2010-11. The authority gives high priority to expenditure on schools within its education budget. Despite the reduction in the overall education budget, delegated budgets for primary and secondary schools increased by about 2% in 2011-12. The level of delegated budgets per pupil in both primary and secondary schools is fifth highest among local authorities in Wales. Welsh Government figures show that the authority delegates to schools 78.5% of its total spending on schools. This level of delegation has increased since 2010-11 and is well above the Welsh average of 76.2%. The level of funding delegated to schools to provide for pupils with additional learning needs has also increased and is above average.

The authority has invested over £105 million since 2004-05 in improving its school buildings and further major investment is planned.

Summary

Overall judgement: Good

Current performance is good because:

- performance at all key stages has improved in recent years;
- the percentage of learners leaving school without a qualification and the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) are amongst the lowest in Wales;
- for three years the authority has met most of the Welsh Government's key stage 4 benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal entitlement;
- support for additional learning needs and social inclusion is good;
- the authority has made good progress in delivering its Modernising Education programme; and
- senior leaders understand clearly the impact of wider regeneration and social care on educational outcomes.

However:

- the proportion of schools requiring follow-up activity after an inspection is high in comparison with other authorities;
- when compared to similar schools on the free-school-meals benchmarks attendance is below average in primary and well below average in secondary; and
- some of the authority's key stage 4 provision outside of schools has not been appropriately registered with the Welsh Government as a Pupil Referral Unit.

Capacity to improve: Good

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- key plans align well at all levels and senior leaders work in a sophisticated way with a range of strategic partners across public services to set high level priorities together;
- the local authority and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and developing a learning culture in the county;
- the arrangements for the joint governance of the 14-19 networks are sector leading;
- the authority has a track record of identifying and intervening where hurdles to effective working hinder progress;
- senior leaders have taken difficult decisions which are responded to proactively;
- the authority analyses data and first-hand evidence well to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of services;
- the authority has addressed all of the recommendations from previous Estyn inspections of education and youth support services well;
- the authority has a good record of effectively managing its education budget and improving efficiency; and

- scrutiny has examined difficult aspects of the authority's work successfully, and has informed decision making by the executive well.

However,

- the authority has not analysed systematically enough the benefits arising from its investment in improving the condition, suitability and efficiency of its schools.

Recommendations

In order to continue to improve, Carmarthenshire County Council needs to:

- R1 ensure that the proportion of schools requiring follow-up activity as a result of inspection is reduced;
- R2 improve attendance in primary and secondary schools;
- R3 work more effectively with SNAP Cymru to help parents understand and access services that may help their children; and
- R4 ensure that any provision for pupils who are not attending school is appropriately registered as a Pupil Referral Unit.

What happens next?

Carmarthenshire County Council will produce an action plan to show how it will address these recommendations within 70 days (50 working days) of receipt of the report.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

In 2011 performance in key stages 1 and 2 improved relative to other local authorities across Wales although performance was slower in key stage 3. At key stage 4, performance was good compared with other authorities on most indicators.

When compared to similar schools on the free-school-meals benchmarks, performance is above average in key stages 1 and 2. At key stage 4 performance is good on those indicators that involve English or Welsh language although it is below average for the level 1 and level 2 thresholds.

For the last three years Carmarthenshire has met most of the Welsh Government's key stage 4 benchmarks for performance based on free-school-meal entitlement although it has not met the key stage 3 benchmark.

Overall, progress between primary and secondary schools is good.

The percentage of pupils attaining the expected level in reading in both languages at the end of Key Stage 2 has improved at a higher rate than the average for Wales over the last three years. Performance in Welsh first language is good in key stages 1 and 3 and below average in key stages 2 and 4.

Overall, vulnerable learners and those learners who are at risk of underachievement achieve well. These learners have responded well to targeted interventions which have impacted on standards of wellbeing and consequently outcomes. For example, the percentage of learners leaving school without a qualification has significantly decreased. On both this indicators, the authority is amongst the best in Wales. At key stage 4 the performance of looked after children and learners from traveller families is good.

Learners in alternative provision for those not attending school such as Youth Access and SMART, and those supported by the Youth Offending Service, gain useful relevant qualifications. Many of these learners develop skills and experiences which help them to continue in education and training. In addition, a good percentage of learners gain accreditation or informal recognition for their participation in the Youth Service and wider youth support services.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Learners participate well in a comprehensive range of activities which contribute towards improving their wellbeing. Standards of wellbeing are good in nearly all schools inspected in the current cycle. Pupils enjoy happy, safe and purposeful environments. Standards of behaviour are good and children and young people develop their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and behaviours well.

Learners engage well in provision which supports them to lead healthy lifestyles. They gain awareness of aspects such as substance misuse and receive recognition for learning achieved. Nearly all learners involved with the Youth Health Team, social and emotional literacy development programmes and the school based counselling service report a positive impact on their lives and make considerable gains in confidence and in personal and emotional awareness. These learners respond well to bespoke interventions and demonstrate improvements in attitudes, behaviour, and educational attainment.

Participation levels in national sports development programmes and extra-curricular sports activities are good. The percentage of learners involved has increased over the last three years; in particular girls have been targeted and their participation has increased. The impact of these activities on healthy lifestyles is analysed well and learners report positive impact on their lives

Learners participate in, and influence the development of, strategic documents. They also develop specific versions to aid accessibility for other children and young people. Learner views shape decisions in some policy areas and school inspection reports indicate that learners are involved well in decisions about their lives in school.

Attendance has not improved quickly enough in either primary or secondary schools. When compared to similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks in 2011 too many primary schools are in the bottom 25% and more than half are below average. In secondary schools nearly three-quarters of schools are below average and nearly one half are in the bottom 25%. Unverified data for the current school year suggests there is an improvement in attendance at both secondary and primary levels. Exclusions have improved although the number of days lost to longer fixed-term exclusions is too high relative to other authorities. As a result a very small number of learners are out of school for too long.

In 2010 the percentage of learners continuing in full time education post 16 increased, and is amongst the best in Wales. The level of young people not in education, training or employment is the third lowest in Wales. Young people benefit from participation in a range of youth services and the percentage of learners achieving recognition for their work is above the Wales average.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Support for School Improvement: Adequate

Since the last inspection the authority has worked well to integrate relevant support services. This has strengthened the level of support and challenge to schools. As a result trends in the performance of primary schools have improved steadily over recent years and performance is good at key stage 4.

The challenge framework used across the local consortium of authorities uses clear criteria to categorise schools appropriately in relation to their performance and capacity to improve. The Partnership Agreement ensures that schools have a good understanding of this process and of the level of support they can expect in order to bring about improvement. In most cases, the criteria are used appropriately to target

strategic intervention. However, the proportion of schools identified as requiring special measures, significant improvement or follow-up monitoring as a result of inspection remains too high in comparison with other authorities. The authority has recently used appropriate powers to improve schools but, in general, has not done this quickly enough

Overall, officers analyse performance data well and provide good support for schools' self evaluation procedures. In most cases, officers produce performance reports on schools that are detailed, with an appropriate level of challenge. Whole school reviews, jointly undertaken by local authority officers and schools' senior management teams, have improved capacity at school level and helped to develop the concept of shared leadership.

Effective strategies have been established to respond to national priorities that focus on raising standards in priority areas. For example, support for literacy is good with a strong emphasis on improving reading skills. Good progress has been made in supporting schools and other providers to improve standards and quality of provision for 14 to 19-year-olds.

The authority provides good support for school leaders and governors. A good range of development opportunities for school leaders includes accredited programmes for middle managers and effective induction for new and acting headteachers. The training provided for governors is of good quality and attendance at training sessions has improved. The authority has placed appropriate emphasis on supporting governing bodies to analyse performance data more robustly. As a result most governing bodies have a good understanding of how their school performs in relation to other, similar schools.

Support for Additional Learning Needs: Good

Support for additional learning needs and inclusion is good. Many of the pupils with statements, and others identified as having additional learning needs, achieve well and are in mainstream schools. Well-developed consultation with schools enables the authority to delegate most of its resources for additional learning needs. It effectively monitors the impact of these resources on pupils' progress.

There is clear information about the comprehensive services available to support parents and carers, but this is not easy to access. The authority does not work closely enough with SNAP Cymru, the parent partnership service that helps parents of children with special educational needs and disability to understand and access services that may help their children.

The authority has the second highest number of appeals to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales. It is working to reduce the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs, which is currently the third highest in Wales. This work includes piloting innovative work for the Welsh Government in assessing pupils' additional needs and providing for them without going through statutory assessment.

Individual development plans enable cohesive planning and monitoring. These are promptly prepared and monitored at least twice each year to make sure pupils are meeting the agreed targets. Early indicators suggest this work is highly effective in supporting the development of pupils' achievements. For pupils with complex needs, thorough multi-agency assessment leads to a comprehensive individual development plan, setting out provision from a range of agencies. The quality assurance processes for monitoring the impact of these plans are appropriate.

Schools receive good training to develop their expertise in meeting a range of needs. Appropriate training is helping staff to understand pupils' additional needs in order to support individual development planning.

Officers work together and share information well. They make good use of provision mapping to hold schools to account about pupils' achievements.

Promoting Social Inclusion and wellbeing: Good

The authority works well to promote the social inclusion and well-being of children and young people. Arrangements for behaviour support are good. The authority gives strong support to schools and parents to increase their capacity and expertise to improve behaviour and secure good outcomes for children and young people.

The authority offers a wide range of provision outside of schools for pupils at key stage 4. This helps vulnerable learners, such as looked after children, young people at risk of dropping out of education and children from traveller families to achieve good outcomes by the end of their school careers. They gain a range of qualifications, improve their health and progress to further learning and employment. However, an aspect of the authority's provision in this area has not been appropriately registered with the Welsh Government as a Pupil Referral Unit.

The authority has significantly improved arrangements for helping schools and staff from different agencies work together to help families improve children and young people's capacity to learn. This includes mentoring for parents, help with housing issues, advice regarding benefits, and improving children's health and self-esteem. In general, this is a strong element of the authority's work. However strategies to improve attendance have not yet had sufficient impact.

The authority has reorganised how it delivers its services to help schools take more responsibility for improving attendance and to work with persistent non-attenders with complex needs. As a result schools are improving overall attendance rates by reducing authorised absences.

The authority works well with a variety of partners to deliver a wide range of good quality services to help young people improve their achievement and wellbeing. These services include targeted interventions with young parents, school counselling, and projects to improve health and tackle racism. They also include work which raises young people's achievement such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

The authority has appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding. It has recently implemented arrangements for auditing safeguarding practices in schools and carried

out reviews in a third of all its schools. The authority intends to complete these reviews by the end of the year. Where the reviews identify shortcomings the authority deploys a team of staff to the school to secure improvements quickly.

Access and school places: Good

The modernisation of the school estate has been a key corporate priority for the authority for many years and remains so. The authority has invested £128.5 million in its school buildings since 2001, removing surplus places and reducing the number of schools. However, the authority has not analysed systematically enough the benefits arising from its investment in terms of improving the condition, suitability and efficiency of its schools.

Despite this significant investment, the authority's data shows that just over half of pupils are taught in buildings in need of further investment. Surplus capacity in primary schools remains well above average, while in secondary schools surplus capacity compares more favourably with other authorities. However, pupil numbers in primary schools are now beginning to rise and a further funded programme of about £170 million is in place to 2020, based on a thorough analysis of need. These plans will remove more places from the system.

The authority manages admissions to its schools well, enabling almost all pupils to obtain places at their first-preference school. There are clear and agreed plans in place to respond to the increased demand for Welsh-medium provision in the Llanelli area.

There is an appropriate range of early years Foundation Phase learning and play provision which meets the needs of children and their families. The authority works effectively in partnership with the voluntary sector to plan and deliver provision, using surplus capacity in primary schools where it is appropriate to do so. The authority monitors the standards within maintained and non-maintained settings well and provides well-targeted support to improve the quality of the learning provided.

The authority co-ordinates youth support services effectively, based on a thorough analysis of need. As a result, young people can access a range of appropriate support services.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

The local authority and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and developing a learning culture in the county. Senior leaders have very high aspirations for children and young people and they understand clearly the impact of wider regeneration and social care on educational outcomes. Service structures and resource planning effectively support the delivery of the shared priorities embedded in the Integrated Community Strategy for Carmarthenshire.

The strategy highlights the vision of enabling 'people to live healthy and fulfilled lives by working together to build strong, bilingual and sustainable communities'. Senior

leaders work in a sophisticated way with a range of strategic partners across public services to set high level priorities together and deliver their vision for the people of Carmarthenshire. Senior leaders have put structures in place to guide cooperation and lead by example. The extensive use of secondments, joint appointments and collaborative initiatives means that staff at all levels recognise and understand each other's strengths whilst working confidently within their own specialisms.

The authority has a track record of identifying and intervening where hurdles to effective working hinder progress. Difficult decisions are responded to proactively. Where appropriate the Leader, elected members, the Chief Executive or other senior managers intervene effectively to overcome obstacles. In addition, the Senior Departmental Opening Doors Group tackle identified barriers to effective working within the directorate. Systems leadership and the delegation of resources support the efforts to place the learner first. Leadership is shared and operational staff can take decisions promptly to support learners and their families so that they stay engaged in learning.

Scrutiny task and finish groups have successfully examined difficult aspects of the authority's work, and have informed decision making well. Elected members have developed their understanding and expertise through working in small groups to analyse specific aspects of education. The process has also brought about cross-party support for important and difficult decisions in areas such as school reorganisation. In addition, the ongoing programme of scrutiny committee visits is raising the level and quality of challenge to schools.

Improving quality: Good

The authority undertakes a wide range of self-evaluation activities that cover most aspects of the work of the children and young people's service. Overall it analyses data and first-hand evidence well to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of services. Although some inconsistencies in the use of data led to over generous evaluations of the authority's progress in some areas of its work.

The arrangements also identify clearly the areas for improvement and help ensure that progress against strategic and other plans is reviewed effectively.

The self-evaluation report produced for the inspection is well-structured and links evaluations to supporting evidence well. However, a few evaluations are not included in the report. As a result, it does not accurately reflect the full range, scope and impact of the work of the authority's education services.

The authority engages well with partners, service users and other stakeholders in its evaluation processes and in planning for improvement. For example, the development of the Dinefwr project within the authority's Modernising Education programme has been influenced by the views of all of the present pupil groups within the area schools.

The authority has effective performance management arrangements which bring about improvements. They also help ensure that objectives for individual officers link well to operational and strategic priorities. Key plans align well at all levels and help

elected members to understand and make effective use of performance information. The well-defined performance management cycle allows them to monitor the progress of improvement plans and take timely remedial action.

Collaborative working across local authorities is seen as a priority and this is developing at a good pace. Senior officers have contributed significantly to the development of a regional integrated school improvement strategy.

The authority works proactively to develop a good range of professional learning communities that have a direct impact on the quality of provision and on raising outcomes. The School Effectiveness Grant is allocated to ensure that funding is used effectively to develop learning communities and other collaborative, strategic working. This is based appropriately on national, regional and local priorities.

The authority has addressed well all of the recommendations from previous Estyn inspections of education and youth support services.

Partnership working: Good

Senior managers demonstrate significant commitment to developing strategic partnerships across all aspects of the practice of the authority. Through the work of Local Service Board, the authority and its partners have joint ownership of priorities and outcomes. These aims are communicated clearly in the authority's Integrated Community Strategy.

The authority makes very good use of its partnerships to deliver services which improve outcomes and wellbeing for children and young people. These include effective partnerships between the authority, the police, local health board, voluntary agencies, other local education authorities and youth support services. The authority monitors and co-ordinates the work of these partners well. Individual partners have a good understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses in the services they deliver.

Partnership working between the authority, further and higher education establishments, employers and secondary schools in developing the work of the four 14-19 networks is good. The arrangements for the joint governance of these networks is sector leading. They successfully promote co-operation and remove unhelpful competition between providers. They also enable school governors, the college, employers and the authority to plan, monitor and resource an effective 14-19 curriculum that meets the needs of learners in their clusters very well. Cross authority collaboration makes sure that learners in a rural area benefit from a wide curriculum choice.

Partnership working between education, children's services and health are very good. Highly effective, integrated planning across partners supports the smooth transition of pupils with complex needs into education, across key stages and from school to adult services.

Partnership working between schools and the authority is good. There is a high level of trust and a common understanding of the need to work together to raise standards and to improve services for children and young people.

Resource management: Good

The high strategic priority given to the education service is reflected in the authority's allocation of both revenue and capital resources. The authority has planned effectively, gradually reducing revenue budgets in order to permit borrowing to contribute to its major capital programme in schools. Schools' delegated budgets have nevertheless been protected from efficiency reductions in recent years. The authority has been successful in securing grant funding for both revenue and capital projects but has also contributed more than half of the £128 million investment in the schools modernisation programme to date from its own resources. The authority has made a commitment to find the further capital necessary to pay its share of the £170 million programme of further investment to 2020.

The authority and its schools have, in the past, spent too little on the routine repair and maintenance of school buildings. Current financial planning does not address adequately the need to ensure that new school buildings are well maintained into the future so that they remain in good condition.

School balances increased during 2010-11 and are well above average. However, the authority has agreed with schools an effective approach that offers a good balance between support and challenge in those schools where surpluses are too high and where there are deficits.

The authority has a good record of effectively managing its education budget and improving efficiency. There have been significant reductions in spending on out-of-county placements reflecting a new provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The authority has acted prudently in increasing its schools reorganisation reserve by some £700,000 in 2010-2011. Joint working with a range of partners has been effective in increasing the authority's capacity to support learners. Overall, the authority's education service provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

The inspection team

Iwan Roberts	Reporting Inspector
Betsan O'Connor	Deputy Reporting Inspector
Liam Kealy	Team Inspector
Sw Roberts	Team Inspector
Huw Collins	Team Inspector
Maldwyn Pryse	Team Inspector
Huw Lloyd Jones	WAO
Gwynne Jones	Peer Inspector
Alan Walters	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.