

26 January 2010

**Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training
welcomes improvement across Wales, but says that too many
learners are still underachieving**

Most schools, colleges and other education and training providers are performing well, according to the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2008-2009. Over the last twelve months there has been improvement across all sectors and inspectors have seen more 'good' and 'outstanding' work than 'poor' or 'unsatisfactory'.

However, the report also highlights that in some cases there is an urgent need to improve the provision of education and training, as too many learners in Wales are being allowed to underachieve – especially the 'more able and talented' learners and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The report presents independent evidence from inspections carried out over the last year and considers what progress has been made by education and training providers in Wales in tackling four main challenges:

1. ensuring all learners reach their potential;
2. meeting the needs of bilingual learners;
3. strengthening partnership working; and
4. improving the ability of providers to evaluate and improve their own performance.

This year for the first time, 'real life' case studies have been included in the report to illustrate how some education and training providers who were inspected last year are successfully tackling one or more of these challenges.

Launching his report today (26 January) at Pontypridd High School, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Dr Bill Maxwell said:

"Our greatest challenge today is tackling mediocrity to bring the weaker providers up to the level of the best. We need to raise expectations and motivate learners to be ambitious and to achieve the best they can. We must demand the highest standards in the provision of education and training, especially for learners who are vulnerable to underachievement, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those in care."

"Learners in Wales need to believe they are capable of succeeding and we need the practices in place to enable them to do so, such as better partnership working, more rigorous self-evaluation and planning for improvement, skilled and inspiring teaching and more comprehensive professional development for those working within education."

The main findings of the report are as follows:

- despite improvement across most sectors, many pupils entitled to free school meals and many more able and talented pupils are not receiving the right blend of challenge and support to ensure they reach their full potential;
- there has been an encouraging upward trend in the quality of leadership and management in primary and secondary schools;
- pupils start learning Welsh as a second language well when they begin school and many are enthusiastic about learning the language, but it soon becomes one of the weakest areas in primary and secondary schools, and learners in English-medium schools often make relatively little progress in learning Welsh through their school years;
- the standard of secondary school accommodation and facilities continues to cause concern with over 40% of school inspections noting shortcomings in this area;

- school improvement services in local authorities were generally good and authorities often provided very well for pupils with additional learning needs, but many of those inspected had been slow to address the challenge of unfilled places in schools;
- the quality of work inspected in the post-16 sector was slightly worse than reported in the previous annual report, especially in work-based learning and the provision for the Department for Work and Pensions where the quality of work varied too much from one provider to another;
- there has been a marked improvement in self-evaluation across all sectors but it is not being developed enough in early-years settings and in many 14-19 networks; and
- there has been marked improvement in partnership working in terms of collaboration but progress towards transformation is still hindered by some practical difficulties and some lack of trust.

Dr Bill Maxwell concludes:

“I am encouraged by what has been achieved over the last twelve months and by the many examples of good practice which I have outlined in this report. These show that real progress can be made in tackling the challenges head-on. Now we must redouble our efforts to address pockets of weaker and more mediocre practice with the aim of eliminating underachievement throughout Wales.”

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors:

A full copy of the Annual Report 2008-2009 and a webcast from Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector is published on the Estyn website at http://www.estyn.gov.uk/annual_report.asp

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Media interviews

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