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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Quality and standards in education and training in Wales

A report on the quality of

Merthyr Tydfil
Local Authority Education services

October 2009

by

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

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- youth and community work training;
- local authority education services (LAES);
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies;
- offender learning; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court
Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

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Context

The inspection

1 Local authority (LA) education service inspections are carried out under section 38 of the Education Act 1997 and the Children Act 2004. The inspection framework for this cycle is on the Estyn website www.estyn.co.uk.

2 This inspection took place from 5 October 2009 to 14 October 2009. This report focuses on the education services provided by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (the local authority). Before the inspection, the local authority reviewed its education services and produced a self-evaluation report as a part of that process.

Key judgements

3 The inspection team makes two key judgements about each service. These are:

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

4 The local authority's performance in discharging its responsibilities is rated on a four-point scale as follows:

Grade 1 good with outstanding features

Grade 2 good features and no important shortcomings

Grade 3 good features outweigh shortcomings

Grade 4 shortcomings in important areas

(2) Will the local authority's performance improve?

5 The prospects of improvement are rated on a four-point scale as follows:

Grade 1 improvement prospects are good, with significant improvements already in place

Grade 2 improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers

Grade 3 some good prospects, but barriers in important areas

Grade 4 many important barriers to improvement

Key questions

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

- How effective is the local authority's strategic planning?
- How effective are the local authority's services?
- How effective are leadership and management?
- How well do leaders and managers monitor, evaluate and improve services?

7 These four key questions and the evaluations are set out in the findings section. They are recorded as grades, using the four-point scales set out at (1) and (2) above. All of the grades are included in the grade profile.

8 Estyn's reports follow its guidance for the writing and editing of reports, which is available on the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk). The table below shows the terms that Estyn uses and a broad idea of their meaning. The table is for guidance only.

Nearly all	with very few exceptions
Most	90% or more
Many	70% or more
A majority	over 60%
Half/around half	close to 50%
A minority	below 40%
Few	below 20%
Very few	less than 10%

Background to the local authority

9 The population of Merthyr Tydfil is approximately 55,700. This is the lowest population of the unitary authorities in Wales and has decreased by 100 since 2004. Around 9,600 pupils attend the authority's schools. It has the second highest percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals in Wales.

10 Merthyr Tydfil has 18,500 children and young people under the age of 25. The proportion of children and young people is similar to the Welsh average, but the total population has fallen in recent years. The National Statistics 2006 mid-year estimates show Merthyr Tydfil to be the only local authority in Wales with a declining population, with the biggest fall in population since the 2001 Census.

11 At the time of the 2001 Census, 98.6% of the population were UK born. A small number (605 or 1.1%) come from a total of 17 minority ethnic groups and have predominantly managerial or professional backgrounds, mostly connected to the Prince Charles Hospital. In addition, there has been recent inward migration from Europe with new arrivals in the intake of children to the three faith primary schools and one faith secondary school. Just under 18% of the population have one or more skills in Welsh, which is below the national average.

12 Merthyr Tydfil experiences significant socio-economic challenges. Thirty-five per cent of the population (19,000) live in Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) ranked in the 10% most deprived in Wales. Life expectancy is 2.8% below national average and is the lowest in Wales. Of the adult population, 44% have no qualifications and only 11.6% are qualified to degree level, the second lowest in Wales. Eight per cent of the working age population are unemployed, the fourth highest level in Wales.

Political structure

13 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is composed of 33 elected members from 11 electoral divisions. The most recent election, held in May 2008, resulted in a change of political leadership. Presently, the Council is an Independent controlled Council, with 14 Independent Councillors, 10 Labour Councillors, four Liberal Democratic Councillors, three Merthyr Independent Councillors and two United Kingdom Independent Party Councillors.

14 Of the 33 Councillors, 10 constitute a Cabinet with representatives from each political group. This committee provides policy framework and leadership for the Council. The 10 Cabinet members have specific departmental portfolios that correspond to particular Directorates. The separate Scrutiny Panels mirror this approach, also having responsibility for particular directorates.

15 The Independent Cabinet Member with lead Portfolio responsibility for Integrated Children's Services serves as the statutory Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services. The Independent Cabinet Member with lead Portfolio responsibility for Adult Services serves as the Council's champion for adults and the elderly.

Local authority structure

16 The management responsibility for the Council rests with the Chief Executive and the Executive Board. Membership of this Board comprises the Chief Executive, the six Directors and the Leader of the Council. The Director of Integrated Children's Services has the statutory responsibility of Chief Education Officer and also serves as the designated Lead Director for Children and Young People's Services. The Authority divides responsibility for Education Services for Children and Adults between children and adult services, the responsibility for the latter resting with Integrated Adult Services. A similar arrangement exists for Children's Social Services and Adult Social Services, the Director of Integrated Adult Services having the statutory responsibility of Director of Social Services.

Funding

17 The Welsh Assembly Government's 2009-2010 Standard Spending Assessment (SSA)[1] per head of population for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is the second highest for all local authorities in Wales and 7.0% above the average for Wales. Within this, the education component (the education Indicator-Based Assessment (IBA)[2]) amounts to £43.0m. This represents an average of £4,668 for each pupil, which is close to the average level of IBA per pupil in Wales (£4,661). The education element represents 43.9% of the total SSA, which is just above the average for Wales of 43.5%.

18 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council set its overall 2009-2010 budget for managing and delivering its services at a level 4.0% above the SSA but the net education budget[3] was 2.2% below the IBA. The Council's net education budget has risen a little more slowly than for most councils since 2005-2006. For 2009-2010, the net education budget of £42.1 million is equivalent to £4,565 per pupil, fifteenth highest of the 22 local authorities in Wales.

19 From 2004-2005 to 2007-2008, the authority invested £14.1m in capital expenditure on education. This represents £1,460 per pupil, the 11th highest in Wales. In 2009-2010, the council forecasts that it will spend £7.3m of capital expenditure on education, representing £767 per pupil, the third highest sum per pupil in Wales.

Schools and pupils

20 Merthyr Tydfil maintains three nursery schools, two infant schools, two junior schools, 21 all-through primary schools, four secondary schools (11-18 age range), one special school and two pupil referral units. Three of the primary schools are Catholic voluntary aided schools as is one of the secondary schools.

21 There are two Welsh medium primary schools. Pupils choosing a Welsh medium secondary education travel to a neighbouring authority.

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[1] SSA is the means by which the Welsh Assembly Government distributes Revenue Support Grant to local authorities.

[2] Education IBA is that part of SSA relating to the delivery of education services. Education IBA is not intended as a spending target, and local authorities are free to spend at levels above or below IBA, in accordance with their priorities.

[3] The net education budget excludes income from specific grants.

Summary

Local authority education services

	How good is the local authority's performance?	Will the local authority's performance improve?
Strategic management	2	2
Support for school improvement	2	2
Promoting social inclusion and wellbeing	2	2
Additional learning needs (ALN)	2	1
Access and school organisation	2	2
Support services	2	1

Strategic management

22 Senior elected members and senior council officers provide good strategic leadership and are committed to making education a priority. This corporate commitment provides a sound basis for improving educational attainment for children, young people and families in Merthyr Tydfil.

23 The directors and officers in Integrated Children's Services (ICS) and Integrated Adult Services (IAS) have established good working relationships with head teachers with a high level of trust, even where there is disagreement on policy.

24 There is very effective partnership working which promotes education priorities well and delivers services through statutory partnerships and joint work with other local authorities. The authority consults effectively with partners, stakeholders and young people.

25 Budget monitoring and financial management for education services are generally sound. The authority has developed many arrangements that enhance its capacity and contribute to the value for money it achieves. However, processes to evaluate quality, value for money, and the added value from partnerships and groups are not developed enough in all areas.

26 Elected members and officers make good use of risk management processes, and link these well to service planning, budget management, and performance monitoring. The authority uses the Council spreadsheet system to record progress of both strategic and operational plans. However, there are weaknesses in the way the aims in strategic plans are translated into the monitoring and performance management system. These reduce its usefulness for monitoring the overall progress against strategic plan objectives. Nevertheless, directors and senior officers provide extensive and appropriate reports to elected members.

27 The authority has successfully delivered a capital programme of primary school re-organisation but does not currently have formal plans in place for further capital spending to make all its primary and secondary schools fit for purpose.

28 The council scrutiny arrangements are not providing a consistent enough process to challenge decisions effectively or to contribute to policy development.

Support for school improvement

29 The operational relationship and partnerships between the Integrated Children's Service (ICS), the Integrated Adults' Service (IAS) and schools are very good. Leaders and managers work closely with schools to prioritise, plan and deliver a range of school improvement initiatives. As a result, school performance outcomes are good in terms of value added to most pupils' low attainment on entry to the school system. There are good processes in place to monitor, challenge and support schools and to intervene in any which cause concern.

30 Officers ensure schools have a wide range of good data. Advisers provide good support and training to help schools use this data well. This includes effective work with governing bodies to raise their awareness of strengths and areas for development. The school improvement visits programme is well planned and the monitoring of self-evaluation and school development planning is good. There are good development opportunities for leaders and managers and comprehensive support for governors through a well-planned training programme.

31 The ICS provides a wide range of high quality training for schools both through its advisory service, the Education School Improvement Service (ESIS), and the Merthyr Tydfil core programme of training and development. Headteachers are closely involved in the planning process and arrangements address local and national priorities well. Although training and initiatives are evaluated, evaluations do not focus consistently on agreed success criteria to identify the impact on pupils' achievement. This means that the authority cannot accurately assess which training or initiatives have the greatest impact on the standards pupils achieve.

32 There is good support for most areas of the curriculum. However, support for Welsh second language at secondary level and for bilingualism at key stage 2 and at secondary level is underdeveloped. There is good support for the development of pupils' basic skills, particularly in reading. Support for the implementation of the Foundation Phase is of high quality. The 14 to 19 network is making good progress in widening choice and opportunities for pupils.

33 Transition arrangements are well developed across all key stages. Officers and advisers work closely with schools to ensure that there has been an improvement in the accuracy of national curriculum assessments. Transition links with a neighbouring authority for Welsh first language pupils are developing well.

34 The ICS promotes wellbeing successfully. The physical education and school sport initiative (PESS) achieves outstanding outcomes for pupils. Community focused schools strategies are successfully promoting improved engagement between schools and their communities.

Promoting social inclusion and wellbeing

35 Social inclusion is a high priority for the council. Strong partnership and multi-agency working provides a range of good quality services and initiatives. Provision for vulnerable groups is good and there are effective policies and procedures to improve their attainment and wellbeing.

36 ICS and IAS work well together to ensure the authority's responsibilities as a corporate parent are met. The attainment of Looked After Children (LAC) is improving steadily and all LAC gained a recognised qualification at the end of key stage 4 in 2009.

37 The ICS has comprehensive child protection policies and procedures in place. All members of staff and volunteers who work with children undertake appropriate training. The LSCB ensures good quality inter-agency training to all designated senior staff at schools to update their knowledge and skills.

38 The authority has identified attendance as a key risk. The strategy put in place has had a significant impact and attendance in secondary schools has improved by 1.8 percentage points between 2006 and 2009. However, improvement in primary schools has been slower.

39 The rate of permanent exclusions in secondary schools since 2006 is low in comparison with Wales as a whole. There have been no permanent exclusions in the primary sector since 2006. However, the rate of fixed term exclusions in secondary schools is rising. Provision for excluded pupils and children and young people educated outside school is co-ordinated promptly and effectively through the authority's steering and clearing arrangements.

Additional learning needs (ALN)

40 Specialist teams and advisers provide good support for individual children, young people, their families and schools. They work closely with schools to raise standards and to promote the social inclusion of pupils with physical and learning difficulties. Pupils generally make good progress in standards, learning and behaviour.

41 The very high quality joint working between officers in the ICS, IAS and other relevant partners makes an important contribution to the good quality of the service.

42 Education and child psychologists provide good advice and support to pupils, parents and schools. The level and quality of this service has improved a lot in recent years due, in large part, to very effective arrangements for the joint education and child psychology service with a neighbouring authority.

43 Through a variety of means, the authority effectively monitors provision for pupils with ALN. These include very careful analyses of the provision for, and progress of, pupils with ALN in the reports of Estyn inspections of schools.

44 The authority collects a wide range of data on ALN provision, school finance for ALN and pupils' progress and achievement. Officers use this to monitor individual pupils and aspects of schools' work with pupils with ALN. However, the authority does not use data well enough to collate and analyse information on the impact of provision on the achievement of particular groups of ALN pupils.

Access and school organisation

45 The authority has been effective in reducing primary school places, but it needs to finalise plans to reduce projected secondary school surplus places.

46 The authority is committed to ensuring all its school buildings are fit for purpose by 2016. Investment in school buildings needs to be maintained, but further progress is dependent on the authority obtaining the necessary capital funding.

47 The authority has transparent systems for collecting data on school places and building conditions and makes good use of this to inform its school development proposals and plans.

48 Admissions procedures are good but the Admissions Forum does not provide enough effective guidance and support to stakeholders.

49 The authority's arrangements for home-to-school transport are in the main good and are well regarded by schools. The home-to-school transport policy is clear and is more generous than is required by law.

50 Early years provision is of good quality. The authority provides effective training and quality assurance in this aspect of its work.

Support services

51 The relationships between headteachers, school governors and the local authority are outstanding. There is a very high level of co-operation and involvement, which leads to a range of good outcomes.

52 Support services for schools are good. There has been a significant improvement from 2003 to 2009 in the rating of these services by the very high proportion of schools that responded to the Wales Audit Office 'schools perception survey. The local authority and the stakeholder groups monitor these services well.

53 The local authority offers services to schools in well-specified service level agreements (SLA), in which schools are able to determine exactly what services they are paying for.

54 The local authority has improved greatly the support services that it provides to schools. These services are now all good.

Recommendations

55 In order to build upon the existing good work, the authority should:

R1 improve performance monitoring and management through:

- ensuring greater coherence between strategic plans and performance monitoring systems; and
- establishing clearer processes to evaluate quality and value for money;

R2 develop plans to respond to the assessed capital funding requirements to ensure schools are fit for purpose;

R3 establish appropriate systems to monitor, collate and analyse the attainment, achievement and progress of all groups of vulnerable children; and

R4 improve scrutiny and overview arrangements so they review decisions more robustly and assist the authority more effectively in policy development.

Findings: How good is the local authority's performance and will performance improve?

Strategic management

Performance

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Prospects for improvement

Grade 2: Improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers

Leadership and relationship with schools

56 The authority's high-level aims for education and lifelong learning are clearly set out in its plans and strategies. The Community Strategy includes the theme 'Forward through learning' which is reflected in the Corporate Plan 2009-2012. This theme includes priorities for improving attainment and engagement in education and reducing surplus places. The Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011 also reflects this theme although it also has a wider group of aims. This commitment to improving education provides the necessary impetus for improvement.

57 Senior elected members and senior council officers provide good strategic leadership and are committed to making education a priority. This corporate commitment provides a sound basis for improving educational attainment for children, young people and families in Merthyr Tydfil.

58 The directors and officers in Integrated Children's Services (ICS) and Integrated Adult Services (IAS) have established good working relationships with headteachers with a high level of trust, even where there is disagreement on policy. This provides a secure foundation upon which to address challenging issues. Elected members and officers have a successful track record in making difficult decisions such as primary and secondary school closures and amalgamations, and they have recently agreed the initial principles for the changes to post-16 education.

59 The good relationships between schools and the authority are reflected in the very positive results of the school perception survey conducted on behalf of the Wales Audit Office in 2009 (WAO survey 2009). Ninety-five percent of schools in the County Borough completed the survey and their perceptions placed the authority in the top quarter of responses for 19 out of 20 questions for aspects of strategic management.

60 The directors for ICS and IAS have put in place comprehensive cross-directorate management arrangements. These arrangements include effective meetings at each management level.

61 The local authority has identified political instability as a key risk to sustained improvement of its services. It is proposing changes to the political management structure in order to address this. The local authority has agreed to undertake consultation to change from the present arrangements, which require the Board or Cabinet and committees to be politically balanced.

62 The council scrutiny arrangements are not providing a consistent enough process to challenge decisions effectively or to contribute to policy development. The Estyn inspection of strategic management in 2004 identified this as an area for development and, although there has been some improvement, the present scrutiny of education arrangements are not robust enough.

63 The authority has made good progress against many of the other recommendations from previous inspections. In particular, Merthyr Tydfil has:

- successfully removed many surplus primary school places;
- raised the quality of ALN services; and
- increased the curriculum range for pupils under the 14-19 pathways arrangement.

64 There remains, however, more for the authority to do, such as reducing surplus secondary school places.

Consultation

65 The authority consults well with its partners and stakeholders on strategic, financial and operational developments. This has helped the authority to improve and achieve its objectives, one of these being successful primary school amalgamations and closures.

66 The authority has also made good progress in increasing the influence of children, young people and their parents over services they receive. For example, joint work between the Children and Young People's Partnership, the Community Safety Partnership and the voluntary sector has extended advocacy support for young people. In addition, the authority has established the post of Youth Mayor and set up a Junior Safeguarding Children Board. Pupils have successfully influenced the improvement of their school toilet facilities and shared their views on attendance with members of a scrutiny review group.

Managing performance

67 Elected members and officers make good use of risk management processes and link these well to service planning, budget management and performance monitoring. There are appropriate policies in place for meeting statutory requirements and operational plans and strategies for all service areas. However, a minority of operational plans and strategies are incomplete or not yet agreed.

68 Directors and senior officers provide clear, concise reports to elected members on specific education issues. Elected members monitor progress effectively at a range of meetings including quarterly business reviews (QBRs) and senior management boards (SMBs). In addition, directors and senior officers provide short information reports for the Chief Executive and provide reports for scrutiny committees.

69 The authority uses a spreadsheet system of 'Key Strategic Plans' and 'Individual Action Planning Toolkits' which enable progress of both strategic and operational plans to be monitored through a single, widely used system. However, the system is not yet used to best effect. As a result, the overall monitoring of progress against key strategic plans is not clear, robust or consistent enough.

Partnership arrangements

70 There is very effective partnership working which promotes education priorities well. The links between statutory partnerships, such as the Health Social Care and Wellbeing Partnership, Children and Young People's Partnership and the Community Safety Partnership, are effective and ensure key education priorities are shared with providers, and inform lower level service planning. This ethos of strong partnership working provides a secure basis for continuing improvement.

71 Merthyr Tydfil also has good partnership arrangements with other local authorities. It has put in place effective joint working and shared services to address common education issues. As a result, the authority benefits from improved economies of scale and a wider range of expertise by participating in a range of shared services with other local authorities. These include school improvement services, elected member training, educational support for Looked After Children[4] (LAC) and the education and child psychology service.

Use of resources

72 Budget monitoring and financial management for education services are generally good. There have been no significant variations from budget in the last two years. Whilst the net education budget has increased more slowly than the average for Wales in the last five years the authority has been proactive in seeking external funding and received above average levels of grant income. The level of delegation to schools is high and individual school budgets are above average.

73 Only two schools have had negative balances in the last three years and these have been for short periods only. Most schools have satisfactory levels of reserves, but a minority of schools have surpluses exceeding 10% of their budget. The authority has appropriately asked for an explanation of these surpluses and asked schools to explain the surplus and where appropriate provide plans to reduce it.

[4] These are children for whom the local authority has a legal parental responsibility. The term is used to describe all children who are subject to a care order, or who are provided with accommodation on a voluntary basis for more than 24 hours.

74 The authority has developed a medium term financial plan and is expecting a period of real-term reductions in spending. An 'efficiencies' sub-group of the Schools Budget Forum has been established to help identify savings and to contribute to a corporate efficiency programme. The good financial management has contributed to confidence and trust between the authority and schools.

75 The authority has developed many arrangements that enhance its capacity and contribute to value for money. However, processes to evaluate quality, value for money and the benefit from partnerships are not developed well in all areas. Officers are putting improved arrangements, such as the clearer success criteria in service level agreements, in place and these will be important in a worsening financial period.

76 The authority has successfully delivered a capital programme of primary school re-organisation but does not currently have suitable plans in place for further capital spending to make all its primary and secondary schools fit for purpose. The authority has limited capital available to address a range of needs. It has plans for some capital spending in the next two years, but has not set out clearly enough how it expects to meet the full capital requirements.

Support for school improvement

Performance

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Prospects for improvement

Grade 2: Improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers

77 The operational relationship and partnerships between the Integrated Children's Service (ICS), the Integrated Adults' Service (IAS) and schools are very good. Leaders and managers work closely with schools to prioritise, plan and deliver a range of school improvement initiatives. As a result, school performance outcomes are good in terms of value added to most pupils' low attainment on entry to the school system. Since 2007, there is an overall upward trend in end of key stage 1, 2 and 3 results. At key stage 4, from 2006 to 2008, the average wider points score has increased in Merthyr Tydfil by 33 points compared to 21 points nationally.

78 Good processes are in place to monitor, challenge and support schools and to intervene in any which cause concern. Schools work well with link advisers and know what support they can expect to achieve agreed school improvement targets. Schools are encouraged to develop projects based on their needs to improve standards. Officers inform all partners about the strengths and weaknesses of individual schools and work closely with a range of agencies and other local authorities to maintain and raise standards.

79 Officers ensure schools have a wide range of good data. Advisers provide good support and training to help schools use this data well. This includes effective work with governing bodies to raise their awareness of strengths and areas for

development. The careful analysis of data enables schools to evaluate their progress over time and to compare their performance with schools of similar backgrounds.

80 The school improvement visits programme is well planned and the monitoring of self-evaluation and school development planning is good. Clear reports of visits to schools note the issues discussed and point to the way ahead. This ensures consistent and effective challenge to schools. There are regular and useful meetings for officers to keep them well informed about schools' progress.

81 The ICS provides a wide range of high quality training for schools both through its advisory service ESIS and the Merthyr Tydfil core programme of training and development. Headteachers are closely involved in the planning process and arrangements address local and national priorities well. Partnership with other authorities has improved the range of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for schools. Although the authority evaluates training and initiatives, these evaluations do not focus consistently on agreed success criteria to identify the impact on pupils' achievement. This means that the authority cannot accurately assess which training or initiatives have the greatest impact on the standards pupils achieve.

82 There is good support for literacy and numeracy and there are effective strategies in place to improve the oracy skills of boys. The ICS targets these strategies well on certain schools. The ICT strategy group has a positive impact on the quality of technical and curriculum support for schools and a third of schools have achieved the BECTA ICT Quality Mark. There are well planned intervention programmes to improve pupils' basic skills. These are having a particularly positive impact on improving reading levels.

83 There is high quality support and training for the implementation of the Foundation Phase. Training for staff at primary level is helping to ensure that there is continuity and progression to key stage 2. A range of good quality bilingual resources supports provision well. The Foundation Phase team provides high quality support for very young children through close links with a range of partners. In addition, an extensive range of family programmes is improving the engagement of parents in children's learning.

84 Support for Welsh first and second language development and bilingualism is well planned in the Foundation Phase and key stage 1. Athrawon Bro provide effective levels of support in primary schools in promoting teachers' confidence and ability to teach in Welsh. However, support for Welsh second language at secondary level is less well developed. Support to develop bilingualism at key stage 2 and secondary level is also underdeveloped.

85 The 14 to 19 network is making good progress in widening choice and opportunities for pupils through close collaboration with the local further education college and work-based learning providers. All four secondary schools have met the Welsh Assembly Government's 2010 course provision targets for B and C schools. The authority has made good progress in meeting the recommendations of the May 2007 area inspection of the quality of standards and provision for 14 to19 learners. There

are good opportunities for pupils to mix general and vocational options and there is equal access for all English-medium pupils to the full options menu. Vocational options are well linked to regional needs. The greater range of vocational options is helping to reduce the number of pupils leaving school without a recognised qualification.

86 Transition arrangements are well developed across all key stages, especially for very young children, through a common baseline profile. Officers and advisers work closely with schools to improve the accuracy of national curriculum assessments. A good working partnership is developing between the two Welsh-medium primary schools and their feeder secondary school in a neighbouring authority. This is helping to improve links for Welsh first language pupils.

87 The promotion of wellbeing is given a high priority. Support and guidance for schools in personal and social education (PSE), the healthy schools initiative and the development of education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) are all good. There is a good partnership between the authority and health related agencies to support these initiatives.

88 The music service for schools is good and extra-curricular activities enrich pupils' experiences. The library service is a good outreach facility that effectively targets groups of pupils unlikely to use traditional library facilities.

89 The very effective co-operation of the PESS team with Dragon Sport and leisure services officers achieves outstanding outcomes for pupils. This is seen in pupils' ability to self-evaluate their own and others' performances. Pupil participation in physical activity has considerably increased as a direct result of this programme.

90 Community focused schools strategies are well developed and are appropriately linked to priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan and the Corporate Plan. All schools carefully evaluate projects undertaken. A wide range of initiatives was supported across 15 schools last year. These are beginning to impact positively in a few areas of the County Borough through greater community engagement in schools.

91 There are good development opportunities for leaders and managers. Potential middle and senior managers attend accredited courses through links with higher education institutions, such as Swansea University. Support for national programmes for school leaders results in good opportunities for action research. Course programmes and training are adapted well to meet the individual needs of school leaders.

92 Support for governors is good. There is a well-planned governor training programme, which reflects local and national priorities. Schools have individual training if required and governors have easy access to officers within the authority for high quality support and advice.

93 All schools buy into the ESIS service level agreement for school improvement support. The agreement ensures economies of scale for the authority and access to a wide range of high quality training for schools. The 2009 Schools' Perception Survey confirms high levels of satisfaction with the school improvement services provided.

Promoting social inclusion and wellbeing

Performance

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Prospects for improvement

Grade 2: Improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers

94 The Children and Young People's Plan and the Integrated Children's Services Plan identify social inclusion priorities well. There is widespread commitment to establishing effective partnerships across directorates at operational level. This is providing a sound base to further improve the inclusion services within the authority.

95 ICS and IAS have good procedures for working together and sharing information about looked after children (LAC). There are effective arrangements to monitor the attendance, attainment and educational progress of LAC, including LAC placed out of county. Relevant reports are presented to the authority's Corporate Parenting Group.

96 The LAC Educational Support team offers good academic, transition and pastoral support. The performance of LAC is gradually improving across the key stages. All LAC gained a recognised qualification at the end of key stage 4 in 2008-2009. Good use of RAISE grant funding has provided additional educational support for key stage 4 LAC pupils and for targeting potential NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

97 ICS and IAS have comprehensive child protection policies and procedures in place. All members of staff and volunteers who work with children undertake appropriate training. The LSCB ensures good quality inter-agency training to all designated senior staff at schools to update their knowledge and skills. The authority has also established a junior LSCB to promote young people's participation and actively involve them in their own safeguarding.

98 The authority has good initiatives aimed at tackling bullying and supporting positive behaviour. The services have recently revised the racial harassment guidelines and the anti-bullying policy. These will help schools to monitor relevant incidents more effectively and to identify areas for development.

99 The Educational Child Psychology Service offers effective support to vulnerable pupils and young offenders. The counselling service is available at all secondary schools and is at the forefront of good practice. Education Welfare Officers provide good pastoral support for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), Gypsy traveller children, excluded pupils and young offenders.

100 The authority generally analyses the impact of targeted initiatives on young people with additional learning needs. However, systems are not yet in place to allow the authority to monitor effectively the attainment and achievement of all vulnerable groups of children and young people.

101 The authority has identified reducing absenteeism as a Council Corporate Risk and a priority for improvement. The ICS strategy is making a significant impact on attendance. Attendance in secondary schools has consistently improved from 89.0% in 2006 to 90.8% in 2009. This improvement is at a faster rate than Wales as a whole. However, although attendance in primary schools has improved, this is at a slower rate than in secondary.

102 The Secondary Attendance Group involves all secondary schools in developing effective initiatives. The Pupil Attendance and Wellbeing Group facilitates a similar multi-agency contribution. The Educational Welfare Service analyses attendance data well. It targets resources effectively and produces monitoring reports for schools regularly.

103 The rate of permanent exclusions in secondary schools since 2006 is low in comparison with Wales as a whole. There were no permanent exclusions in the primary sector over the same period.

104 Rates of fixed term exclusions for five days or fewer from secondary schools are increasing. Fixed term exclusions of six days or more from secondary schools fell in 2008 but remain above the Welsh average. The authority has recently revised its exclusions policy and managed moves protocol. However, the inconsistent application by schools of procedures and guidance often restricts the impact of the authority's initiatives.

105 The Education and Child Psychology Service and the Behaviour Support Team provide schools with readily available support for behaviour management. This very good support helps schools identify challenging behaviour more effectively and helps them implement strategies to address it.

106 Provision for excluded pupils and children and young people educated outside school is promptly and effectively co-ordinated through the authority's steering and clearing arrangements and the Pupil Service Team. There are good links with the 14–19 partnership and the Youth Offending Team (YOT). These links strengthen the individualised programmes for relevant key stage 4 pupils. Provision for children identified as a child in need or referred through child protection procedures is very effectively co-ordinated through the Multi Agency Referral Group (MARG).

Additional learning needs

Performance

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Prospects for improvement

Grade 1: Improvement prospects are good, with significant improvements already in place

107 The authority provides good quality advice and support for children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN). Generally, pupils in all age ranges make good progress in standards, learning and behaviour.

108 Learning Resource Bases (LRBs) located in mainstream schools allow pupils with a wide range of ALN access to both specialist teaching and to work with their peers in mainstream classes. The authority also has a special school for pupils with more complex needs. Inspection reports show that the special school and the LRBs provide schools with a good level of service to their pupils.

109 There are two pupil referral units (PRU) that cater for secondary school pupils with a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Not enough key stage 4 pupils return to their mainstream schools and, overall, the curriculum is not broad enough, especially in key stage 4, where it does not give adequate attention to the Welsh Assembly Government 14-19 core.

110 The authority meets the requirements of the SEN and Disability Act (2001) and is making good progress in ensuring that schools are accessible for disabled children and young people.

111 Generally, the quality of statements of special educational needs and annual review documents is good and information for parents is clear. In the last two years, the proportion of statements completed within 26 weeks has been well in excess of the Wales average and has been in the top quarter of authorities in Wales. Officers monitor well the progress of all pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN), giving particular priority to pupils moving between key stages and to those placed out of county.

112 The number of pupils referred by schools for statutory assessment has fallen significantly in the last few years. This is because mainstream schools are increasingly accepting responsibility for meeting pupils' needs without recourse to a statement and because of the effective support and guidance that officers and educational psychologists are providing for schools.

113 For the last four years, the proportion of pupils with statements of special education need has been low at around 2%, compared with the all-Wales average of about 3%. The council educates a relatively high proportion of pupils with statements of SEN in the special school or special classes in mainstream schools, and a correspondingly low proportion in ordinary classes in mainstream schools.

114 There is good communication between ALN officers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and schools. As a result, the planning and delivery of support for learners with ALN is consistent with the authority's promotion of inclusion and raising standards for all learners. The head of service provides high quality leadership. Officers at all levels show good understanding of, and commitment to, the aims of the service.

115 The quality of joint working among officers in the Integrated Children's and Adult Services, and their joint working with other relevant partners, has outstanding features. Their work in multi-agency groups contributes significantly to ensuring that good quality provision is delivered promptly to meet pupils' individual needs, especially for those with the most severe and urgent needs. Each group has an appropriate role in managing provision that complements very well the work of the other groups.

116 There have been significant, recent improvements in the arrangements for identifying and assessing the needs of pre-school children and for considering their educational needs as they approach school age.

117 Generally, specialist teams and advisers provide good support for individual children, young people, their families and schools. They work closely with schools to raise standards and to promote the social inclusion of pupils with physical and learning difficulties.

118 The Education and Child Psychology Service provides good advice and support to pupils, parents and schools. The level and quality of service has improved significantly in recent years and schools now rate it highly. The improvements are mainly due to very effective arrangements for the joint education and child psychology service with a neighbouring authority.

119 ALN officers implement well a good range of initiatives aimed at improving provision and raising standards. Officers evaluate the initiatives in pilot schools before sharing effective practice with others. An example of this is the individual education plan (IEP) initiative.

120 There is a number of initiatives aimed at promoting the inclusion of pupils with ALN in mainstream schools. For example, the behaviour support team of advisory teachers provides good quality intervention and support across the age range and is improving the ability of schools to support pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The authority is very successfully increasing schools' ability to identify and support pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. This latter initiative is linking well to outreach work on autism that is part of the Unlocking the Potential initiative in the authority[5].

121 There has been no appeal to the SEN Tribunal for Wales in recent years. Together with the falling number of referrals for statutory assessment and the low proportion of pupils with statements, this indicates that the authority is successful in negotiating with most parents and reaching agreement about appropriate provision for their

[5] Unlocking the Potential of Special Schools is a Welsh Assembly Government grant funded initiative.

children. A focus group of parents of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder presents good opportunities for feedback about provision, but the group does not represent parents of pupils with other ALN. A few parents do not have a high level of confidence in the service.

122 Through a variety of means, the authority effectively monitors provision for pupils with ALN. These include very careful analyses of the provision for, and progress of, pupils with ALN in the reports of Estyn inspections of schools.

123 The authority does not use data well enough to collate and analyse information on the impact of provision on the achievement of particular groups of ALN pupils. It collects a wide range of data on ALN provision, school finance for ALN and pupils' progress and achievement. Officers use this to monitor individual pupils and aspects of schools' work with pupils with ALN, but the data is not used extensively enough. The authority has done much work to develop an IT system to enable officers to carry out collation and analysis of data. There are firm plans for the system to be in place in the near future.

124 The have been significant improvements in many aspects of the ALN service since the previous inspection of the special educational needs service. These have improved provision and helped to raise standards for pupils with ALN. The most noteworthy are the development of very good partnership working and the substantial improvements in the education and child psychology service.

Access and school organisation

Performance

Grade 2: Good with no important shortcomings

Prospects for improvement

Grade 2: Improvement prospects are good, with no major barriers

School places

125 The authority has a good track record on the management of reorganisation projects. Its forecasts of requirements for school places have been accurate. It has appropriately recalculated school capacity using the Welsh Assembly Government formula. In January 2008, surplus capacity was 14.8% in primary schools, below the Welsh average of 18.6%. Surplus capacity in secondary schools was 16.4%. This is very close to the Welsh average of 15.4%.

126 The authority has removed over 600 primary school places since 2005 and, despite falling pupil numbers, has been successful in reducing significantly the overall level of primary school surplus places. It is one of only eight authorities to have reduced primary school surplus places over the period 2001 to 2008. The percentage decrease was the third highest in Wales. In 2008 Merthyr had only four primary schools with significant surplus capacity and the authority has plans established to address these.

127 The authority closed one of its secondary schools in 2005 and 700 secondary school places were removed over the period 2005 to 2009. Despite this, in January 2008 there were 4,149 pupils in secondary schools within Merthyr against a capacity of 4,965, creating an overall surplus of 816 (16.4%) places. This is the eighth highest level of unfilled total capacity in Wales. The authority's projections indicate that secondary school surplus capacity will increase and rise to over 1,500 by 2014. Three of its four secondary schools will have significant surplus places. The authority is currently considering options for further reducing secondary school surplus places.

128 A partnership between Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and the University of Glamorgan is considering options for the future provision of post-16 education. The authority is appropriately waiting the outcome of these considerations before planning any major secondary school reorganisation.

Asset management planning and capital

129 The authority's school asset management planning systems are good. Schools are directly involved in the collection of school buildings condition, suitability and sufficiency information. This information is used effectively to determine long-term school development requirements and to produce short-term building maintenance and improvement programmes. Schools are also directly involved in the prioritising of building works and this leads to effective ownership by schools of building maintenance and improvement programmes.

130 The authority has used School Buildings Improvement Grants well to build new schools and improve others. New schools and building improvements have been of a high standard and there has been very good involvement of schools at each stage. The authority monitors performance on building contracts and contracts are delivered on time and within budget. The authority takes appropriate account of statutory requirements including disabled access, energy efficiency and sustainability.

131 The authority is appropriately committed to ensuring all its school buildings are fit for purpose by 2016. It estimates that capital investment in excess of £100 million is required to meet this aim. Investment in school buildings needs to be maintained, but further progress is dependent on the authority obtaining the necessary capital funding. The authority has to date been significantly reliant on Welsh Assembly Government Grants. There has been no policy for the ring-fencing of efficiency savings or of capital receipts from sales of redundant school buildings. However, the authority is committed to delivering its capital needs and officers are continuing to seek alternative sources of funding for capital projects.

132 The authority uses a mutual fund to manage routine building maintenance and this arrangement is well received by schools. There is good partnership working between ICS , Property Maintenance and Schools. Prioritisation of work is transparent and the management of emergency repairs effective.

Admissions to schools

133 Admissions procedures are good. The clear, comprehensive information for parents is precise, easily understandable and available in English and Welsh. The authority liaises well with other local admissions authorities such as governors of voluntary aided schools and neighbouring councils. There have been no admissions appeals for a number of years.

134 Until nine months ago, the Admissions Forum had not been meeting regularly and has not been providing enough effective guidance and support to stakeholders. However, it now meets every two months and has been given some appropriate key tasks to support improvement.

Home-to-school transport

135 The authority's arrangements for home-to-school transport are, in the main, good and are well regarded by schools. The home-to-school transport policy is clear and is more generous than is required by law. The authority monitors service standards and budgets closely. There is CCTV and bus escorts on all home-to-school transport vehicles. Drivers and escorts on home-to-school transport are regularly CRB checked.

136 Pupils entitled to free transport receive no support when they access out of school hours' activities.

Early years

137 Early years provision is of good quality. Despite having a low level of early years childcare, there is no evidence of significant unmet demand. However, the authority recognises, and is addressing, a lack of awareness of availability of provision.

138 Effective systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of work in both maintained and non-maintained settings. The overall quality of training is good and the Family Information Service has increased enquiry levels significantly.

Support services

Performance

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Prospects for improvement

Grade 1: Improvement prospects are good, with significant improvements already in place

139 The relationships between headteachers, school governors and the local authority are outstanding. There is a very high level of co-operation, which leads to a range of good outcomes. Merthyr provides good information about the services it offers. It supports schools in choosing alternative services should they decide to use them.

140 Support services for schools are good. Schools rate the quality of services highly. The large number (95%) of schools that took part in the 2009 School Perception survey rated all services in the first or second quartile. The local authority and the stakeholder groups monitor these services well.

141 The local authority offers support services to schools through well-specified service level agreements (SLA). Heads and governors monitor, evaluate and influence the services through a Budget Forum, which is very effective. It has a track record of bringing about improvement, especially in ICT and property services.

142 A team of school support officers links governing bodies and the local authority. The support officers are very highly valued. They clerk governing bodies and provide training. They are a first point of contact for more detailed advice where necessary.

143 The quality of financial information available to schools is good. All primary and special schools buy into the finance SLA. The support officer works out the budget profile, using the actual costs of the school staff. The authority uses a three-year accounting system that takes account of projected pupil numbers.

144 Support officers give good support in budget management. They provide good training to those school staff with responsibility for book keeping and budget monitoring.

145 The size of school balances is within recommended limits in most schools. A few schools have surpluses over 10%. The authority has succeeded in reducing the number of schools with overlarge surpluses from 11 schools to five schools (out of 34). Similarly, the authority has been successful in reducing schools in deficit so that there was just one school in deficit at the end of the financial year 2008/2009.

146 The local authority provides effective human resources (HR) support to schools through officers with knowledge of schools in corporate HR and through the school support officers. Headteachers report that this system works well.

147 The local authority has co-operated with other local authorities to ensure that supply teacher agencies comply with CRB checks. It has issued advice on this to headteachers and governors. School support officers and advisors provide good support to schools in recruitment. The authority is currently updating its personnel advice across the range of employment issues. Staffing of teachers, teaching assistants and other support workers is stable. One Welsh medium school has had difficulties in recruiting for headship. There are very few tribunal cases, although the authority uses disciplinary and capability procedures when appropriate. Trade unions praise the authority for its industrial relations, for its willingness to listen to criticism and for its caring ethos.

148 The local authority gives good support to schools in their use of ICT. All schools buy in to the service. The SLA provides management information support and support for procurement as well as hardware and software support. The service provides training in the use of Capita's School Information Management System (SIMS) and in the use of ICT in curriculum areas. This service has improved significantly in the schools' perception survey from the fourth quartile in 2003 to the first quartile in 2009. Ninety-seven percent of schools rate the service as being good or very good.

149 The local authority's website, run by the corporate ICT service, is good and provides the public with a range of useful information, including key education policies and plans and information about schools. There is a good education website, with useful curriculum material. The authority is making the corporate intranet open to schools so that they may share information on a range of policy issues and improve communication.

150 Property-related services are good. The authority sets out clear lines of responsibility for buildings. Merthyr Tydfil devolves the reactive maintenance budget, but all schools buy into a mutual fund. The service provides good emergency maintenance and a good range of health and safety training. It also provides minor upgrades to property. The service also provides schools with good quality advice on issues such as security and emergency procedures.

151 By making good use of the mutual fund, the authority is able to monitor conditions proactively and ensure compliance on a range of issues.

152 The properties section gives advice on alterations and minor works and the authority project manages schemes. There are several examples of good school build, such as at the ecologically sustainable new school build for Ysgol Gymraeg Santes Tudful.

153 The local authority has good up to date information about the condition, sufficiency and suitability of all school buildings. It has provided schools with this data. There are still a few schools defined by the authority as being in poor condition. The authority has plans in place to rectify health and safety issues in these schools. Property services have improved in the School Perception survey from third quartile to top quartile and now 77% of schools rate it as good or very good.

154 The education service carries out its statutory responsibilities for school meals well. All schools use the authority's catering service. Merthyr Tydfil is in the top quartile for total meal uptake, as measured by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE). The participation rate in breakfast clubs is high.

155 The authority has appropriate arrangements to make sure that school kitchens meet their statutory duties for hygiene.

156 The catering service is well prepared to meet government nutritional standards. It is actively seeking good ways to improve. For example, it is piloting electronic card payment and biometric payment methods later this year. It has increased the take up of free school meals. The kitchen refurbishment programme has been good and many schools have their own on-site kitchen.

157 The prospects for improvement in the authority's provision of support services are very good. There has been a good track record of improvements already in place, especially in ICT, property services and the clarity of specification of these services. The authority listens to stakeholders well, responds to criticism and improves its practices where necessary.

The local authority's response to the report findings

Merthyr Tydfil Local Education Service is grateful to the inspection team for the open and challenging approach adopted during the inspection. We welcome the findings of the inspection, which identify many good features but also highlight areas for improvement.

Working closely with our teaching colleagues, school governors, elected members and various partner organisations, Merthyr Tydfil Local Authority Education Service is committed to enhancing the overall quality of educational provision and to promoting further effective learning. Our key aims are to improve the life chances and ensure the well-being of all our children and young people. We intend to draw purposefully upon this inspection report to continue to improve our performance and to lift standards across the County Borough.

Appendix 1

Local authority performance data

Update dates in footnotes

The following table shows the percentage of statutory school age pupils entitled to free school meals in Merthyr over the last three years.

Percentage of statutory school age pupils entitled to free school meals			
	2007	**2008**	**2009**[6]
Merthyr Tydfil	26.4%	24.6%	24.9%
Wales	17.4%	17.0%	17.8%
Rank	22	22	21

(1=lowest)

Performance of schools in National Curriculum assessments and public examinations

The following tables compare the percentage of pupils in Merthyr Tydfil achieving the core subject indicator[7] (CSI) in National Curriculum teacher assessments in key stages 1, 2 and 3 in the last four years with that of pupils throughout Wales[8].

Key stage 1	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**
Merthyr Tydfil	77.0%	75.0%	77.3%
Wales	80.1%	80.7%	81.1%
Rank	17	21	21

Key stage 2	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**
Merthyr Tydfil	69.2%	70.7%	77.3%
Wales	74.1%	75.5%	77.0%
Rank	22	21	21

Key stage 3	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**
Merthyr Tydfil	48.6%	52.1%	54.8%
Wales	56.7%	59.6%	61.3%
Rank	21	20	21

[6] SDR 99/2009 Schools Census 2009 provisional results

[7] The Core Subject Indicator represents the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level or above in English or Welsh (first language), mathematics and science in combination. The expected level of the majority of pupils at the end of key stage 1 is level 2, level 4 at key stage 2 and level 5 at key stage 3.

[8] Sources: National Statistics: SDR 145/2007, SDR 129/2008, SDR 126/2009 National Curriculum Assessments of 7,11 and 14 year olds: Wales

In key stages 1, 2 and 3, the performance of pupils in Merthyr Tydfil schools in national curriculum assessments is below the average for Wales. However, in the past three years, pupil performance has been at or better than expected levels given the level of social deprivation as indicated by the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

The following tables compare the performance of pupils in all maintained settings in Merthyr Tydfil with that of pupils throughout Wales in external examinations at key stage 4[9].

Percentage of pupils who gained five or more GCSEs grade A*-C or vocational equivalent	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	43.3%	40.9%	40.2%
Wales	53.8%	54.2%	55.8%
Rank	22	22	22

Percentage of pupils who achieved the level 1 threshold[10]	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	n/a	80.4%	82.3%
Wales	n/a	86.0%	86.8%
Rank	n/a	22	21

Percentage of pupils who achieved the level 2 threshold	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	n/a	42.0%	45.8%
Wales	n/a	55.0%	58.0%
Rank	n/a	22	22

Percentage of pupils who achieved the level 2 threshold including a GCSE pass in English or Welsh first language and mathematics	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	n/a	n/a	33.7%
Wales	n/a	n/a	45.6%
Rank	n/a	n/a	21

[9] Sources: SDR 164/2006, GCSE/GNVQ and GCE A, AS and AVCE results in Wales, 2006; SDR 184/2007(R), GCSE/GNVQ and GCE A, AS,AVCE results in Wales, 2007; SDR 195/2008, Examinations Results in Wales 2007/2008

[10] The new 'threshold' indicators represent a volume of approved external qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework. It consists of a wider range of qualifications than previously used. The 'level 1' threshold is equivalent to five GCSEs at grades D-G. The 'level 2' threshold is equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A*-C.

Average wider points score	2006	2007	2008
Merthyr Tydfil	286.9	298.1	320.2
Wales	335.4	343.9	356.0
Rank	22	21	21

Percentage of pupils who attained the CSI at KS4	2006	2007	2008
Merthyr Tydfil	31.8%	28.2%	33.0%
Wales	39.7%	40.0	44.4%
Rank	21	22	21

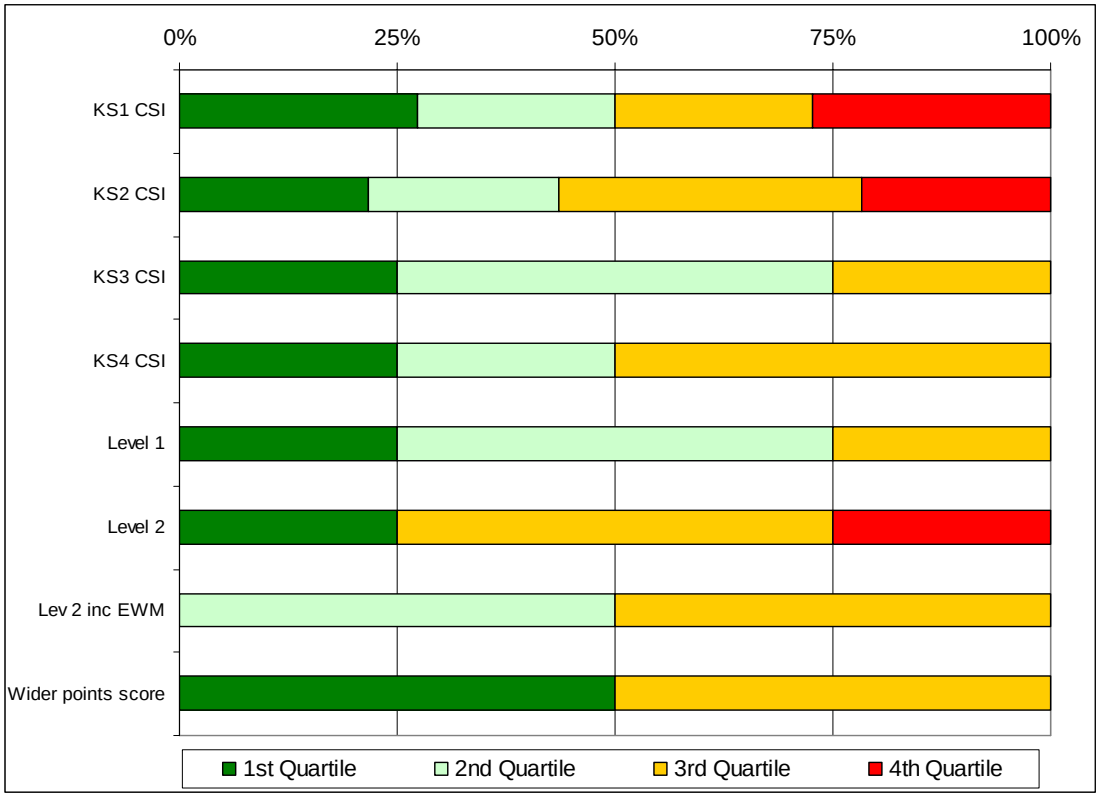
Percentage of pupils aged 15 leaving full time education without a recognised qualification	2006	2007	2008
Merthyr Tydfil	4.1%	1.3%	1.1%
Wales	2.1%	1.7%	1.5%
Rank	21	7	9

The performance of Merthyr Tydfil schools at key stage 4 is below the all Wales average. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE has declined since 2006. The percentage gaining the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics is also considerably below the Welsh average as is the key stage 4 CSI.

However, the average wider points score in Merthyr Tydfil rose by over 33 points from 2006-2008 compared to a rise of just under 21 points nationally. The percentage of pupils leaving school without a recognised qualification has declined sharply since 2006 and at a significantly greater rate than across Wales. In Merthyr Tydfil the decline was three percentage points compared with less than one percentage point nationally. This makes Merthyr one of the nine highest performing authorities for this indicator.

The following tables show the distribution of Merthyr Tydfil schools within the all-Wales Free School Meals Benchmark Quarters[11] for the Core Subject Indicator at each key stage, and for the key stage 4 indicators.

[11] Each year school examination and test results are grouped together according to free school meal entitlement. Each group of schools is then divided into four quarters. This allows comparison between similar schools across Wales.



Key stage 1 CSI

Percentage of schools in	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter
2006	32%	23%	23%	23%
2007	18%	50%	5%	27%
2008	27%	23%	23%	27%

Key stage 2 CSI

Percentage of schools in	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter
2006	26%	26%	26%	22%
2007	22%	30%	22%	26%
2008	22%	22%	35%	22%

Key stage 3 CSI

Percentage of schools in	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter
2006	25%	25%	50%	0%
2007	50%	0%	50%	0%
2008	25%	50%	25%	0%

Key stage 4 CSI

Percentage of schools in	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter
2006	25%	50%	25%	0%
2007	25%	50%	25%	0%
2008	25%	25%	50%	0%

When comparing the performance of Merthyr Tydfil schools in 2008 with that of similar schools on the free school meals benchmarks, performance at key stage 1 is comparable, but slightly below average for key stage 2. At key stage 3, performance is very good when compared to similar schools, with average performance at key stage 4.

The Welsh Assembly Government sets benchmarks for performance based on entitlement to free school meals, in maintained secondary schools only.

	2006		2007		2008	
	Merthyr (Actual)	Expected benchmark comparison	Merthyr (Actual)	Expected benchmark comparison	Merthyr (Actual)	Expected benchmark comparison
KS3 CSI	52	49	49	44	53	49
GCSE 5A*-C	44	42	42	41	47a	47
GCSE Average points score	35	35	35	35	327b	318

a Level 2 threshold in 2008 b Average wider points score in 2008

The data in the table differs from data published elsewhere in this report as this data only refers to pupils in mainstream schools and excludes pupils in PRUs, alternative education and special schools.

Percentage of Year 11 leavers continuing in full-time education

	2006		2007		2008	
Merthyr Tydfil	72%	19th	69.2%	22nd	73%	21st
Wales	75.7%		77.2%		79.2%	

Percentage of Year 11 leavers not in education training or employment (NEETS)

	2006		2007		2008	
Merthyr Tydfil	7.3%	15th	7.9%	16th	7.8%	15th
Wales	6.4%		6.4%		7.1%	

The percentage of pupils remaining in full time education has improved since 2006 but at a slower rate than the Wales figure.

The percentage of young people in Merthyr Tydfil who are NEET is above the Welsh average. In 2008 Merthyr Tydfil's performance was fifteenth of the 22 LAs. When taking into account levels of deprivation in the borough, the levels of NEETs are lower than could be reasonably expected.

Attendance

Primary schools

Percentage of school sessions missed due to unauthorised absences			
	2006	**2007**	**2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	0.9%	1.0%	1.0%
Wales	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%
Rank	14	16	16

Percentage of half day sessions attended by pupils			
	2006	**2007**	**2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	91.3%	92.2%	92.2%
Wales	92.5%	93.1%	93.3%
Rank	21	=20	21

Secondary schools

Percentage of school sessions missed due to unauthorised absences			
	2007	**2008**	**2009**
Merthyr Tydfil	1.5%	1.8%	1.3%
Wales	1.8%	1.8%	1.7%
Rank	11	11	= 9

Percentage of half day sessions attended by pupils			
	2007	**2008**	**2009**
Merthyr Tydfil	89.6%	90.6%	90.8%
Wales	90.7%	91%	91%
Rank	20	=16	=14

In primary schools, levels of attendance are below the Welsh average but have improved over the last three years. The percentage of unauthorised absence is only slightly above the all-Wales figure for the last two years and, in 2008, Merthyr Tydfil was ranked sixteenth out of the 22 authorities for this indicator.

In secondary schools, attendance has improved by just under two percentage points since 2006, compared to the all Wales figure of just under one percentage point. The percentage of time missed through unauthorised absence is lower or equivalent to the national figure over the last three years.

Exclusions

Permanent exclusions from maintained secondary schools			
(rate per 1,00 pupils)	**2004-2005**	**2005-2006**	**2006-2007**
Merthyr Tydfil	*	*	*
Wales	1.9	1.2	1.0
Rank	.	.	.

Fixed term exclusions of five days or less from maintained secondary schools			
(rate per 1,000 pupils)	**2005-2006**	**2006-2007**	**2007-2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	61.3	72.2	75.0
Wales	70.7	71.1	70.5
Rank	10	11	15

Fixed term exclusions of six days or more from maintained secondary schools			
(rate per 1,000 pupils)	**2005-2006**	**2006-2007**	**2007-2008**
Merthyr Tydfil	11.6	13.1	9.2
Wales	9.0	9.0	7.7
Rank	16	19	15

* Results not shown where their inclusion may be disclosive

Data indicates that Merthyr Tydfil has good strategies in place to ensure that there have been very few permanent exclusions over the last three years. The all-Wales figure for 2006-2007 was 1%.

However, the low number of permanent exclusions has led to an increase in the number of five day or less fixed term exclusions, at above the Welsh average for the last two years.

The number of exclusions of six days or more, decreased in 2007/08, placing Merthyr Tydfil fifteenth out of the 22 authorities.

Estyn school inspection outcomes

The following table shows the inspection grades for schools inspected in Merthyr Tydfil during the four-year period from September 2005 to March 2009.

Inspection outcomes, Merthyr Tydfil LA, 2005-2006 to 2008-2009								
2005-2006								
	Percentage of schools at each grade for each KQ							
1	Grade 1	40%	40%	60%	100%	60%	40%	60%
2	Grade 2	20%	60%	20%	0%	40%	60%	40%
3	Grade 3	40%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	Grade 4	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	Grade 5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2006-2007								
	Percentage of schools at each grade for each KQ							
1	Grade 1	14%	29%	29%	43%	14%	14%	14%
2	Grade 2	57%	43%	43%	57%	43%	29%	86%
3	Grade 3	29%	29%	29%	0%	29%	57%	0%
4	Grade 4	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	0%	0%
5	Grade 5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2007-2008								
	Percentage of schools at each grade for each KQ							
1	Grade 1	17%	17%	33%	33%	33%	0%	50%
2	Grade 2	67%	67%	50%	67%	50%	67%	33%
3	Grade 3	17%	17%	17%	0%	17%	33%	17%
4	Grade 4	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	Grade 5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2008-2009								
	Percentage of schools at each grade for each KQ							
1	Grade 1	22%	33%	56%	56%	44%	33%	44%
2	Grade 2	67%	56%	44%	44%	33%	44%	44%
3	Grade 3	11%	11%	0%	0%	22%	22%	11%
4	Grade 4	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	Grade 5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
All years								
	Percentage of schools at each grade for each KQ							
1	Grade 1	22%	30%	44%	56%	37%	22%	41%
2	Grade 2	56%	56%	41%	44%	41%	48%	52%
3	Grade 3	22%	15%	15%	0%	19%	30%	7%
4	Grade 4	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	0%
5	Grade 5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Individual schools inspection results September 2005 to March 2009

Key to colours and numbers used in the table:

1 Good with outstanding features	**2 Good features and no important shortcomings**	**3 Good features outweigh shortcomings**	**4 Some good features, but shortcomings in important areas**	**5 Many important shortcomings**

School	KQ1	KQ2	KQ3	KQ4	KQ5	KQ6	KQ7
Edwardsville Primary School	2	2	1	1	1	2	1
Gurnos Nursery School	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Gwaunfarren Primary School	3	2	2	1	2	2	2
Ysgol Gynradd Coed y Dderwen	3	2	3	1	2	2	2
Ysgol Santes Tudful	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bedlinog Primary School	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
St Aloysius Primary School	2	1	1	1	2	2	2
St Illtyds R.C.Primary School	3	3	3	2	4	3	2
Treharris Nursery School	2	2	2	2	3	3	2
Trelewis Primary School	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Ynysowen Primary School	2	2	2	1	2	3	2
Merthyr Tydfil Pupil Referral Unit	3	3	3	2	3	3	2
Abercanaid Community School	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Gellifaelog Primary School	2	2	2	1	1	2	1
Pantysgallog Primary School	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
St Marys R.C. Primary School	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Afon Taf High School	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
Bishop Hedley High School	2	2	1	2	2	2	1
Gwernllwyn Junior School	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Heolgerrig Primary School	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Brecon Road Infants School	2	1	1	1	2	2	2
Goetre Junior School	3	3	2	2	3	3	3
Mount Pleasant Primary School	2	2	2	2	3	3	2
Trefechan Nursery School	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Troedyrhiw Primary School	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cyfarthfa High School	2	2	1	1	1	2	1
Pen-Y-Dre High School	2	2	1	1	1	1	1

This represents a positive picture overall. The inspection outcomes of Merthyr's schools are mainly good or very good overall.

Nearly a quarter of schools received grade 1 for standards, nearly a third received grade 1 for the quality of teaching and a third were judged to have outstanding leadership and management.

Appendix 2

The grade profile

	How good is the local authority's performance?	Will the local authority's performance improve?
Strategic management	2	2
Support for school improvement	2	2
Promoting social inclusion and wellbeing	2	2
Additional learning needs (ALN)	2	1
Access and school organisation	2	2
Support services	2	1

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Farrukh Khan HMI	Estyn	Reporting Inspector
Gerard Kerslake HMI	Estyn	Team inspector
Rhona Edwards HMI	Estyn	Team Inspector
Iwan Roberts AI	Estyn	Team Inspector
Maldwyn Pryse	Seconded Additional Inspector	Team Inspector
Nick Jones	Seconded Additional Inspector	Team Inspector
Stephen Martin	Wales Audit Office	Team Inspector
Alan Lowndes	Additional Inspector	Team Inspector
Michael Newman	Additional Inspector	Team Inspector
Robert Blewitt	Additional Inspector	Team Inspector
Gillian Jones	Additional Inspector	Team Inspector
Russell Ward	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council	Peer Assessor
Margaret Wagner	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	Nominee