

News release

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Funding has helped to develop the role of special schools within local authorities and the wider school community

Today, Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, publishes a report¹ on the impact of special school pilot projects funded by the Welsh Assembly Government's *Unlocking the Potential* programme.

The 'Unlocking the potential of the special school' funding scheme aims to promote the use of special schools as a community-focused resource base.

In September 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government made £5.1 million available over three years to the 22 Local Authorities (LAs) in Wales to set up a range of special school pilot projects. This initiative supported the Assembly Government's aim to raise standards for disadvantaged groups in Wales.

Estyn inspectors found many examples of good practice and concluded that considerable benefits have resulted from the funding. The special schools involved have made good progress towards becoming centres that offer useful resources in a central location. They also model good practice and offer guidance to the wider community.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education and Training in Wales said, "The use of 'unlocking the potential' funding has had a very positive impact on many special schools. Generally, special schools have been very enthusiastic

¹ *The impact of 'unlocking the potential' funding on promoting the use of special schools as community focused resource bases*

and committed to making the best use of this funding. They have developed a wide range of innovative projects designed to improve outcomes for pupils and make stronger links with mainstream schools. We also found that staff in special schools are beginning to feel that their work is more widely valued and the pupils feel more included.”

Inspectors found that the ‘unlocking the potential’ of special schools funding has raised awareness of the expertise that exists in special schools and promoted a good exchange of skills between special and mainstream school staff. The funding has also increased collaborative working between schools and local authorities. Special school staff have benefited from the opportunity to share their expertise. This has resulted in their feeling more a part of their local education community and realising that their work is valued by others.

Areas for improvement include the management of the funding and monitoring and evaluation. Despite regular progress reports and feedback to LAs by special schools, projects are not monitored rigorously enough. In the very small minority of projects that had not worked as well as they could have done, it was because the funding has not been managed or allocated carefully enough in line with the aims and conditions of the grant.

Also, whilst a few schools share the good practice from the projects, some staff are still carrying out this valuable work in isolation and do not know enough about what is working well in the projects across Wales.

Estyn recommends that, if further funding is to be made available, in order to achieve maximum benefits from this initiative, strategic management, monitoring and evaluation should be strengthened.

ENDS

For further information please contact:
Communications, Media and Marketing Team

Estyn

communications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

02920 446464

Notes to Editors:

- Estyn's report 'The impact of 'unlocking the potential' funding on promoting the use of special schools as community focused resource bases' was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and is available in full at www.estyn.gov.uk
- Inspectors sent comprehensive questionnaires to all LAs and special schools involved in the funding pilot. Eighteen LAs and their 34 special schools and one autism unit responded.
- Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales. Estyn commissions independent inspectors (registered, team and lay inspectors) and Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training to carry out inspections across the full range of education and training providers.
- Estyn inspects nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local education authorities (LEAs), primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, independent schools, further education, adult community-based learning, youth support services, local education authorities, teacher education and training, work-based learning, offender learning, careers companies, and the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.