

## **News release**

30 October 2008

### **Pupils' needs not being well met in independent special schools with linked 52-week residential provision**

Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, has today published a report on the way local authorities in Wales plan and monitor the quality of the provision for pupils with complex special needs in independent special schools with linked 52-week residential provision.

Inspectors found that, for the majority of pupils, the particularly complex range of special needs which these pupils have are not being met well in these placements. Local authorities too often focus on finding a school that can meet the pupils' most challenging needs, which are often behavioural, rather than assessing all the complex needs of pupils and making sure the school can meet all of these needs.

There are around 30 establishments in Wales providing residential special education with linked 52 week care provision, catering for approximately 150 pupils from across the UK at any one time. Most of these pupils are looked-after children with complex special needs such as extreme social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and/or other difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

The annual cost of provision for pupils with complex special needs in independent special schools with linked 52-week residential provision can range from £40,000 up to £500,000 per pupil in the most extreme cases. The significant majority of this cost is attributed to the residential aspect of 52-week provision. In 2007, local authorities in Wales spent approximately

£16 million on this type of provision. This means that local authorities use significant resources to meet the needs of these pupils.

Estyn inspectors found that around half of local authorities have not been able to agree with other council services and partners, on their common priorities or the best way to work together to meet these pupils' needs. Consequently, collaborative working arrangements, including pooling of budgets and other resources between local authorities and their health partners have not progressed well enough.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales says, "Addressing complex special needs of this nature often requires schools and local authorities to work effectively together with partners from other agencies, for example children's social services, the youth support services, health services and the police, particularly when the pupils' behavioural problems stem from circumstances at home. Local partners should be seeking to minimise the need for residential placements through delivering holistic support and intervention provided involving the support and guidance for parents combined with support at school that helps improve pupils' learning and behaviour. When they do need to make 52-week residential placements for education and care, local partners should stay fully engaged in ensuring that the placement chosen can meet the young person's needs fully and supporting and monitoring progress thereafter. "

The failure of many local authorities and their health partners to strategically plan and provide enough flexible local services, including family support, has led too many pupils with complex needs to be placed out of their own area to receive education and care.

Inspectors also found too few examples of good, up-to-date pupils' assessment data in many of the schools visited. Therefore, pupils' learning is often hampered by teaching that is not planned to meet their individual needs. This in itself can lead to further behaviour problems as pupils feel frustrated at their difficulties in learning. In the most effective local authorities, officers ensure that comprehensive individual education and care information is passed to the school prior to pupils' placement.

**ENDS**

## **Notes to Editors:**

Estyn's report, 'Local authority placements of pupils with additional learning needs in independent residential special schools', has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The special educational needs 'Code of Practice' 2002 defines a pupil as having special educational needs if he or she has a difficulty which requires special education to be made for him or her.

The term 'additional learning needs' covers a very wide range of needs. We use the term ALN in relation to learners who have needs besides those of most of their classmates, for a number of different reasons, including learners who:

- have special educational needs (SEN), as defined within the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002);
- are disabled, as defined within the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- have medical needs;
- have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties;
- are more able and talented than most of their classmates; and
- are learning English as an additional language

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