



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales



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## **A report on education services in**

**Cardiff Council  
County Hall  
Atlantic Wharf  
Cardiff  
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**Date of inspection: November 2021**

**by**

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

## About Cardiff Council

Cardiff Council is in the city of Cardiff and has a population of 369,000. The local authority maintains 127 schools. There are 98 primary schools, including 15 that provide Welsh-medium education, two dual language and three maintained nursery schools. There are 18 secondary schools including three Welsh-medium schools. In addition, there are seven special schools and one pupil referral unit.

The chief executive took up post in 2013 and the director of education was appointed in 2020. The council leader has been in post since 2017 and the main portfolio holder for education services took up this position in 2015. The local authority was last inspected in 2011 and was placed in the follow up category of Estyn monitoring. At a subsequent follow up visit in 2014 the local authority was found to be in need of significant improvement and remained in this category until 2016.

Cardiff is one of five local authorities in the Central South Consortium for school improvement.

In 2020-2021, the Council's net education budget was around £360,114,000. The delegated school budget per pupil in 2021-22 is £5,064, the 5th highest of all local authorities in Wales.

Inspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating outcomes and the quality of education services. They consider this information alongside information about the national population. Some of the most useful information about children and young people is noted below:

- Over a three-year average, 24.5% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are eligible for free school meals, slightly higher than the Wales average of 20.4%. In line with nearly all other authorities in Wales the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals has increased over the past three years.
- 11.8% of pupils aged five and over are fluent in Welsh, which is lower than the Wales average of 16.1%.
- 35.1% of pupils aged five and over are from ethnic minorities, considerably higher than the Wales average of 12.2%.
- 16.6% of pupils have special educational needs, lower than the Wales average of 19.5%.
- 132 children per 10,000 were looked after by the local authority in 2021, which is higher than the Wales average of 115 children per 10,000.

## Summary

In recent years, Cardiff Council has demonstrated a sustained and incremental improvement in the quality and effectiveness of its education services. Senior leaders share a bold and ambitious vision for all learners, which they communicate clearly in the council's 'Capital Ambition' document. The leader of the council, cabinet member and chief executive set out high expectations for officers, schools and other providers and the strong commitment of elected members and officers at all levels to supporting young people and their families is highly evident. The director of education supports fully the 'Cardiff 2030' vision and strategic priorities and the drive towards the Child Friendly City strategy. The Assistant Director for Education and the Assistant Director, County Estates aligned their work effectively throughout the pandemic. This support is well regarded by school and setting leaders.

In general, inspection outcomes between 2017 and March 2020 have been strong especially in the primary sector. Out of the 43 primary schools inspected during this period, four had excellent judgements for standards and 36 good.

The outcomes for pupils across key stage 4 have been above or well above expectations in the majority of schools in the three years up to the pandemic. Outcomes for pupils that are eligible for free-school meals (efsm) has generally been above that of the same group nationally.

Officers across the education directorate work together productively to consider a range of issues in schools. Their joined-up approach enables the local authority to gain a secure understanding of the individual contexts of its schools. The local authority has established strong working relationships with the regional consortium and there are robust processes for the support and challenge to schools causing concern. Presently, improvement partners do not consider Cardiff's strategic priorities well enough for example, the Cardiff Commitment, in their approaches to working with schools and PRUs.

The local authority's strategy for reorganising its schools is focused appropriately on its vision for ensuring high quality learning environments to meet the needs of children and young people as outlined in the 'Cardiff 2030' vision. The School Organisation Programme (SOP) team provide purposeful leadership and direction to help realise this strategy.

The local authority has developed a clearly understood and research-informed strategic vision to support youth engagement and progression for young people after they have left school. Strong political and executive leadership of the 'Cardiff Commitment', through an ambitious city-wide alliance, has generated considerable support from a wide range of stakeholders, including senior business, school and college leaders.

The Cardiff Commitment strategy has capitalised on both developing strong and secure links with existing businesses and acted as a powerful lever for attracting investment from organisations whose corporate priorities align with those of the council. Priorities such as social mobility and the provision of work-related experiences for children and young people. Particular aspects of the work are highly

effective, for example the inclusion of young people in helping to influence decisions that affect them.

The local authority has a well-established Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) that oversees support for pupils who have English or Welsh as an additional language. The service has adapted its priorities appropriately over recent years to help address the changing pattern of support needed by schools, pupils and their communities. The educational support to asylum seekers is a particularly effective aspect of this work.

The local authority works well with other directorates and partners to provide support for children who are looked after. The corporate parenting strategy is supported by a comprehensive action plan which clearly outlines the responsibilities across directorates such as education, housing and children's services and partner agencies including Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and South Wales Police.

Cardiff youth service provides high quality provision in prioritised areas of the city that includes a mixture of open access and targeted work. Young people, in the areas served, are at the heart of service development. Support for young people's emotional health and wellbeing and the effective use of digital platforms are particularly strong aspects of the provision.

Senior officers and elected members understand well the broad challenges facing the education service. They recognise that in a few instances, the quality of evaluation at service or team level is too variable which hinders officers from identifying and addressing areas that need to improve. Leadership at senior officer level, for example, does not always provide effective strategic direction to help stimulate the demand for Welsh-medium education in all areas of the city. In addition there is a recognition that counselling services have been weak in supporting the wellbeing needs of children and young people.

## Recommendations

- R1 Improve counselling services for children and young people
- R2 Improve the quality of self-evaluation at service and team levels across the directorate
- R3 Ensure that the work of the regional consortium is focused appropriately on Cardiff's strategic priorities
- R4 Ensure clear strategic leadership and oversight of the development of Welsh-medium education

## What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of the publication of the inspection report

We will invite the provider to prepare three case studies on its work in relation to the Cardiff Commitment, support for asylum seekers and transforming youth work for dissemination on our website.

## Main findings

### Outcomes

We are unable to provide a full evaluation of outcomes. This is due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the suspension of inspections of schools and most other education providers since March 2020. It is also due to the lack of data about outcomes that can be compared over time as the pandemic caused changes to the way that qualifications were awarded and affected most other data that we consider when making evaluations, such as school attendance, school exclusions and post-16 learner destinations.

Any evaluations that follow provide a context by reporting on outcomes before the pandemic or relate to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

Between September 2017 to March 2020 we inspected seven secondary, 43 primary and two special schools. In addition, we inspected two non-maintained settings. We judged that standards were excellent in two secondary schools, good in a further two and adequate in three. We judged standards to be good in many primary schools and excellent in four. In a further five schools, standards were judged to be adequate. Standards in maintained special schools were good in one and adequate in the other. In non-maintained settings, standards were good in one. In the other there were too few children to comment. Excellent judgements for standards in secondary schools are higher than those nationally and in primary schools are in line with other schools across Wales. No special school received a judgement of excellent compared with just under a third nationally.

Two primary schools were placed in a statutory follow-up category and a further nine schools were placed in the follow-up category of Estyn review. Of these, five were primary schools, three secondary and one special school. One secondary school remains in Estyn review.

Standards at the end of key stage 4 (2017-2019) in eight schools have been consistently high and well above expectations. In a further eight schools standards are generally in line or above expectations. In the remaining two schools, standards are variable in one and consistently below expectations in the other.

Outcomes for pupils that are eligible to free-school meals (efsm) have generally been above that of the same group nationally. The proportion of esfm pupils that achieve 5A/A\* grades is notably higher than the national average. Overall, girls outperform boys across the key stages but the performance is broadly in line with that across Wales. The most notable gap between girls and boys is in literacy.

Prior to the pandemic, inspection judgements for wellbeing and attitudes to learning in Cardiff schools were in line with those nationally, and no school in Cardiff was identified as being unsatisfactory. Overall, school attendance rates were good, although the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent from secondary school was rising and above the Wales average. Pupils eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs continue to be disproportionately impacted

by exclusion. While fixed term exclusion rates were gradually reducing in secondary schools, they were rising considerably in primary schools but this is better than the average in Wales. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training at age 16 was in line with the Wales average.

During the pandemic, children and young people have been supported through a range of activities to support their wellbeing. For example, a considerable number of young people engaged with beneficial activities led by the youth service, including innovative online activities. Many thousands of children and young people participated in the 'Summer of Smiles' programme in 2021 as part of Cardiff's work to be a 'Child Friendly City', which provided an extensive range of stimulating and enjoyable activities that supported their wellbeing. However, the overall uptake of the authority's counselling service and the impact that this service has on the wellbeing of children and young people have been weak for a number of years.

Children and young people readily take up opportunities to make their voice heard. They influence decisions that affect them when they are given the opportunity.

## **Education services**

Under Inspection Area 2, Estyn sets local inspection questions that are relevant to each local authority. Local inspection questions focus on education services that relate to the local authority's current strategic priorities or result from information that Estyn has about education services in the local authority.

### **How effective is the challenge, support and intervention in schools to enable all learners to make good progress?**

During the period of the pandemic, the local authority significantly strengthened its relationships with its schools. Throughout this time, enhanced communication and a strong focus on headteacher wellbeing created a sense of partnership and mutual trust and support.

In the directorate, officers across teams work together productively to consider a range of issues in schools. They consider information available to them from a range of perspectives and align their work to key strategic priorities. This joined-up approach enables the local authority to gain a secure understanding of the individual contexts of its schools. Since the start of the pandemic, each member of the extended management team is linked to a cluster of schools which provides further opportunities to identify important aspects of provision and practice. These helpful ways of working mean that any issues pertaining to schools are shared with the senior management team in a timely manner.

The local authority has established strong working relationships with principal improvement partners from the regional consortium and there are robust processes for the support and challenge to schools causing concern.

The All Schools Risk meeting is used to good effect. Officers from a range of teams such as human resources, safeguarding and additional learning needs (ALN) contribute valuable intelligence about each school. These meetings are chaired by principal improvement partners. The local authority collates information and

evaluates the interventions and the work of improvement partners effectively to gain a rounded picture of improvement and to intervene in schools in an efficient way. As a result, they generally have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of Cardiff schools. Many schools in an Estyn follow-up category, for example, have made enough progress to be removed from that category. In general, improvement partners provide a sound evaluation of progress based on first-hand evidence of provision and leadership in these schools. However, contributions from improvement partners do not always help officers to consider how aspects of support might link to improvements, for example in teaching and learning experiences.

Principal improvement partners share information with improvement partners that help them to understand the individual contexts of each school. Throughout the pandemic, the improvement partners have complemented the local authority's approach to support headteachers' wellbeing effectively. They are clear that their brief is to support schools in a bespoke way and are sensitive to the current context in schools. However, improvement partners' reports are not always evaluative enough. There is too much variation, for example, in how they report key aspects of the school's work, especially with regards to teaching and the curriculum. Furthermore, their work does not reflect Cardiff's strategic priorities well enough, for example the work of the Cardiff Commitment.

The very recently introduced 'Team Around the School' meetings, for a very few schools, are proving to be an additional helpful way of ensuring that integrated support is offered to schools where there are specific concerns. Examples include supporting schools with additional learning needs reform and other provision such as support for pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language.

There are various approaches to sharing effective and innovative practice between schools. However, not all schools know how to access these.

The local authority provides a valuable range of professional learning for headteachers, teachers and support staff. These complement the offer from the regional consortium by providing learning opportunities that are tailored effectively to the local context. These include a programme for new headteachers that provides helpful practical guidance for leading a school in Cardiff, and support for schools in implementing additional learning needs reform. The local authority uses the expertise within its teams to provide professional learning opportunities that support the local authority's strategic priorities well. For example, the e-learning team has worked with practitioners during the pandemic to create a 'technologically literate workforce', and teaching assistants have benefited from training in literacy approaches.

The local authority has capitalised on its partnership working with higher education institutions to develop learning opportunities for practitioners. Working with the Open University, the local authority offers a programme which focuses on developing teaching approaches and content for distance learning. To help practitioners engage with Curriculum for Wales developments, the local authority has launched a 'computation in the curriculum' course in partnership with Swansea University. This course supports practitioners to consider curriculum planning for computing, linked to science and technology. The course is delivered with industry partners through live online sessions.



## **How well does the local authority school organisation planning ensure appropriate education provision for all children and young people, including pre-school provision?**

The local authority's strategy for reorganising its schools is focused appropriately on its vision for ensuring high quality learning environments to meet the needs of children and young people as outlined in the Cardiff 2030 plan.

In general, the School Organisation Programme (SOP) team provide purposeful leadership and direction to help to realise this strategy. The SOP team have clear roles and responsibilities and have a broad and suitable range of experience and expertise in planning for school places. They use a good range of information sources including building condition surveys, research evidence and data effectively to help inform their strategic decisions. This ensures that they have up-to-date knowledge of the condition, sufficiency and suitability of their school buildings. The SOP team also make good use of a range of partners and external providers to complement this process. For example, they recently commissioned a survey of all schools and settings to determine the efficiency of buildings to inform future investment and reduce energy costs. This is helping the team to plan a substantial investment programme over the next five years to support the required improvements to around two thirds of school buildings. Although the plan has been shared with key stakeholders including school leaders, chairs of governing bodies and elected members, the SOP team recognise the need to improve communication with schools particularly in relation to the roll-out of the programme and the prioritisation of urgent repairs and maintenance.

The local authority has invested well in a range of capital projects during the first phase of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools between 2014 and 2019. This has enabled it to make good progress in ensuring that there are the right schools, of the right type and in the right places to meet the needs of their learners. The local authority has increased planned investment to over £284million for the five-year period from 2019. Although the rollout of this programme has been delayed slightly by the COVID-19 pandemic, the SOP team have ensured that consultation and key decision processes have continued.

In general, the local authority has invested in a suitable range of capital projects to increase Welsh-medium education capacity. The SOP team recognise the need to be proactive in their planning of school places to stimulate demand for Welsh-medium education across the city through the draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-32. The political leadership has a clear understanding of the requirement to increase capacity in all Welsh-medium sectors. Recent proposals, such as the consultation to establish a new dual stream school at the new Plasdŵr housing development, are a positive step and signal the local authority's commitment to increase Welsh-medium education capacity in line with its local development plan. However, the leadership at senior officer level does not always provide effective strategic direction to help stimulate the demand for Welsh-medium education in all areas of the city.

The local authority has recently consulted on proposals to increase additional learning needs (ALN) provision to help meet the current and projected demand for services and improve the learning environment. Recent proposals, such as those

seeking to provide quality primary school special school places for pupils with Emotional Health and Wellbeing Needs and Specialist Resource Base places for those with complex needs, are based on appropriate principles and will increase capacity considerably. In addition, the local authority recognises appropriately the need to increase Welsh-medium ALN provision to meet the growing demand for specialist support for pupils. The opening of a new Welsh-medium Specialist Resource Base at Ysgol Gymraeg Pwll Coch has increased capacity for pupils with ALN in the primary sector. There are plans similarly to increase Welsh-medium capacity for pupils with ALN who require specialist support in secondary schools as the current provision does not always meet the demand for places.

The local authority plans appropriately for nursery education through a combination of maintained schools and a few non-maintained settings. In general, these arrangements provide suitable opportunities for parents and carers to choose the provision within their locality. However, the historic high demand for places for nursery provision in a few areas of the city can limit the choice for parents and carers, particularly for those choosing to attend Welsh-medium provision.

The SOP team value the input of key stakeholders such as Mudiad Meithrin and other organisations to help establish wraparound arrangements when planning new schools. They make good use of well-established links between the team and key professionals across the local authority, other agencies and community groups to evaluate the needs of communities. This includes consulting with a suitable range of stakeholders when undertaking an evaluation on education and community services in specific areas of the city. These proposals help the local authority to meet its aspiration to ensure that schools are an integral part of their communities and help meet the local needs.

### **How well is the local authority working with partners (and young people) through the 'Cardiff Commitment' to meet its ambition that all learners progress into education, employment or training post-16?**

The local authority has developed a clearly understood and research-informed strategic vision to support youth engagement and progression for young people after they leave school. Strong political and executive leadership of the Cardiff Commitment, through an ambitious city-wide alliance, has generated considerable support from a wide range of stakeholders, including senior business, school and college leaders.

The Cardiff Commitment has been a powerful lever for attracting investment from businesses and industry in education, training and employment opportunities for young people. The aims of this long term strategy have evolved suitably in response to national educational priorities and the challenges of the pandemic.

Strong strategic leadership has ensured that the Cardiff Commitment priorities align closely with regional goals through the work of the Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership. This has produced an effective, cohesive strategy that benefits young people. The governance framework supports the integration of the Cardiff Commitment priorities across the council's directorates and has improved officers' understanding of the skills requirements of employers, particularly in new growth sectors such as cyber security. The Cardiff Commitment team holds useful training

events for partners that helps to develop their understanding of the barriers and challenges young people face, particularly in the city's most disadvantaged communities.

Importantly, the Cardiff Commitment operational steering group maintain good oversight of progress against the priorities. Their operational leadership is strong and the reach of their work is extensive. Partners and schools value their expertise and support. Leading by example, the local authority's internal services work together successfully to provide numerous valuable opportunities for young people, such as apprenticeships, work experience, volunteering, traineeships and jobs.

The local authority communicates very successfully with schools, young people and partners, through media including a dedicated Cardiff Commitment website, the 'What's next?' platform, social media pages and frequent newsletters. This enables officers to make schools and other providers aware of the breadth of opportunities available to young people and to broker partnerships that meet schools' individual needs. Initiatives, such as 'Open your eyes' weeks, have supported senior leaders and staff in schools to develop their knowledge of the skills employers are looking for, as well as providing primary-aged pupils with valuable insight into a wide range of careers and further learning.

Despite this approach being relatively new, the school business forum is already making a difference to pupils in secondary schools. Termly strategic meetings between employers and senior school leaders direct this work successfully. They identify suitable learning pathways and embed worthwhile careers and work related experiences within the curriculum. Less well developed are the local authority's processes for ensuring that consortium improvement partners support and challenge schools about those pupils at risk of not being in education, employment or training and are fully aware of and support the Cardiff Commitment.

A healthy culture of discussion and reflection between various partners at different levels of the work provides useful feedback that informs effective planning for improvement. For instance, focus groups held with groups of learners, such as those who are educated other than at school, have helped the local authority to understand better how to tailor experiences to their needs. The partnership also benefits from intelligence gathered about the labour market in Cardiff by the Economic Development directorate to target resources and ensure projects are relevant for young people.

Improvements to the identification and tracking of pre-16 learners identified as vulnerable, those leaving Year 11 and post-16 young people mean that the local authority and its partners are better placed to provide timely and individualised support. For example, the weekly multi-agency transition forum uses this information well to address the enhanced needs of young people with additional learning needs. In particular, youth mentors play a strong role in supporting their transition to Cardiff and Vale College.

The local authority understands that the increasing scale of partners and opportunities available through the Cardiff Commitment, coupled with the impact of the pandemic, poses challenges for the strategic management of this aspect of its work. Officers recognise the need to review provision to ensure that vulnerable

learners who are at greatest risk of not progressing into or sustaining a post-16 destination benefit from the support and opportunities offered. They have also identified the need to ensure an equitable and appropriately tailored offer for Welsh-medium schools, special schools and the pupil referral unit through the Cardiff Commitment.

Over time, the local authority has been highly effective in co-ordinating young people's access to careers advice, work-related experiences and learning pathways through successful partnership working between education providers, and public, private and third sectors. This has been instrumental in raising aspirations for children and young people across the city.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic the local authority's strengthened focus on post-16 transition through the work of the Cardiff Commitment has continued to have a positive impact for most learners in supporting them into education, employment and training.

### **How well does the local authority meet the educational needs of children and young people who have English and Welsh as an additional language?**

The local authority has a well-established Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service team that oversees support for pupils who have English or Welsh as an additional language. The service has adapted its priorities appropriately over recent years to help address the changing pattern of support needed by schools, pupils and their communities. Officers facilitate regular opportunities to share effective practice with other local authorities across Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom and use beneficial ideas from others to strengthen their work. For example, officers have adapted strong provision in family engagement, used in another Welsh local authority, to strengthen their advice to schools in this area.

The local authority distributes grant funding to schools based on the annual 'Needs Assessment' survey of pupils' language acquisition. It allocates nearly all of the grant directly to schools to enable them to choose how to support their pupils. Schools consider this a beneficial way of distributing funding, and it enables them to employ staff to provide bespoke support for pupils in their specific communities. The local authority uses the remaining grant to centrally fund a small team of professionals including 'Closing the Gap' officers assigned to each part of the city. One of these officers works predominantly with Welsh-medium schools to oversee their provision for pupils who have Welsh as an additional language. The team responds rapidly if a school is in need of immediate support. For example, when one primary school received a large number of Chinese pupils, the central team supported the school to find volunteers to work with these pupils in their home language. Overall, schools feel that the work of the central team is highly successful in helping them to support pupils and staff effectively.

The local authority provides helpful guidance and support schools about how to use their grant funding. However, the local authority does not routinely monitor how all schools spend their grant and its overall impact on improving pupils' outcomes and wellbeing.

The local authority's provision to support pupils new to Welsh-medium education is effective. Nearly all pupils who attend the local authority's two Welsh-medium immersion units, one primary and one secondary, make good progress in becoming confident in their use of Welsh. As a result, after an appropriate period of time in a unit, these pupils access the mainstream Welsh-medium curriculum successfully. The local authority uses the provision as additional support for pupils in Welsh-medium schools who have been negatively affected by periods of lockdown to help improve their Welsh language skills.

Officers organise regular training events for school staff on relevant themes, for example on re-engaging with pupils who have English as an additional language after lockdown and supporting the wellbeing of asylum seekers, refugees and new arrivals. They use these events to facilitate the sharing of good practice by inviting schools to showcase their work.

As a result of this strong support and practice, many pupils who have English as an additional language achieve well when compared to their peers, particularly by the end of key stage 4.

The local authority provides a high level of support for asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in the area. This includes providing highly effective support for the educational needs of newly arrived children by swiftly arranging learning opportunities for them. For example, within two weeks of their recent arrival in the city, officers co-ordinated teaching for large groups of children from Afghanistan. This includes refugees who are being accommodated in Cardiff before their dispersal to other parts of Wales. The local authority is working with local primary and secondary schools to release teachers who speak relevant languages to support these pupils. This support is provided either at its accommodation or in the school setting where it is possible to do so.

### **How well do education services work with other directorates and partners to provide support to improve the education outcomes and wellbeing of children who are looked after?**

The evaluations in this section of the report provide a context by reporting on outcomes before the pandemic or relate to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

The number of children who are looked after by the local authority has increased year-on-year for at least the past seven years. The majority are educated in Cardiff schools or other providers within the local authority. The local authority has strengthened its systems for capturing the end of key stage education performance information. Over time the performance of children who are looked after has generally improved but is more variable for pupils at key stage 4 and significantly lower than children who are not looked after.

The recently revised corporate parenting strategy provides a clear framework for work between directorates in the local authority and partners. Importantly, children and young people shared their views, worries and aspirations for the future. As a result, the strategy focuses on five key issues that directly impact on children and young people who are looked after. These include, for example, improving the

emotional wellbeing and physical health of children who are looked after, improving their educational achievement, employment and training, and providing them with comfortable, safe and stable homes.

The local authority works well with other directorates and partners to provide support for children who are looked after. The corporate parenting strategy is supported by a comprehensive action plan, which clearly outlines the responsibilities across directorates such as education, housing and children's services and partner agencies including Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and South Wales Police. Elected members have recently received an update on activity that relates to the priorities in the strategy. However, this generally relates to activity undertaken and the direct impact on children who are looked after is not always clear.

The local authority has very recently established the corporate parenting operational group. The aim of this group is to provide multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions to the identified priorities in the corporate parenting strategy. Local authority officers from education and children's services meet at least monthly and discuss key areas of work including individual cases. Importantly, they provide elected members with regular updates on the different aspects of their work and signal to members both existing and future service pressures. The creation of the performance dashboard has assisted officers in this. Elected members understand their corporate parenting role and discharge this duty effectively.

The education directorate has recently taken responsibility for the completion of personal education plans and this has significantly increased the rate of their completion. However, the local authority does not systematically capture and evaluate learner wellbeing and progression data. Similarly, whilst the local authority works closely with the regional consortium regarding the allocation of the pupil development grant for children who are looked after, the local authority does not evaluate the overall quality of planning and impact of the use of the grant.

The local authority celebrates the individual successes of children and young people through the Bright Sparks Awards. This is an inclusive, child-centred event that involves children and young people from a range of provision including out of county providers.

The local authority has recently created additional staffing capacity and appointed four learning mentors to work with children who are coming to the end of their statutory schooling and an inclusion teacher to support the development of individual plans for children with additional learning needs. This builds on support formalised in recent years and captured in team pledges of provision for children who are looked after.

Over time the local authority has developed strong and valued relationships with establishments it commissions to provide education for children who are looked after. The local authority issues providers with a quality assurance framework and has discussions with providers on curriculum provision, planning for pupil progression and self-evaluation. The local authority sets out clearly the range of information it expects providers to report on in relation to education provision and pupil progress. Communication between officers and providers is regular and effective. Generally, officers provide appropriate challenge to changes in provision and in discussing the

outcomes of Estyn visits with providers. In addition to the quality assurance framework, providers benefit from the safeguarding self-evaluation toolkit provided by the local authority. In a very few cases, support from the local authority for children who are looked after and have additional learning needs is not always timely enough. Whilst the local authority works closely with education other than at school providers the recording of systematic monitoring of individual providers is inconsistent.

The local authority has very recently established a residential assessment centre based in Cardiff. Children attend for a short period whilst their health, education and welfare needs are assessed. The intention is that this approach will inform the matching of individuals' needs to future placements. Whilst this is a positive development and signals the intention of the local authority to tailor long-term provision for children who are looked after, the impact of this new provision is not yet established.

### **How well does the local authority use youth work to support young people?**

Cardiff youth service provides high quality provision in prioritised areas of the city that includes a mixture of open access and targeted work. Young people, in the areas served, are at the heart of service development.

The service works with six partner youth and community work providers which enhances the offer to young people. There is a wide variety of provision which meets key local and national priority areas for youth work. For example, youth mentors work in secondary schools and support those pupils at risk of becoming not engaged in employment, training, or employment. In addition, the youth service provides support for young people that are homeless. Support for young people's emotional health and wellbeing is particularly strong.

Youth workers are adaptable, resourceful and well qualified for the wide variety of roles they carry out. There is strong and well-established partnership working such as with youth justice, social services, and through the development of youth action groups.

Youth workers provided a high level of support to young people and to education services during lockdowns. They worked alongside other colleagues to provide valuable support to young people identified as likely to benefit from school-based hub provision. Where appropriate, youth workers carried out controlled home visits and delivered more than two thousand food parcels to families. The youth service was agile in adapting its provision to better meet the needs of young people. When youth centres closed, youth workers undertook outreach work and teams assisted in managing incidents involving gangs of young people.

Over the last 12 months the youth service has developed an innovative digital youth work offer, which is delivering effective youth work to a broader range of young people in the city. This work is led by young people who worked effectively with youth workers and web developers to create a bespoke young person friendly website for the youth service. They collaborated with partners and determined the content and most appropriate digital platform for online activities. The local authority has recognised the value of this approach and has plans to further develop this aspect of youth work provision.

Young people from disadvantaged areas of the city are targeted effectively. However, the service offers limited access to young people from a wider socio-economic background from across the city. As a result, all young people do not have the same opportunities to benefit from youth service provision or the support that youth workers provide.

Youth work services are highly valued by those who receive them. Generally, too many school leaders, governors and wider partners do not understand the full extent and potential of this work in supporting all young people.

There are good examples of individuals using the Welsh language with young people as part of the youth work offer. However, the local authority does not make effective use of Welsh-speaking staff to enrich and widen the youth service offer. Overall, there is an insufficient proactive offer for young people to engage with the Welsh language and an open access youth work through the medium of Welsh is not integrated well within mainstream provision.

The council has recently directed additional funding to support various initiatives to engage with young people and improve their health and well-being in response to the pandemic. However, the future sustainability of these initiatives is uncertain due to the reliance on limited term grant funding from external sources.

Leaders have a secure understanding of provision. Arrangements for quality assuring service provision are effective. Strategic plans for the youth service align well with council priorities and reflect the council's commitment to a child friendly city. In addition, members of Cardiff Youth Forum sit on a number of scrutiny committees.

## **Leadership and management**

Senior leaders in Cardiff share a bold and ambitious vision for all learners and clearly communicate that 'education is everybody's business' in the 'Capital Ambition'. Through the 'Capital Ambition', the leader of the council, cabinet member and chief executive set out high expectations for officers, schools and other providers with due regard for the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. A notable strength of the local authority is the work with partners both within and beyond the council in delivering key strategies effectively, including the Cardiff Commitment. The director of education supports fully the 'Cardiff 2030' strategic vision and priorities, and the drive towards the Child Friendly City strategy. Corporate ambitions inform relevantly the work of the education team, along with specific priorities identified within the directorate.

The children and young people's scrutiny committee provides strong and timely scrutiny on a number of relevant issues facing education in the local authority, including sensitive school organisation proposals and a range of school support services. Officers, and invited partners, provide clear and useful reports to the committee. Senior officers assist the committee further by providing clarity and relevant additional information during the meetings and during the pre-scrutiny stage. The scrutiny committee follow up areas of focus in their work programme and write to the cabinet member to express their observations with suitably challenging recommendations. Training for scrutiny members over time has been beneficial and the chair and committee members have accessed useful guidance on their role of



scrutinising and challenging performance or policy. Since 2018, the committee has included a youth forum representative who brings a helpful viewpoint to scrutiny discussions. During the pandemic the chair of the children and young people's scrutiny committee worked effectively with the four other scrutiny chairs, ensuring that education was at the heart of critical decision-making related to COVID-19.

The strong commitment of elected members and officers at all levels to supporting young people and their families is highly evident. The assistant director for education and his counterpart with responsibility for health and safety aligned their work effectively throughout the pandemic. Consequently, they are now able to respond swiftly to the needs of schools and other providers as the COVID-19 situation changes. This support is very well regarded by school and setting leaders. Over this period, officers have developed stronger and more collaborative relationships with school leaders. Through this work they have engendered trust, providing a sound basis for purposeful collaborative improvement work in the future.

Senior officers and elected members understand well the broad challenges facing the education service. They recognise it is timely to refresh the ten-year vision "Cardiff 2030", not least because of the changes in education due to the pandemic, and have taken early steps to do so. In the main senior officers hold clear roles and responsibilities linked to activity across the directorate and carry out these functions well. In general, service teams are purposeful and effective when carrying out their work. In a few instances, teams do not gather pertinent information from schools, such as grant funding spends, to evaluate the impact of their work or to amend their team plans relevantly. In a few instances, lines of accountability are not sufficiently clear, for example regarding the strategic leadership of all aspects of Welsh-medium provision and the general development of the Welsh language across Cardiff schools.

There is a strong corporate commitment to open, regular and rigorous self-evaluation to support planning for improvement, and this is evident in the focused approach to self-evaluation of strategic priorities in the education directorate. The directorate's own evaluation of progress against its priorities broadly accords with the findings in this inspection, and this is also reflected in Cardiff's most recent annual wellbeing report.

The local authority has sustained progress in addressing areas for improvement highlighted in Estyn's last inspection work with the local authority 2016.

Since the highly critical inspection of youth justice services in July 2020, the local authority has appointed an external independent chair of the service and increased governance and leadership capacity. The local authority has provided reassurance around the many specific educational issues in relation to supporting children and young people. However, leaders within relevant service areas are not well sighted on these, nor do they have a good enough grasp of the role of the education officer.

Performance management arrangements are appropriate. There is a range of processes in place through the year that ensure that education services, in the main, are monitored closely. For example, issues with the performance of traded services, especially in relation to budget positions, were tabled at an education management team assurance meeting mid-way through the current financial year and actions to

address these issues was discussed. The local authority manages risks well that affect education services, with appropriate escalation and de-escalation to the corporate risk register.

The local authority engages well with stakeholders to inform the evaluation and planning of education services. In particular, the local authority has strengthened the influence of children and young people, especially through its work towards becoming a 'child friendly city'. For example, there are three grand councils every year that bring children and young people together, including those who are vulnerable, from across the city to explore a specific theme. The local authority has trained officers and elected members to understand the rights of children and to take their views into account in decision-making processes. The local authority has adjusted its impact assessments to include a children's rights impact assessment. The education directorate also works effectively with school leaders, governors, other authority services and external partners, and takes good account of their views.

The quality of evaluation at service or team level is too variable. Responsible officers do not always consider the full range of information relevant to their services or are not sharp enough in their evaluations. As a result, officers sometimes do not identify areas for improvement. For example, officers have not evaluated partnership work with the regional consortium with sufficient rigour to ensure it meets the precise requirements of the local authority well enough, or challenged robustly the impact of this work over time. Another example is that, although outcomes from the school-based counselling service have been weak for several years, this is not picked up in self-evaluation or highlighted as an area for improvement.

The local authority has well-established performance management arrangements for staff. These focus appropriately on corporate, directorate and team priorities. In addition, they duly consider the professional learning objectives of officers. The council has mandated that all officers undertake e-learning in topical and important issues such as domestic abuse and sexual violence, children's rights and Welsh language awareness. Cardiff Council's academy provides a range of useful opportunities for staff from across the organisation to develop their skills in, for example British sign language, mentoring young people and accredited courses in leadership. In addition, and where appropriate, bespoke professional learning is commissioned, for example on specific aspects of additional learning needs. Drop-in sessions, facilitated by senior leaders, have been used to good effect to keep all staff appraised of strategic and operational developments over the period of the pandemic.

Despite a rich professional learning offer being available for staff the systematic tracking and reporting on the impact of these opportunities is under-developed. As a result, senior leaders do not have a good enough understanding of the impact of professional learning on individuals or service areas.

The safeguarding of children and young people is a high priority across all education departments. There is a strong corporate understanding that safeguarding is everybody's concern, and this is reflected in the local authority's policies and practices. The local authority has a robust quality assurance process for corporate safeguarding. All departments undertake an annual safeguarding self-evaluation and from this create their action plans for improvement.

Safeguarding officers provide schools and other providers with a high level of support including training for designated safeguarding persons and governors, and regular written updates. They respond quickly to address concerns from practitioners. In addition, the work of the Cardiff multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is effective in providing schools with support and in dealing with concerns. The work of the Prevent team is particularly valuable in providing schools with training and ongoing support to help recognise if children and young people are being drawn into extremism or radicalisation.

The recently introduced local authority funded online package to record safeguarding concerns is now used in all schools, the youth service and providers of education other than at school (EOTAS) within the local authority. This system is beginning to deliver a more consistent approach to the recording and sharing of safeguarding information.

Currently the local authority does not collect data from all schools on important issues such as allegations of bullying and positive handling and as a result, officers are not able to analyse or address trends.

The Council's allocation of resources reflects the priority afforded to education services. The local authority spends above the indicator based assessment for education services and has increased and protected schools' budgets against a backdrop of financial pressures across the council. The local authority also has a significant capital programme in relation to schools both in terms of new school builds and investment in its existing schools' estate. The local authority delegates the highest proportion of its education budget to schools of any council in Wales and has a comprehensive range of service level agreements in place with a large uptake of the services provided by schools.

Overall, the education budget is projected to overspend at the end of 2021-2022 by £1m and the local authority recognises that there has been a growing reliance in some schools and some Education Directorate teams on external grant funding, surplus balances or Covid Hardship Funding to maintain spending and staffing levels.

Schools' balances overall significantly increased over the 2020-2021 financial year, although this was largely due to additional funding being received from Welsh Government. Despite this additional funding, two schools remained in a deficit position at the end of the 2020-2021 financial year and four schools have set a deficit budget for 2021-2022.

The local authority has arrangements in place to work with the schools in deficit and has intervened appropriately. This action included removing the delegated budget from a secondary school and the subsequent re-introduction of the delegated budget following support from the council.

The local authority works well with the school budget forum in a transparent manner. The local authority has established task and finish groups involving schools' representatives to consider the schools funding formula and how medium term financial planning of schools can be strengthened. The task groups are due to discuss their findings and recommendations with the school budget forum.

The local authority recognises a number of key financial challenges due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic and is taking appropriate action. These include the need to strengthen the sustainability of traded services and review the business models for specialist additional learning needs services, educational psychology services, school meals and music tuition.

## Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- consult the local authority on the local inspection questions to be used during the inspection, based on the authority's self-evaluation, strategic plans and relevant data held by Estyn
- analyse the outcomes from open questionnaires, including the views of learners, parents, school staff and governors, local authority staff, regional consortium staff, elected members and general public
- carry out a preliminary visit to the local authority to meet with a range of relevant partners to education services, such as learner representatives, headteachers and governors, and leaders from statutory and third sector agencies working with children and young people

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet with the leader of the council, elected members responsible for education services, elected members responsible for the scrutiny of education services, the chief executive, the director of education, other leaders and managers in education services, other relevant staff in the local authority, the managing director of the regional consortium for school improvement and other relevant staff from the regional consortium
- look closely at the local authority's self-evaluation processes
- consider the local authority's strategic and operational plans for improvement
- scrutinise a variety of documents, including information on learner outcomes, information on the performance of schools and other education settings, including information from the regional consortium for school improvement, minutes from a range of meetings, reports presented to council or scrutiny, information relating to the safeguarding of learners and any other information relevant to the local authority's education services held by Estyn

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection
- provide a draft copy of the report for the local authority to note any concerns with factual accuracy, and made amendments where necessary

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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