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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales



WALES **AUDIT** OFFICE
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Quality and standards in education and training in Wales

A report on the quality of

**Denbighshire
Local Authority**

**Strategic management
School improvement
Promoting social inclusion and well-being
Additional learning needs**

July 2007

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 education authorities (LEAs);
- ▲ 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;
- ▲ LEAs;
- ▲ 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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Context

The Inspection

- 1 In April 2006, a six-year cycle of Local Authority service inspections, under section 38 of the Education Act 1997 and the Children Act 2004, began. The inspection framework for this cycle is on the Estyn website www.estyn.co.uk.
- 2 This inspection took place from 2 to 6 July 2007. The focus of this inspection is on Denbighshire County Council's services for:
 - supporting school improvement;
 - promoting social inclusion and well-being;
 - additional learning needs; and
 - the strategic management of the services.

Before the inspection, the authority undertook a review of these three services and produced a self-evaluation report as a part of its own review 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 authority's performance in relation to each of four key questions:
- 1 How effective is the authority's strategic planning?
 - 2 How effective are the authority's services?
 - 3 How effective are leadership and management?
 - 4 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.

Background to the authority

- 8 Denbighshire is largely a rural county in North Wales, with a population of 95,990. It contains some of the most prosperous areas within Wales along with some of the most deprived. It covers an area which runs from the North Wales coastal resorts of Rhyl and Prestatyn down through the Vale of Clwyd, south as far as Corwen and Llangollen. Around a quarter of the overall population speaks Welsh but this rises to over 60% in some rural areas.
- 9 Service industries and tourism are the main employers in Denbighshire. Together, these groups account for around 64% of all jobs. Manufacturing provides 13% of jobs and agriculture accounts for a further 3%.
- 10 Denbighshire has 62.4% of its working-age adults economically active compared with 61.0% for Wales. The proportion of self-employed workers (9.8%) is higher than that in Wales (7.7%). A quarter of the workforce is partly skilled or unskilled. The unemployment rate in the County is 2.4%, which is the same as the rate for Wales as a whole. A high level of seasonal employment is the main cause of the transient school population in one area in Rhyl.

Political structure

- 11 After the elections in June 2004 a new authority was formed. The council is led by the Independent group, and members are distributed as follows:
- Independents - 18 members;
 - Conservative - 9 members;
 - Labour - 7 members;
 - Plaid Cymru - 7 members;

- Denbighshire Alliance - 3 members;
- Non-aligned - 3 members.

Authority structure

- 12 The authority is made up of four directorates, each one led by a director. The four directors have responsibility for the following areas:
- resources;
 - environment;
 - social services and housing; and
 - lifelong learning.
- 13 Each directorate is made up of services which are managed by a head of service. The school improvement, social inclusion and additional learning needs functions are located within the education service which, in turn, is within the lifelong learning directorate. The education service is currently going through a restructuring programme. So far this has resulted in the formation of two separate branches. The two branches are called:
- school improvement; and
 - partnerships and inclusion.

The new head of partnerships and inclusion took up her post on 1 July, 2007. At the time of the inspection the head of learning and improvement had not been appointed.

Schools and pupils

- 14 In Denbighshire, there are 52 primary schools, eight secondary schools, two special schools and special units in five primary schools. Together, these schools serve a population of just over 16,000 pupils.
- 15 Primary schools vary greatly in size. A quarter of them, mostly situated in the coastal areas of Rhyl and Prestatyn, have over 200 pupils. Sixty per cent of all primary school pupils in Denbighshire attend these larger schools. In contrast, about half of the primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils, including 12 that have fewer than 50 pupils. These smaller schools, though many in number, serve only 18% of the pupil population. The numbers on roll in secondary schools range from 339 pupils to 1,761. Two of the eight secondary schools have fewer than 500 pupils. There are 265 pupils in the two special schools. The proportion of pupils entitled to free schools meals in Denbighshire is 11.8%, which is below the January 2006 average for Wales (16.0%).

- 16 About one-fifth of the pupils in the authority's schools have special educational needs (SEN)¹. About two-thirds of pupils with SEN in the authority's schools have general or specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia. Almost 12% of pupils with SEN have social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The remaining 22% of pupils with SEN have more complex learning needs that are linked with communication, sensory and/or physical disabilities. This profile of need is broadly similar to the all-Wales picture, except that the proportion of school-aged children with SEN who have autistic spectrum disorder (4.5%) is just over twice that found nationally.
- 17 The proportion of pupils with statements² has been reducing steadily since 2003 and is now, at 3.21%, very close to the national average of 3.15%. The school placement of pupils with statements of SEN in January 2007 was:

School placement for pupils with SEN	Percentage (Authority)	Percentage (Wales)
Mainstream schools (ordinary classes)	51.4	50.9
Mainstream schools (special classes or units)	7.1	20.2
Special schools (including non-maintained)	38.1	24.4
Independent schools	1.8	2.2
Pupil referral units/other than at school	1.6	2.5

- 18 The authority educates a relatively high proportion of pupils with statements of SEN in special schools, and a correspondingly low proportion in special classes or units in mainstream schools. This is mainly a consequence of the authority's change of policy for the issuing of statements. Pupils no longer need a statement of SEN to access a place in a mainstream unit provision or to receive individual support in a mainstream class. Although the authority's criteria for statutory assessment and statements include social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, in practice the authority rarely issues statements for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties as a primary need.
- 19 There are 455 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). These pupils speak 45 different home languages, of which the most common language is Tagalog, which is spoken in the Philippines.
- 20 The authority does not make additional provision for pupils who are more able and talented.

Performance of schools in National Curriculum assessments and public examinations

- 21 Overall performance at key stages 1, 2 and 4 is below the average for Wales. The overall rate of improvement is slower than that achieved nationally. When performance is compared with all 22 authorities across Wales and free school meals entitlement are taken into account, attainment in Denbighshire schools is much lower

¹ Source: Pupil Level Annual School Census Data, January 2006: Local Government Data Unit for Wales, October 2006

² Source: Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs, January 2006: SDR 79/2007, National Assembly for Wales, June 2007

than might be expected. Denbighshire has the sixth lowest free school meal entitlement in Wales at 11.8%, compared with the average for Wales at 16.0%.

Primary schools

- 22 The following table compares the performance of pupils in Denbighshire primary schools in 2006 with that of pupils throughout Wales in attaining the core subject indicator (CSI) in National Curriculum teacher assessments. For 2006, the percentage of pupils attaining the CSI in Denbighshire was lower than for Wales as a whole in key stages 1 and 2. Since 2003, there has been a downward trend in performance at KS1 on the CSI and no consistent upward trend at KS2.

CSI (2006)	Key stage 1	Key stage 2
Denbighshire	79.5%	71.3%
Wales	80.6%	74.2%
Rank³	14	17

Secondary schools

- 23 The following table compares the performance of pupils in Denbighshire secondary schools in 2006 with that of pupils throughout Wales in attaining the core subject indicator (CSI) in National Curriculum teacher assessments and in GCSE examinations. For 2006, the percentage of pupils attaining the CSI in Denbighshire was higher than for Wales as a whole in key stage 3 but lower in key stage 4. Since 2003, there has been a downward trend in performance at KS4.

CSI (2006)	Key stage 3	Key stage 4 (GCSE)
Denbighshire	58.7%	34.3%
Wales	58.2%	39.7%
Rank	10	16

- 24 The performance in Denbighshire for all indicators at GCSE is below average for Wales. The percentage of learners attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C is 18th out of the 22 authorities in Wales. The percentages of learners attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-G and the average points score gained by pupils are both ranked 17th out of the 22 authorities in Wales.

Key stage 4 (2006)	5 A*-C	5 A*-G	Average points score
Denbighshire	48.5%	84.1%	38.2
Wales	53.8%	86.0%	41.2
Rank	18 th	17 th	17 th

- 25 In 2006, 2.6% of pupils in Denbighshire left school with no recognised qualification. This compares with the Welsh average of 2.1%. Only four authorities had a higher figure.

³ When performance is compared to all the 22 authorities across Wales

Sixth form performance

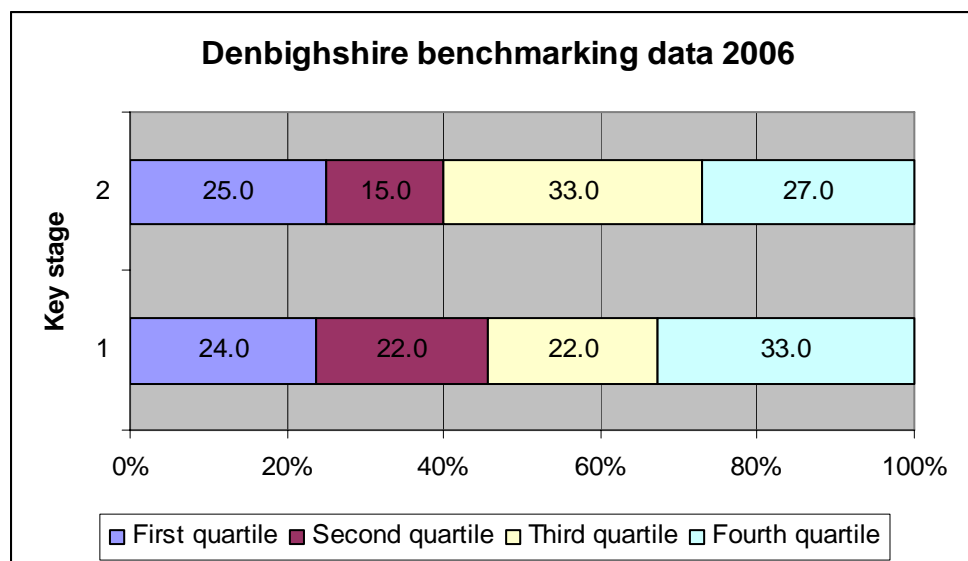
- 26 There has been a downward trend over the last three years in the percentage of learners attaining two or more grades A-C and A-E at 'AS' and 'A' level. This has increased the gap between the figures for the LEA and the national average. The results for Denbighshire are below those for Wales as a whole. In 2006, the average points score and the percentage gaining two AS/A levels were 18th and 19th out of the 22 authorities in Wales.

A level performance	2 or more at A-C			2 or more at A-E			Average points		
	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
Denbighshire	67%	64%	65%	96%	94%	92%	19	19	19
Wales	68%	68%	68%	95%	94%	94%	20	20	20

Comparing performance in National Curriculum assessments and public examinations with similar schools across Wales

Primary schools

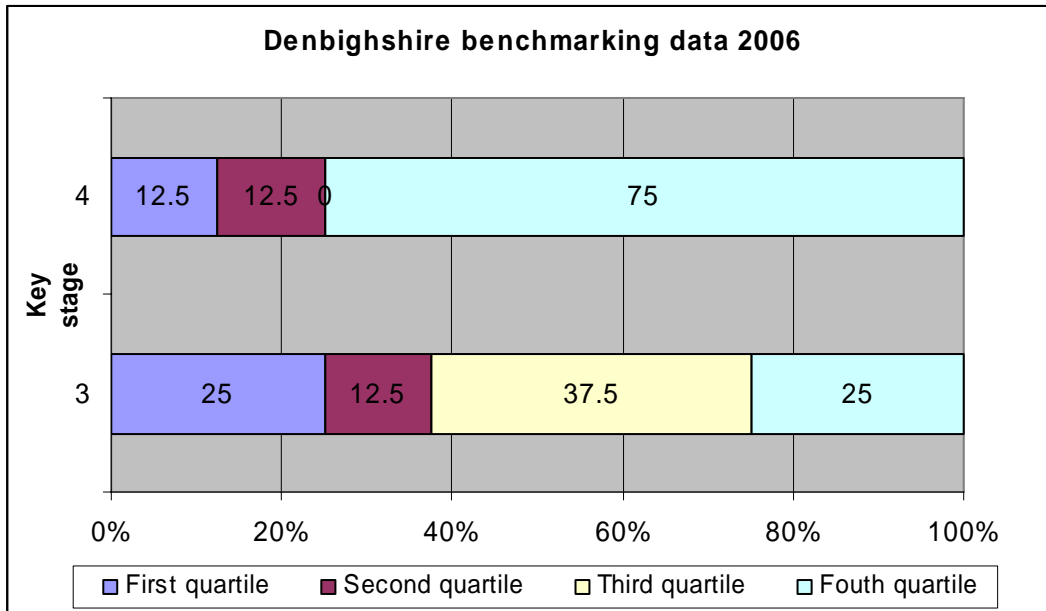
- 27 The following table shows the percentage of Denbighshire primary schools that fall into each quarter within the all-Wales Free School Meals Benchmark Quartiles⁴ for the Core Subject Indicator at each key stage.



- 28 In key stages 1 and 2, more than half of schools in Denbighshire are in the lower performing half for the percentage of pupils attaining the CSI.

⁴ This benchmarking works by ranking all schools in Wales according to their performance outcomes. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in each school is taken into account and the schools' are then ranked again and put into four groups. Each group consists of one quarter of the total number of schools. These groups are called quartiles. This means that a school in the top quartile is performing in the top 25% of similar schools, one in the bottom quartile is amongst the 25% lowest performing schools. In this way, the performance of any individual school, group of schools or whole authority can be compared with that of any other individual school, groups of schools or whole authorities.

- 29 Overall, the performance of secondary schools in Denbighshire schools is well below the expected level when compared with the performance of similar schools across Wales.
- 30 The table below shows the percentage of Denbighshire schools that fall into each quarter within the all-Wales Free School Meals Benchmark Quartiles for the Core Subject Indicator at key stages 3 and 4.



- 31 In key stages 3 and 4, more than half of schools in Denbighshire are in the lower performing half for the percentage of pupils attaining the CSI. In key stage 4, six of Denbighshire's eight secondary schools are in the lowest performing 25% of similar schools in Wales on the CSI.
- 32 Other indicators at key stage 4 show a similar pattern. Six of the eight (75%) of Denbighshire schools are performing in the lower half when the percentage of pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades A*-C is compared to those for similar schools across Wales. Also, 75% of Denbighshire secondary schools are performing in the lower half when the average points score gained per pupil is compared to those for similar schools across Wales.
- 33 The National Assembly for Wales sets benchmarks for performance based on entitlement to free school meals:
- for the percentage of pupils who gain five or more A*-C grades at GCSE;
 - for the average points score per pupil at GCSE; and
 - for the percentage attaining the CSI at key stage 3.
- 34 In 2006, Denbighshire was one of only five authorities across Wales who were below all of these benchmarks. At key stage 4, Denbighshire performance was below two of the benchmark indicators by an amount greater than in any other authority in Wales.

KS3 CSI		5 A*-C		Average points score	
Denbighshire	Benchmark	Denbighshire	Benchmark	Denbighshire	Benchmark
60	63	50	59	39	44

- 35 Value added data⁵ takes into account each pupil's prior attainment and predicts targets for the end of the next key stages. It also takes into account a range of school context indicators, such as the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, to allow for the performance of 'similar' schools. Using value added data, pupils at key stages 3 and 4 in Denbighshire make less progress than pupils in similar schools across Wales. On the basis of key stage 2 performance, the predicted performance at key stage 4 is in the lowest 25% of authorities for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades at A*-C, for the average GCSE points score and for the percentage of pupils attaining the Core Subject Indicator.

Funding

- 36 The Welsh Assembly Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA)⁶ per head of population for Denbighshire Authority is slightly above the average for local authorities in Wales. Within this, the education component – education Indicator-Based Assessment (IBA)⁷ – amounted to £63.7 million for 2006-2007. This represents £3,950 for each pupil in 62 schools, 3% below the Wales average of £4,076; this is the sixth lowest level of education IBA per pupil in Wales.
- 37 The funding per pupil for Denbighshire primary schools in 2006-2007 was the fifth lowest in Wales and for secondary schools the second lowest. This is mainly because the Welsh Assembly Government funding formula weights the indicative resources on the basis of deprivation and sparsely distributed population, both of which are below average in Denbighshire, but Denbighshire County Council decisions also contribute to the level of funding.
- 38 The net education budget⁸ for 2006-2007 was set at 99.7% of the education IBA, but for 2007-2008, in line with many other authorities, this reduced to 98.6%. The resulting net education budget in 2006-2007 was £3,939 per pupil, compared with the average of £4,094 per pupil for all authorities in Wales.

⁵ Value added data takes into account each pupil's prior attainment, gender and month of birth. It also takes into account a range of school context indicators such as the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, mean level and distribution of intake and demographic data to allow for the performance of 'similar' schools.

⁶ SSA is the means by which the Welsh Assembly Government distributes Revenue Support Grant to local authorities.

⁷ Education IBA is that part of SSA relating to the delivery of education services. Education IBA is not intended as a spending target, and councils are free to spend at levels above or below IBA, in accordance with their priorities.

⁸ The net education budget excludes income from specific grants.

Summary

Grade profile

Grade profile for the services inspected	How good is the local authority's performance?	Will the local authority's performance improve?
Strategic management	4	4
Support for school improvement	4	4
Promoting social inclusion and well-being	4	4
Additional learning needs (ALN)	3	4

Strategic management

- 39 Education services overall in Denbighshire have shortcomings in important areas. Although a few officers in Denbighshire work effectively, leaders at all levels in the authority, over a long period of time, have not addressed robustly and comprehensively enough the continual poor performance of schools. The political leadership of education in the authority is ineffective. At both cabinet level and in the scrutiny committee, the challenges to officers about the performance of the education service are not focused enough. Accountability for the poor performance of the education service and schools is unclear. Overall, the authority has a poor track record in managing change and making improvements in education.
- 40 Recently, the directorate has employed consultants to seek an objective view on how schools should be funded in Denbighshire and on modernising education. Although its conclusions are yet unknown, the modernising education review has the potential to contribute to improvement by the education service and schools.
- 41 Consultation and communication within the authority and between the authority and its schools, parents, pupils and key partners in the development of strategies, plans and policies are poor. The authority has not been successful in engaging and influencing schools to work in constructive partnerships with officers and elected members on agreed improvement strategies to raise performance. As a result, there is a lack of clarity at all levels about the authority's key strategic priorities for education. There are no shared understanding and ownership of key priorities between schools and the authority.
- 42 The authority does not have an effective planning system for improvement in education. There is little evidence that its plans are the result of critical self-evaluation and audit of need. The authority has not demonstrated that education and the raising of the standards achieved by all children and young people are its priority.

- 43 The directorate places too much emphasis on performance measurement and not enough on performance management. Currently, the identification of performance against individual indicators is not underpinned by analysis and evaluation leading to actions to improve the outcomes. Although team leaders monitor and evaluate their team's priorities formally on an annual basis, the authority does not evaluate the impact of education service teams with sufficient rigour. As a result, the directorate does not always know if its work is effective or not.
- 44 The processes by which the lifelong learning directorate allocates resources to schools and to centrally funded priorities are not effective and are not sufficiently transparent. The delegation of resources to schools is not targeted closely enough to the needs of pupils and schools. Key issues around school funding formulae have been identified by external consultants and work is taking place to address them.
- 45 There are many important barriers to improving education services in Denbighshire. These barriers impact on all the services inspected.

Support for school improvement

- 46 The authority has not been successful in engaging and influencing schools to work in constructive partnership with officers and elected members on agreed improvement strategies to raise pupil performance.
- 47 School improvement officers know Denbighshire schools well. These officers know through analysing data carefully that many schools are not performing as well as they should. This knowledge has not been used to explore rigorously enough the reasons for the low attainment of pupils at authority level or in individual schools. This is a significant barrier to raising standards.
- 48 The school improvement strategy does not focus on the key priorities and actions needed to raise standards. The recently restructured service aims to give a sharper focus to the work of school improvement officers and has a good range of data on pupils' performance. Officers are beginning to share this information with schools but are not using data and risk assessments rigorously or openly enough to challenge schools about their performance, subsequent actions and their targets for improvement.
- 49 The authority does not have a clear and consistent rationale for target setting to all its schools. Therefore, schools do not have a consistent approach to the use of data in setting realistic and challenging targets. Most schools do not use benchmark or value added data enough to compare their own performance with that in similar schools or to target specific areas for improvement in their own schools. As a result, some of the targets in the authority's single education plan are too high compared with current performance and recent rates of progress.
- 50 There is no clear strategy to raise standards in key stage 3. In addition, the school improvement service is not giving enough priority to improving standards at key stage 4 or in post-16 education.

- 51 The curriculum support element of the school improvement service is shared with Conwy and Flintshire LEAs. The school improvement service does not target curriculum support officers effectively enough to ensure that advisers' time is used most effectively to raise standards.
- 52 There is no cohesive programme for continuous professional development that the education workforce as a whole can access to meet their needs. Although there is a good induction programme for primary headteachers, there is a lack of sustained support for existing headteachers and middle managers to drive forward school improvement.
- 53 The authority has worked effectively with a range of partners in the voluntary sector to develop early years provision for three year olds. Together they provide childcare, language and play, parenting and other integrated services in the integrated centre.
- 54 There is a good range of expertise and initiatives within the school improvement service to address some national priorities. These include the foundation phase, English and literacy, and the promotion of healthy schools.

Promoting social inclusion and well-being

- 55 The authority does not have an overall strategy for services delivering inclusion programmes. As a result, services do not work together well enough to raise standards for all children and young people.
- 56 Recent work to restructure the Children and Young People's Partnership has improved understanding of its purpose within the authority. However, because there are tensions in relationships and ineffective communication between certain parts of education and social services, it is not clear how the lead director and member for children and young people will be able to work effectively with the education service to develop and deliver the Children and Young People's Plan.
- 57 The authority is effective in its duty as a corporate parent for looked-after children. It has a range of individual programmes, including those funded by Cymorth, to support other groups of vulnerable young people such as young mothers. Because of the lack of an overall strategy, these individual programmes have been successful in raising standards for only a few groups of children and young people.
- 58 The authority's attendance strategy has yet to have a positive impact on overall attendance levels, which are below average in both primary and secondary schools. Pupils' learning needs are not always being met by schools. This contributes to them not attending mainstream schools. The attendance strategy has not challenged schools' present practices enough for engaging children and young people and encouraging them to attend school. This is because there is a lack of focus in the authority's partnership work with its schools.
- 59 The behaviour support service works well with schools to advise on and monitor the impact of behaviour strategies. However, whilst schools value the quality of this advice, there are not enough staff available to provide the level of help needed across the county. As a result, too many pupils are excluded permanently or for a fixed period. In addition, those pupils who are not educated at school following exclusions do not receive their statutory entitlement to 25 hours a week of education.

Additional learning needs (ALN)

- 60 The impact of the good, and sometimes very good, work of the ALN services is limited by the lack of an overall co-ordinated inclusion strategy, and the authority's overall lack of a coherent picture of the wider outcomes for pupils with additional learning needs. The authority does not know the costs of particular types of provision relative to the level of need.
- 61 The authority is making good progress in ensuring that schools are accessible for disabled children and young people. It meets the statutory requirements of the SEN and Disability Act (2001). The quality of statements and annual review documents has improved over the past three years, and is now good.
- 62 There are effective arrangements for identifying and assessing the additional learning needs of pre-school children and for providing early support to these children and their families in partnership with local child health services.
- 63 The authority's services for children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD), including those with autistic spectrum disorder, are good with some outstanding features.
- 64 The authority provides effective support for pupils with severe and complex needs and disabilities in its special schools and in special classes in mainstream schools.
- 65 There is an effective and fully bilingual support service for individual pupils with general and specific learning difficulties in mainstream primary schools.
- 66 The authority provides a very good service for pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The service includes effective training for schools and for newly qualified teachers.
- 67 The authority does not provide well enough for the minority (12%) of pupils with SEN who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Officers have not succeeded in enabling mainstream schools to identify the additional learning needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties early enough, or consistently enough. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Recommendations

68 In order to secure the improvements that are needed, the local authority should:

R1 address the issue of poor performance in schools by:

- identifying the reasons why the overall attainment of pupils, particularly at key stage 4, is low and what needs to be done to improve it;
- developing, in partnership with schools, a coherent and specific school improvement strategy sharply focused on the priorities needed to raise performance;
- improving overall attendance figures across the authority;
- reducing permanent and fixed term exclusions;
- improving the amount of provision and support for children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- rigorously monitoring and challenging the performance of schools through the effective use of data; and
- determining schools' entitlement to support from the local authority according to need, and communicating this clearly to schools;

R2 improve the leadership and management of education at all levels of the authority by:

- identifying clearly and addressing systematically, through robust planning and monitoring, the key strategic priorities needed to improve performance at all levels;
- creating clearer links between operational, service and corporate priorities;
- consulting and communicating effectively with schools, parents, pupils and other key partners;
- influencing schools to work in constructive partnership with officers and elected members on agreed improvement strategies to raise performance;
- improving relationships and communication between parts of social and education services to successfully implement the Children Act 2004; and
- using the scrutiny function to establish clear accountability and challenge robustly officers, members and services who are accountable for raising standards and improving the quality of provision; and

R3 improve the use of resources by:

- linking funding priorities within the education budget more closely into strategic and operational planning processes;
- prioritising resources according to the needs of children, young people and schools;
- evaluating the impact of the use of resources;
- completing the work on funding formulae for secondary and special schools and the delegation of resources for SEN and behaviour support; and
- working openly with schools to improve their understanding of funding decisions and processes.

Findings: How good is the authority's performance?

Strategic management

Grade 4: shortcomings in important areas

- 69 Education services overall in Denbighshire have shortcomings in important areas. Although a few officers in Denbighshire work effectively, leaders at all levels in the authority, over a long period of time, have not addressed the continual poor performance of schools. The political leadership of education in the authority is ineffective. At both cabinet level and in the scrutiny committee, the challenges to officers about the performance of the education service are not focused enough. Accountability for the poor performance of the education service and schools is unclear. Overall, the authority has a poor track record in managing change and making improvements in education.

Strategic planning

- 70 The authority does not have an effective planning system for education. There is little evidence that plans have been the result of critical self-evaluation and audit of need. They have limited focus on actions and improved outcomes for learners. Links between aims, actions and intended outcomes are not always clear. This significantly impacts on the ability of the directorate to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people.
- 71 Decision making and resource allocation by the lifelong learning directorate are not always linked to agreed aims and priorities. Strategic plans are not clear on costs and funding sources. As a result, the cost of implementing strategic plans is not clearly known.
- 72 Strategic plans such as the Single Education Plan are structured, fairly easy to read and identify visions, aims and priority areas for education. However, there has been insufficient systematic consultation and communication with schools, parents, pupils and key partners in the development of strategies, plans and policies. As a result, there is no shared understanding and ownership of key priorities within education.
- 73 There are good elements of operational planning in some parts of education services. However, links between operational, service and corporate priorities lack rigour and are not always clear. This lack of clear links limits the effectiveness of the strategic and operational plans. This also hinders their usefulness in performance management and appraisal systems.

Performance management and self-evaluation

- 74 The performance management processes in the services inspected are ineffective. Performance management systems, including individual staff appraisal, are developing slowly. Corporate standards are in place for these. Key performance indicators are reported both to members and to officers. The accuracy of data collected has improved during 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

- 75 A series of documents, *Celebrating Success*, was published by education officers as part of the self evaluation for this inspection. These documents contain some good evaluation of the work of the education service. Some individual services evaluate the impact of what they do effectively and are improving as a result. A useful list of barriers to development has also been identified. This list includes the absence of 'raising standards' as one of the authority's main priorities, and inadequate staffing levels in behaviour support service.
- 76 The directorate places too much emphasis on performance measurement and not enough on performance management. Currently, the identification of performance against individual indicators is not underpinned by analysis and evaluation leading to actions to improve the outcomes. The authority does not monitor or evaluate the impact of education service teams. This lack of rigour is most apparent within the school improvement area. As a result, the directorate does not know if its work is effective or not. Not enough feedback is sought from parents, pupils and partners in the three services that were inspected.
- 77 Members do not provide enough drive to improve educational standards. At both cabinet level and in the scrutiny committee, the challenges to officers on performance are not focused enough. Accountability for poor performance of the education service and schools is unclear.

Resources

- 78 The funding per pupil delegated to Denbighshire primary schools is the fifth lowest in Wales and for secondary schools the second lowest. This is mainly because the Assembly funding formula weights the indicative resources on the basis of deprivation and sparsely distributed population, both of which are below average in Denbighshire.
- 79 The high level of strategic management costs, which includes central recharges compared with other authorities, also contributes to the comparatively low level of school funding. Changes from year to year in the apportionment of recharges⁹ for corporate services have caused distortions in the budgeted expenditure on education. Budgeted expenditure was 98.4% of the education Indicator-Based Assessment in 2005-06, 100% in 2006-07 and 98.6% in 2007-08. Central service recharges were recalculated twice in successive years. The education recharges increased by £67,000 between 2005-06 and 2006-07, but then reduced by £241,000 in 2007-08. These fluctuations helped to reduce the transparency of education funding and to undermine schools' confidence in the budget-setting process.
- 80 The processes for allocation of resources by the lifelong learning directorate to schools and to centrally funded priorities are not effective. Operational resources, most particularly school improvement resources, are not targeted according to need. As a result they do not provide value for money. The delegation of resources to schools is not targeted sufficiently closely to the needs of pupils and schools; in particular, issues have been identified with the funding formulae for secondary and special schools. The process of delegating resources to meet additional learning needs has not yet been completed. There is an over-reliance on grant funding to

⁹ These are charges made to a directorate for the use of other Council services during the year.

drive initiatives: some grants, such as parts of the Better Schools Fund, are not aligned to their intended purpose. Core staff are also paid out of grant money. This makes the funding of the posts vulnerable, especially if the criteria for allocating grants change. Faults in the process for allocating resources have resulted in the need for the authority to intervene to offset overspending, for example by some individual schools and by clusters of schools on behaviour support.

- 81 The result of all of these issues at both corporate and directorate level is that schools are uncertain about the resources they control. Nevertheless, schools do not take enough responsibility for using these resources effectively. Schools over emphasise their below average level of funding as a reason for poor educational performance in Denbighshire.
- 82 Key issues in resource allocation have now been recognised, particularly following the publication of a report commissioned from consultants in December 2006, and work is now underway to address them. This includes reviews of the primary, secondary and special school funding formulae.

Support for school improvement Grade 4: shortcomings in important areas
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- 83 The authority has not been successful in engaging and influencing schools to work in constructive partnership with officers and elected members on agreed improvement strategies to raise performance.
- 84 School improvement officers know Denbighshire schools well. These officers know through analysing data carefully that many schools are not performing as well as they should. Officers have not explored rigorously enough the reasons for the low attainment of pupils at authority level or in individual schools. As a result, its school improvement strategy does not focus on the key priorities and actions needed to raise standards. The education service is not working well with headteachers in the drive for improvement.
- 85 The authority has a planned programme for monitoring, challenge and intervention but does not tackle underperformance in schools incisively enough. Recently, the emphasis on improvement has increased. However, the authority does not target resources systematically and transparently enough on the schools that need to improve most. Officers do not challenge and support schools causing concern early enough to ensure that they do not fall into the categories of needing significant improvement or special measures¹⁰. Officers have provided good support to remove a primary school from the category of serious weaknesses quickly. However, progress in securing improvement in the secondary school placed in special measures has been too slow. There is an over-reliance on Estyn inspections to identify underperformance rather than using performance information as the trigger for co-ordinated and well-planned support from the local authority.

¹⁰ Special measures must be taken if a school is failing, or is likely to fail, to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

- 86 The restructuring of the school improvement service in 2006 aims to give a sharper focus to the work of school improvement officers. These officers know schools well because they have better data now and have produced detailed risk assessments. Primary schools are beginning to use the service's useful guidance on self-evaluation to take more responsibility for their own self-evaluation, and become more accountable for improvement. However, school improvement officers do not undertake their roles fully enough, partly because they have too many other responsibilities which makes it difficult to prioritise tasks enough to make an impact on schools.
- 87 The education service has a good range of data on pupils' performance. School improvement officers are beginning to share this with schools but are not using data and risk assessments rigorously or openly enough to challenge schools' performance and targets for improvement. The authority does not have a clear and consistent rationale for target setting to all its schools. Therefore schools do not have a consistent approach to the use of data in setting realistic and challenging targets. Most schools do not use benchmark or value added data enough to compare their own performance with that in similar schools or to target specific areas for improvement in their own schools. As a result some of the targets in the authority's single education plan are too high compared with current performance and recent rates of progress.
- 88 School improvement officers, particularly in the primary phase, are beginning to link support to the priorities identified in schools' self evaluation and school development plans. However, the authority is not realising the potential of the new arrangements to drive up standards because it does not co-ordinate support from all service teams in an integrated way.
- 89 There is not enough clarity about the elements of the budget for school improvement. Headteachers do not know what they are entitled to receive in the way of authority-funded support to improve their own schools and what they should purchase from their own budgets. The authority is unable to offer support and training in all subject areas bilingually and does not offer a brokerage service for schools to purchase external support in areas where it does not have expertise.
- 90 There is a good range of expertise and initiatives within the school improvement service to address some national priorities, particularly for the foundation phase, English and literacy, ICT, global citizenship, personal and social education and the promotion of healthy schools. The Athrawon Bro and school library services, shared with Flintshire and Conwy, provide good support. Primary schools, in particular, value the support they receive in all these areas. However, support is not uniformly good. For instance, support for numeracy is not well developed and there is not sufficient technical and curriculum support for ICT to meet the demand from schools.
- 91 The authority has worked effectively with a range of partners in the voluntary sector to develop early years provision for three year olds. Together they provide childcare, language and play, parenting and other integrated services in the integrated centre. Across the county, strong links between LEA and voluntary officers and the local school allow regular professional advice to early years staff and support the transition of children into school.

- 92 There is some good work by individual officers in a few clusters of schools to improve transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3. However, there is no co-ordinated strategy from the authority to share developments, ensure consistent quality and to monitor transition plans. Officers and advisers have provided training for assessment and initiated project work to improve the accuracy and consistency of teacher assessment at key stage 2 and key stage 3. However, officers are not linking these initiatives together effectively enough.
- 93 There is no clear strategy to raise standards in key stage 3, but individual schools used grant funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to improve standards in 2006. The authority has provided additional resources to secondary schools to help schools sustain this improvement. Most schools have used funding to reduce class sizes and improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, improvement plans focus too much on processes and not enough on desired outcomes in terms of improved standards.
- 94 The school improvement service is not giving enough priority to improving standards at key stage 4 or in post-16 education. The work of the 14-19 Network has increased the range of formal learning opportunities and provided learning coaches but it is too early to measure the impact of these initiatives. The recent 14-19 Vision into Action conference allowed schools to understand and contribute to developments.
- 95 The curriculum support element of the school improvement service is shared with Conwy and Flintshire LEAs. Denbighshire is entitled to around one-third of the shared service. The service provides curriculum support in most subjects of the National Curriculum and in religious education. Too little of this support is available through the medium of Welsh and it does not, therefore, meet the needs of Welsh medium and bilingual schools. The authority does not manage the shared service effectively enough to make sure that advisers' time is used to support Denbighshire priorities and those schools where improvement is most needed.
- 96 The authority's Welsh Education Scheme provides a clear picture of the challenges facing Denbighshire. A Welsh medium school was recently established in the south of the county. However, the authority has not given enough challenge or support to schools, particularly in the secondary sector, to extend and improve bilingual provision.
- 97 The authority provides a well co-ordinated programme of training for national qualifications in schools' leadership for existing and aspiring school leaders. There is a good induction programme and school-based support for recent cohorts of new primary headteachers that are improving their management skills. The effective training of higher level teaching assistants has resulted in very good completion and retention rates. In addition, the school improvement service provides an appropriate induction course for newly qualified teachers.
- 98 However, there is no cohesive programme for continuous professional development that the education workforce as a whole can access. There is a lack of appropriate and sustained support for existing headteachers and middle managers in driving forward school improvement to make an impact on standards.

- 99 The quality of governor support services is good. The annual report for governors on their own school gives governors good information about performance in their school. The authority provides more effective support for the governing bodies of individual schools, but the attendance by governors at training sessions is often poor.
- 100 There are a few small scale individual initiatives to raise standards of learners in different ways. However, there is no effective co-ordination of school improvement initiatives, nor a county-wide approach to sharing good practice across all schools.

Promoting social inclusion and the well-being of learners
Grade 4: shortcomings in important areas

- 101 The authority does not have an overall strategy for services delivering inclusion programmes. As a result, services do not work together well enough to raise standards for all children and young people.
- 102 Recent work to restructure the Children and Young People's Partnership has improved understanding of its purpose within the authority. However, it is not clear how the lead director and member for children and young people will be able to work effectively with the education service to develop and deliver the Children and Young People's Plan. This is because there are tensions in relationships and ineffective communication between certain parts of education and social services.
- 103 The authority is effective in its duty as a corporate parent. Educational outcomes for children who are looked-after by the local authority (LAC) have improved but are still below the all-Wales average. The authority has recently established a corporate parenting panel. Through the work of this panel, support and training for foster carers on the importance of education has improved. A liaison officer works effectively with schools to help LAC raise their level of achievement. This work has resulted in a greater focus on the needs of LAC in schools and on improving their achievement.

Performance measure	Denbighshire statistics				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	Wales
Percentage of LAC with personal education plans	0	85	100	100	n/a
Percentage of looked-after children who gained at least 2 GCSE at grade A*-G or GNVQ	27	21.43	35.71	9	42.86

- 104 The Local Safeguarding Children's Board has appropriate procedures in place for managing child protection procedures with schools. Existing procedures for child protection have been in place for some time and there has been suitable training for schools and officers in their use. During the inspection, the quality of working relationships between education and certain areas of social services were ineffective. Both services need to do more together to ensure closer working relationships with schools.
- 105 The authority has a range of programmes, including those funded by Cymorth, to support groups of vulnerable young people including excluded children and young people, young parents, young offenders, Gypsy and Traveller children (in partnership

with Conwy County Borough Authority) and pupils educated otherwise than at school. These programmes have been successful in raising standards for a few children and young people.

- 106 The authority offers helpful advice and support to schools on writing policies and guidelines. This advice helps schools implement policies which promote race equality, combat racism and prevent and tackle bullying.

Support for attendance at school

- 107 Although the education social work service offers a good range of help and advice to schools, the authority's attendance strategy has yet to impact on overall school attendance levels. The strategy has not been able to challenge present practice enough and engage children and young people and encourage them to attend school. This is because there is a lack of focus and clarity in the partnership work with schools. Also, these pupils' learning needs are not always met by schools and are likely to have contributed to them not attending mainstream schools.
- 108 Attendance levels in primary schools in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 were above the Wales average. In 2005-2006 attendance levels in primary schools were lower than the Wales average. Attendance rates in Denbighshire primary schools decreased at a faster rate than the Wales average. Attendance levels in secondary schools have been lower than the average for Wales in the three academic years 2004-2006 and are declining in six of the county's eight schools.

Primary schools	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	Attendance	Unauthorised absences	Attendance	Unauthorised absences	Attendance	Unauthorised absences
Denbighshire	93.5%	0.6%	93.5%	0.7%	92.3%	0.7%
Wales	93.2%	0.7%	93.1%	0.8%	92.5%	1.0%

Secondary schools	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	Attendance	Unauthorised absences	Attendance	Unauthorised absences	Attendance	Unauthorised absences
Denbighshire	89.5%	1.9%	89.6%	2.1%	89.4%	1.6%
Wales	90.6%	1.7%	90.6%	1.7%	90.2%	1.7%

Support for behaviour in schools

- 109 Although the standards of behaviour in schools inspected in 2005-2006 were good, too many pupils are excluded from schools either permanently, or for fixed periods that commonly last at least two weeks. These excluded pupils' needs are often not met in schools and are likely to have contributed significantly to the behavioural difficulties that led to exclusion from mainstream schools.
- 110 The rates for both permanent and fixed term exclusions have increased over the last three years at a faster rate than in Wales as a whole. The rate for permanent exclusions now exceeds that for Wales.

Permanent and fixed exclusions from secondary schools

Permanent exclusions	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Denbighshire	0.8 ¹¹	1.9	2.3
Wales	1.6	1.9	1.9

- 111 The rate of fixed term exclusions in Denbighshire is better than the Wales average between 2003-04 and 2005-06. However, the increase in the rate of fixed term exclusions in the authority over this three year period is significant. On average 11.6 days are lost per exclusion of six days or more, one of the highest figures in Wales. This impacts on the continuity of pupils' learning because there is no alternative provision during these long fixed-term periods. It also impacts on attendance figures.

Fixed term five days or fewer	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Denbighshire	31.5 ¹²	49.8	70.4
Wales	56.3	69.7	70.7

Fixed term of six days or more	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Denbighshire	5.5 ¹³	5.6	7.7
Wales	8.2	9.9	9.0

- 112 The behaviour support service works well with individual schools to advise on and monitor the impact of behaviour strategies. However, while schools value the quality of this advice, there are not enough staff available to provide the level of help needed across the county. As a result, staff are unable to provide enough support for schools. There is not a clear whole authority strategy to assist schools to manage poor behaviour themselves.
- 113 To provide extra support in managing behaviour, the authority delegates monies to clusters of schools, for them to manage themselves. This arrangement gives schools appropriate responsibility for managing behaviour. However, there has been no analysis of need in schools to ensure that there is enough money to meet the needs of all pupils.
- 114 The authority does not make appropriate provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who cannot be educated within mainstream classes in secondary schools. These pupils are educated out of school, usually in one of the authority's pupil referral units. The quality of accommodation and learning resources within the authority's pupil referral units is exceptionally poor. This provision does not meet pupils' special educational needs. The authority has recognised the need to improve provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and is considering entering into a partnership with other authorities to secure access to regional specialist provision.
- 115 All pupils who attend the key stage 2 pupil referral unit return successfully to mainstream schools. Almost half of the children attending the key stage 3 pupil referral units are also successfully re-integrated into mainstream schools. Over a half remain in the pupil referral units throughout key stage 4. No pupils from key

¹¹ Rate is number per 1,000 pupils.

¹² Rate is number per 1,000 pupils.

¹³ Rate is number per 1,000 pupils.

stage 4 are re-integrated back to school. Nevertheless, 75% of these pupils progress on to college and/or work-based learning after they have completed their compulsory education.

- 116 Service performance measures for pupils at the key stage 4 pupil referral unit have improved in the last four years. However, too many of these pupils do not get their statutory entitlement to education of 25 hours a week.

Service performance measure ¹⁴	2003	2004	2005	2006
Percentage of KS4 PRU pupils who participate in education, employment or training after they have left compulsory education	56	74	48	75
Percentage of KS4 PRU pupils who receive between 50 and 75% of their statutory entitlement	-	16	76	79

<p>Additional learning needs (ALN) Grade 3: good features outweigh shortcomings</p>

- 117 There is no overall co-ordinated inclusion strategy to link additional learning needs, social inclusion, the children's services agenda and school improvement. Also, the authority as a whole does not have a coherent picture of the wider outcomes for pupils with additional learning needs. This limits the impact of the good, and sometimes very good, work of the ALN services. As a result, the authority does not know the costs of particular types of provision relative to the level of need.
- 118 The quality of statements and annual review documents has improved over the past three years, and is now good. Assessments and statements of SEN are appropriately detailed and clearly specify pupils' needs, educational objectives and provision. Officers give suitably high priority to attending reviews of the pupils with highest levels of need, especially those placed out-of-county. The authority completes assessments, statements and annual reviews promptly.
- 119 The authority meets the statutory 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 as the need arises.
- 120 The authority provides high-quality professional advice and support for most pre-school and school-age children with SEN, especially those with the most complex needs and disabilities. As a result, most pupils with SEN achieve good standards in learning and behaviour in mainstream and special schools.
- 121 There are effective arrangements for identifying and assessing the needs of pre-school children and for providing early support in partnership with local child health services. The authority's work to develop Foundation Phase provision for all children is well-linked with the work of inclusion and SEN services. As a result, there is very effective early intervention for young children with SEN and disabilities.
- 122 The authority provides effective support for pupils with severe and complex needs and disabilities in its special schools and in special classes in mainstream schools.

¹⁴ This data is from Denbighshire's own service performance.

Although there is no overall inclusion strategy for the authority, officers and schools work closely together to provide an increasing range of opportunities for pupils with SEN to access both mainstream and specialist provision.

There are outstanding features in the authority's services for children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) including those with autistic spectrum disorder. Examples of very effective practice include:

- programmes such as Earlybird, the Autistic Children's Education (AsCE) programme and the Language and Play project that enable parents to work in partnership with educational psychologists, teachers and speech and language therapists to improve the social, communication and play skills of young children on the autistic spectrum and those with delayed speech and language skills;
- the joint arrangements between the authority and the Speech and Language Therapy Service that have transformed the quality, accessibility and impact of provision for children with speech, language and communication difficulties across the authority; and
- the support that the authority provides for the inclusion of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder in mainstream schools, for example through the partnership work between Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn and local mainstream schools.

- 123 Over the past three years, the authority has improved the accommodation and resources in its two special schools significantly. The high quality of provision at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn is generating an increased demand for places from families within and outside the authority. The authority has improved the accommodation and increased the scope of provision at Ysgol Tir Morfa. As a result, pupils who would formerly have been placed in out-of-county special schools now benefit from access to good-quality provision closer to home.
- 124 The service teams that provide support for different groups of pupils with ALN are well-led, efficiently managed and co-ordinated well. Through the inclusive learning management team, service team leaders meet regularly to share information and plan jointly to make best use of their resources in meeting the needs of individual pupils, groups of pupils and schools. Service team leaders are beginning to share data with school improvement officers. This is a useful first step towards improving the co-ordination of support for ALN, inclusion and school improvement.
- 125 The Sensory Service provides effective support for pupils with hearing, vision and multi-sensory impairment. The service is at the forefront of developments in provision for Welsh-speaking pupils with hearing and/or vision impairment, for example by enabling Welsh to be read as Braille, and providing sign language support for Welsh-speaking pupils. The service is included in the authority's 'Unlocking the Potential' project and is using external funding effectively to increase its provision and support for pupils who need specialised information communications technology (ICT) to access the curriculum.

- 126 The Learning Development Team provides an effective and fully bilingual support service for individual pupils with general and specific learning difficulties in mainstream primary schools. Specialist teachers work closely with special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) to ensure that pupils identified as having SEN at school action and school action plus¹⁵ are appropriately assessed and provided with suitable programmes of teaching and support. There is a good range of training for teachers and learning support assistants that is improving the capacity of mainstream schools to identify and meet needs at an earlier stage. The Literacy Screening Kit is widely and effectively used in schools to identify pupils in need of additional support for reading, spelling and writing. Specialist teachers take a lead role in ensuring that pupils with SEN make a smooth transition from primary to secondary school, working in accordance with the service's Transition Protocol.
- 127 The authority provides a very good service for pupils with English as an Additional Language that includes effective training for schools and for newly qualified teachers. Schools are very satisfied with the range and quality of support that they receive. The EAL service is shared with Conwy, an arrangement that increases the service's ability to be flexible in using staff and resources. There are very good links with other English as an Additional Language services in the region, enabling the service to share good practice more widely, to compare its performance with that of others and to be more consistent in assessing English as an Additional Language needs. The service has rigorous and effective systems for tracking the progress of individual pupils.
- 128 There is good support for parents and carers of pupils with ALN. The Educational Psychology Service, the Sensory Support Service and Behaviour Support Service provide good advice and guidance that helps parents and carers to understand and meet their children's needs effectively. SEN Officers work closely with parents and carers whose children need statutory assessment. Parents value the flexible and helpful approach of the authority in meeting their children's needs. As a result, parents very rarely take appeals to the SEN Tribunal for Wales.
- 129 The authority does not provide well enough for the minority (12%) of pupils with SEN who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Behaviour Support Service (BSS) and Educational Psychology Service (EPS) provide a good range of advice and support for individual pupils in key stages 1 and 2 who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Behaviour Support Service and Educational Psychology Service also work with individual secondary schools, using effective programmes such as Solution Oriented Schools and Assertive Discipline that are designed to improve schools' capacity to raise standards of teaching, learning and behaviour. The overall impact of this work, especially in mainstream secondary schools, is limited by lack of capacity in Behaviour Support Service and Educational Psychology Service, and by the absence of a strategy to link the work of inclusion service teams with school improvement work more generally.

¹⁵ The SEN Code of Practice defines support at school action as intervention that is additional to, or different from, that provided as part of a school's usual differentiated curriculum and strategies. At school action plus external support services will provide more specialised advice to the school and, in some cases, may provide direct support to the pupil.

- 130 The authority has not succeeded in enabling mainstream schools to identify the additional learning needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties early enough, or consistently enough. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Educational psychologists find that many of the pupils who attend PRUs have additional learning needs in literacy, speech, language and communication that have not been recognised or met in mainstream schools. These pupils' needs are not met and are likely to have contributed significantly to the behavioural difficulties that led to their exclusion from mainstream schools.
- 131 The authority has made progress in making schools responsible for their expenditure on Additional Learning Needs by delegating responsibility for learning support assistants (LSAs) to schools. The authority has yet to complete the planned work to develop a banding formula¹⁶ for these resources and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of LSAs. The authority's funding mechanism for special school places has not been reviewed recently and, as a result, the funding formula does not currently meet the needs of individual pupils in the special schools.

¹⁶ A banding formula is used to categorise pupil needs and apportion funding accordingly.

Findings: Will the local authority's performance improve?

Grade 4: many important barriers to improvement

- 132 Despite the recent restructuring of educational services to lay foundations for improvement, there are many important barriers to improvement in Denbighshire. These barriers impact on all the services that we inspected.
- 133 Leadership at all levels in the authority over a long period of time has not addressed the history of poor performance of schools. Overall, the authority has not been effective enough in influencing schools to work with officers and elected members on improvement strategies.
- 134 The political leadership of education in the county is ineffective. Consultation and communication between the authority and its schools are poor. In the Welsh Audit Office perception survey¹⁷, primary schools rated political leadership to be below satisfactory, many rating it as poor. This view was confirmed during the inspection. There is no political drive to work in partnership with schools to improve educational standards.
- 135 Senior elected members do not hold themselves or others accountable for education performance. The scrutiny function is not robust and members do not challenge officers enough, particularly about their performance, the performance of the education service and the performance of schools.
- 136 There is a lack of clarity at all levels of the authority about key strategic priorities for education. The authority has not demonstrated that education and the raising of standards achieved by all children and young people are among its priorities. Its key priorities include a commitment to improve school buildings.
- 137 Recently, the directorate engaged consultants to provide an objective analysis of how schools should be funded in Denbighshire and of how education can be modernised. Although its conclusions are yet unknown, the modernising education review has the potential to contribute to improvement by the education service and schools.
- 138 There is no overall co-ordinated inclusion strategy to link additional learning needs, social inclusion, the children's services agenda and school improvement. The tense relationship and ineffective communication between certain areas of education and children's services departments is a barrier to the work that the authority needs to do to improve services for vulnerable children and their families, especially those children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. As a result, good work at service level has not impacted fully on improving outcomes for learners.
- 139 In general, preparation and planning to fill key posts is ineffective. There is no clear analysis of capacity in relation to priority areas. A number of key staff are retiring or moving to new posts, leaving significant gaps at a senior level. Some of these significant gaps, such as the head of school improvement and a secondary officer, are yet to be filled.

¹⁷ The Welsh Audit Office conduct a survey on how each individual school perceives the quality of services they receive from their own local authority. The results of the responses are then collated and shared with each LA.

- 140 Overall, the authority has a poor track record in managing change and delivering improvements in education. Its consultation with schools, parents and communities on the reorganisation of school provision two years ago was ineffective. As a result, initial proposals to reorganise primary schools were abandoned. The authority has been slow in implementing many of the recommendations given in the Estyn LEA inspections of access in 2005 and special educational needs and curriculum support services in 2003.

The authority's response to the report findings

Denbighshire County Council accepts the findings of this report as an external evaluation of the performance by the council and its schools at the time of the inspection.

We are pleased that the report identifies a number of areas of good practice within each of the three services inspected. These will provide a sound basis for further development and improvement, particularly in the light of the significant re-structure of the education service announced in late 2006, into two new services focussing on School Improvement and Partnership and Inclusion and the creation of the new Plans and Performance Service. We are pleased also that the Modernising Education programme has been recognised as having the potential to contribute to improvement by the education service and schools.

The Council is committed to implementing strategies that will impact positively on the lives of children and young people in Denbighshire. The rigorous inspection process has already caused services critically to analyse current practices. We are pleased that the report has confirmed many of the issues for improvement that have already been identified and others that are emerging from the work of the Modernising Education Programme, which will form the mainstay of the Council's work to improve standards in our schools.

We recognise that there is a great deal of work to do to bring our services and the performance of schools to the expected standard. We are determined to continue the process of improvement already begun. We intend that school improvement, in particular raising standards and improving performance when measured against national benchmarked data, will receive the highest priority by the Council.

Continuous service improvement for children and young people can be secured only by working effectively in partnership with schools and our other internal and external partners: this will be a key focus for the Council in implementing the Children and Young People's Single Plan in 2008.

The report's recommendations will be incorporated into both strategic and operational plans along with an Action Plan in order to provide improved services and outcomes for all children and young people in Denbighshire's schools.

Appendix 1

The grade profile

	How good is the local authority's performance?	Will the local authority's performance improve?
Strategic management	4	4
Support for school improvement	4	4
Promoting social inclusion and well-being	4	4
Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	3	4

Key question	1 How effective is the authority's strategic planning?	2 How effective are the authority's services?	3 How effective are leadership and management?	4 How well do leaders and managers, monitor, evaluate and improve services?
Strategic management	4	See report text for individual services	4	4
Support for school improvement	4	4	4	4
Promoting social inclusion and well-being	4	4	4	4
Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	4	3	4	4

Appendix 2

The inspection team

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