

## News release

5 June 2008

### **Funding helps schools share good practice but impact on outcomes for pupils not known**

Estyn today reports that schools and local education authorities are making progress in sharing their expertise and good practice on curriculum developments more widely.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, says, "The Better Schools Fund aims to help schools share good practice and promote innovation. The majority of funds for curriculum developments are used on staff training and development. However, local authorities' and schools' evaluation of how effective these activities are in developing the curriculum and improving outcomes for learners needs to improve.

"The grant supports a broad range of national curriculum development priorities. As a result of the large number of different priorities, combined with the limited extent of evaluation, the grant's impact on national priorities is not known. The grant is often used in conjunction with other funding which makes it even more difficult to determine its impact."

Very few local authorities are able to show a clear link between curriculum development activities funded by the scheme and improvements in outcomes for learners. Estyn recommends that local authorities, schools and the Welsh Assembly Government should develop a robust evaluation system to determine the impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Many schools use the funding to help staff keep up to date with new curriculum developments. Estyn inspections of schools carried out between September 2005 and August 2007 found that staff in many schools show good subject knowledge and familiarity with recent developments in their field. Yet in some curriculum development projects, even after years of sustained Better Schools Fund programmes, schools and local authorities have not achieved the intended outcomes for learners. For example, despite ongoing investment in the teaching of modern foreign languages in one cluster of primary schools, the number of learners opting to study these at key stage 4 has continued to fall.

During 2006-2007 the Better Schools Fund enabled over 8,000 teachers to train in curriculum developments. However, only a fifth of the teachers who received training were from secondary schools. This imbalance is often due to local authority training initiatives targeting only one teacher from each school. As a result, a far greater proportion of primary school teachers across Wales are accessing curriculum development training through the Better Schools Fund than secondary school teachers.

Only a few curriculum development initiatives are targeted at schools or pupils most in need of support. Estyn recommends that local authorities target the funding more effectively towards curriculum areas, schools and pupils that are most in need of development.

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**Notes to Editors:**

- Estyn, the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, provides a high quality inspection and advice service.
- Estyn's report, 'Impact of the Better Schools Fund on curriculum development' has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- The report looks at work during 2006-2007 which supported innovation and initiatives in the areas of:
  - modern foreign languages
  - physical education
  - healthy schools schemes
  - education for sustainable development and global citizenship
  - cwricwlwm cymreig; and
  - Learning Pathways 14-19

- The report also looks at work during 2007-2008 which supported innovation and initiatives in the areas of:
  - staff familiarising themselves with the revised Orders and frameworks, and preparing schemes of work for Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3;
  - the dissemination of good practice, and training to support greater emphasis, for teaching and assessing thinking and learning skills for learners aged 3-14;
  - the development of outdoor learning environments (in particular, for Foundation Phase);
  - specialist training and support for teachers in sex and relationships education; and
  - the development of innovative approaches to teaching science.
  
- The evidence base for this report includes:
  - School and local education authorities (LEAs) inspections between September 2005 to August 2007;
  - An analysis of Better Schools Fund applications from all local authorities for the years 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009;
  - An analysis of documentation provided by local authorities and schools, including training programmes and course evaluations, school development plans and records from lesson observations;
  - Interviews with:
    - › officers responsible for school improvement, staff development and the management of the Better Schools Fund in six local authorities;
    - › headteachers and other staff with a responsibility for staff development from a representative sample of five secondary schools and five primary schools from across Wales; and
  - Published reports on the Better Schools Fund by Estyn and the Wales Audit Office.
  
- Estyn inspects nursery schools and settings maintained or funded by local authorities, primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, pupil referral units, independent schools, further education, adult community-based learning, youth support services, youth justice system, LEAs, teacher education and training, work-based learning, Careers Wales companies and the education, guidance and training elements of the Jobcentre Plus programmes.
  
- Full copies of inspection reports are available on Estyn's web site at [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

For further information please contact:

Gina Carrington

Communications, Media and Marketing Team

Estyn

[communications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:communications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk)

02920 446464