

News release

17 June 2008

Better learning opportunities needed for young offenders

Estyn today reports that local authorities need to do more to secure full-time education, training or employment for children and young people in the youth justice system.

Figures show that between April 2006 and March 2007 only 59% of young offenders in Wales were in full-time education, training or employment. This falls well short of the target of 90% set by the Youth Justice Board for Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), the multi-agency bodies that help prevent youth offending. And many YOT boards do not have plans to improve this level of performance.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales says, "Many children and young people who offend are highly disadvantaged. They may have complex needs, including a history of substance misuse, mental health needs and disrupted family backgrounds. In a recent survey in England and Wales¹, 40% of young people in custody rated their experience of school as 'awful'".

"Their experience of education leaves some young offenders feeling frustrated and angry because they have to study subjects that they find too difficult to understand. In the best Youth Offending Teams, workers take the children and young peoples' values and culture into account in order to help plan to meet their needs."

¹ Improving the literacy and numeracy of disaffected young people in custody and in the community – summary interim report of the first 18 months of the study, National Research and Development Centre 2005.

Local authorities are accountable for the Youth Offending Team in their area, but inspectors found that authorities are not always represented on the YOT management board by someone who can make decisions about resources or take recommendations to the appropriate committees. This means that there is not always effective strategic delivery or development of education provision for young offenders in an area.

Most local authorities have difficulty ensuring that young offenders are offered the 25 hours education per week recommended by the Welsh Assembly Government. Schools are often reluctant to offer places to children and young people who have been excluded, offended and/or who have been in custody.

In spite of these difficulties, many local authorities do ensure that provision for excluded children leads to appropriate accreditation. The children and young people supervised by the YOT who do not have full-time school places have alternative education packages that challenge them and can help raise their self-esteem.

Estyn's report gives examples of youth service projects that are successful in meeting the learning needs of children and young people who offend. Youth Offending Team projects that illustrate good local authority support across Wales include:

- a media project that helps high risk young people to attain accredited qualifications and develop skills through film and programme making, and broadcasting over the internet;
- using drama to simulate a court room situation to help young people better understand the personal cost of crime; and
- a project in which young people prepare and record musical 'raps' to learn about and discuss the dangers and consequences of arson.

ENDS

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, 'Meeting the learning needs of children and young people who offend' has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- The evidence base for this report is based on:
 - the outcomes from inspection and the findings of published research and surveys.
 - the responses from questionnaires that Estyn sent to all YOTs and local authorities in Wales; and
 - local authorities' Single Education Plan and YOT Youth Justice Plans.
- YOTs are multi-agency bodies and must be funded or staffed from the following statutory partners:
 - the police service;
 - the probation service;
 - social services;
 - local authority education services; and
 - the health service.
- 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, local education authorities (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

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