



Estyn

Rhagoriaeth i bawb - Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Supporting more able and talented pupils in primary schools

July 2011



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The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

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- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community learning;
- local authorities;
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies; and
- offender learning.

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- 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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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

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Summary

This survey evaluates the effectiveness of strategies used by primary schools and local authorities to support and challenge more able and talented pupils.

Overall, most more able and talented pupils are not challenged enough and too few pupils achieve above the expected levels at the end of key stages 1 and 2.

Provision for more able and talented pupils varies too much across Wales. In the few primary schools with the best provision, thorough analysis of data and assessment outcomes helps to identify more able and talented pupils. In these few schools, more able and talented pupils are supported through a range of additional provision and their progress tracked and monitored carefully. Parents understand the school's approach to providing additional support for more able and talented pupils.

More able and talented pupils gain most in schools that promote individualised or personalised approaches to learning and they benefit particularly from having control over how and what they learn.

However, in the majority of primary schools, more able and talented pupils are not identified and do not receive appropriate support. Teachers in these schools do not have the expertise to identify, support or track the progress of more able and talented pupils.

Transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools often do not provide enough continuity and progression in the education of more able and talented pupils.

Few local authorities use data to monitor the progress of more able and talented pupils or promote the sharing of best practice between schools. School improvement officers rarely discuss more able and talented pupils during their visits to schools.

Main findings

Standards achieved by more able and talented pupils

- 1 Too few primary pupils in Wales achieve above the expected level for their age in end-of-key-stage teacher assessments in the core subjects of English or Welsh, mathematics and science. (They are expected to reach level 2 at seven years old in key stage 1 and level 4 at 11 years old in key stage 2.) At key stage 2, only a very few pupils achieve level 6 in a core subject and it is extremely rare for a school to award pupils a level 7 for exceptional performance.
- 2 School inspection reports published between 2008 and 2010 suggest that raising standards for the more able and talented is often an area of weakness in primary schools and inspection recommendations frequently relate to this area of schools' work.
- 3 In the few schools where more able and talented pupils achieve particularly well, all pupils tend to achieve high standards. This is because the teaching and learning strategies that are having a positive impact on the more able and talented pupils also improve standards for pupils of all abilities.

Provision for more able and talented pupils

- 4 In only a few schools do more able and talented pupils achieve high enough standards. In these schools they are identified early, appropriately supported and challenged, and a co-ordinator for more able and talented pupils sets them targets and tracks their progress.
- 5 More able and talented pupils tend to achieve high standards when schools use a combination of teacher assessment, standardised testing, observation, discussion and parental questionnaires to identify and diagnose their strengths and particular talents.
- 6 Effective communication with parents is a key factor in those few schools where more able pupils are successfully challenged to reach high standards. However, a significant minority of schools do not communicate their policy for supporting more able and talented pupils effectively enough and do not routinely inform parents that their children have been identified as more able and talented.
- 7 In the few schools where provision for able and talented pupils is good, there are consistent, whole-school approaches to learning and teaching, a wide range of relevant extra-curricular activities, and strong transition links with other schools. More able and talented pupils gain most in schools that promote individualised or personalised approaches to learning and they benefit particularly from having control over how and what they learn.
- 8 The quality of transition between schools is a significant factor in the long-term success of more able and talented pupils. However, transition arrangements

between primary and secondary schools often do not provide enough continuity and progression in the education of more able and talented pupils.

- 9 More able and talented pupils benefit significantly from additional provision which is aimed specifically at developing their talents and offers opportunities to work with other talented pupils. However, access to additional provision that is relevant to the needs of more able and talented pupils is too uneven across Wales. The quality of support and breadth of additional opportunities depend too much on the arbitrary availability of skills and resources in a school or local authority.
- 10 Too often, even when schools identify pupils who are very able, they do not do enough to ensure that they reach the highest standards. Schools are often reluctant to allocate additional resources to pupils who will easily achieve the expected standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2.
- 11 All of the schools surveyed provide some additional provision for more able and talented pupils to pupils from all backgrounds. However, only a few schools actively ensure that more able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds receive specific support to overcome the barriers to their learning.
- 12 Many primary schools provide additional provision for their more able and talented pupils only after they enter key stage 2 at seven years old, despite often identifying these pupils early in the Foundation Phase.

Local authority support and challenge for schools

- 13 The support provided by local authorities for schools to address the needs of more able and talented pupils varies considerably across Wales. It depends too much on the officer responsible for developing more able and talented provision in each authority and the time allocated for this work.
- 14 Too few local authorities actively promote sharing best practice between schools about supporting more able and talented pupils. In a few local authorities, a few schools have set up professional learning communities that focus on improving provision and outcomes for more able and talented pupils. However, these professional learning communities are usually newly established and there is not enough evidence of their impact on pupil outcomes yet.
- 15 Very few local authorities use the data they have available to monitor the progress made by more able and talented pupils. School improvement officers only occasionally discuss more able and talented pupils during their routine visits to schools.

The impact of Welsh Assembly Government strategy

- 16 The Welsh Assembly Government's more able and talented pupils strategy and funding streams have resulted in improvements by schools and local authorities. Since the publication of 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More-able and Talented Pupils' (Welsh Assembly Government/National Association for Able Children in Education, 2008), many schools and local authorities have raised

the profile of the education of more able and talented pupils. The guidance and quality standards provide a practical way for schools and local authorities to audit and improve their provision.

- 17 The support provided for local authorities and schools by the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) through conferences and training is also good. However, a few local authorities have not taken full advantage of this training and a significant minority of schools are not aware of the guidance available. This means that they have not responded as effectively as possible to the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy and guidance and have not made enough progress in improving provision and raising the attainment of more able and talented pupils.
- 18 Nearly all schools, whose provision for more able and talented is good, use the Welsh Assembly Government/NACE quality standards effectively to support their work, usually using it as an audit or self-assessment tool. Only a few schools use the quality standards to prepare for the NACE Challenge Award, but this does not generally detract from the work the school does or the standards achieved by pupils.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 provide more challenging and individualised learning experiences to help more able and talented pupils to achieve the highest standards;
- R2 improve the use of data and assessment to identify, track and monitor the progress of more able and talented pupils;
- R3 build on existing transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools to provide more appropriate challenge for more able and talented pupils;
- R4 improve parents' understanding of how they can better support the education of their child;
- R5 use professional learning communities to share best practice in the education of more able and talented pupils; and
- R6 provide training for school leaders, teachers and support staff on how to address the needs of more able and talented pupils.

Local authorities should:

- R7 train school improvement officers on how to identify, support, track, monitor and evaluate the progress of more able and talented pupils; and
- R8 use data more effectively to evaluate trends over time in the achievement of more able pupils.

Context

Purpose of the report

19 The purpose of this survey is to:

- evaluate the quality and effectiveness of strategies used by primary schools and local authorities to support and challenge more able and talented pupils;
- highlight examples of good practice and its impact on pupils;
- identify weaknesses and gaps in provisions; and
- evaluate how successful Welsh Assembly guidance and training has been in improving provision and standards for more able and talented pupils.

It draws on the range of evidence noted in Appendix 1.

What do we mean by more able and talented?

- 20 In Wales, the term 'more able and talented' refers to about 20% of pupils who require enriched and extended opportunities to develop their abilities or talents in one or more areas.
- 21 In every school, there are more able and talented pupils who require greater support in learning than that provided for the majority of pupils. These pupils include those who are more able across the curriculum and may be capable of achieving above the expected level in the end-of-key-stage teacher assessments. They also include those pupils who show ability or are particularly talented in one or more specific areas, such as music, drama, art or sport.

A national priority

- 22 Challenging more able and talented learners to perform better is a national priority. In May 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government published the guidance document for schools and local authorities called 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More-able and Talented Pupils'. It complemented the guidance issued by ACCAC in 2003, 'A Curriculum of Opportunity: Developing Potential into Performance' and by the Welsh Assembly Government in the same year, 'Educating Pupils who are More able and Talented: Guidance for Local Authorities'.
- 23 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More able and Talented Pupils' provides practical advice to local authorities and schools. It is intended to be used as a developmental tool by schools that are at an early stage of developing whole-school provision for more able and talented pupils. It provides structure and direction for long-term planning. Schools that have already developed policies and practices for more able and talented pupils can use the quality standards to audit their provision and plan for improvement. Schools with well-established provision and action-planning systems can use it to assess their provision more formally, and may choose to be assessed for "The Challenge Award" quality mark based on the standards.

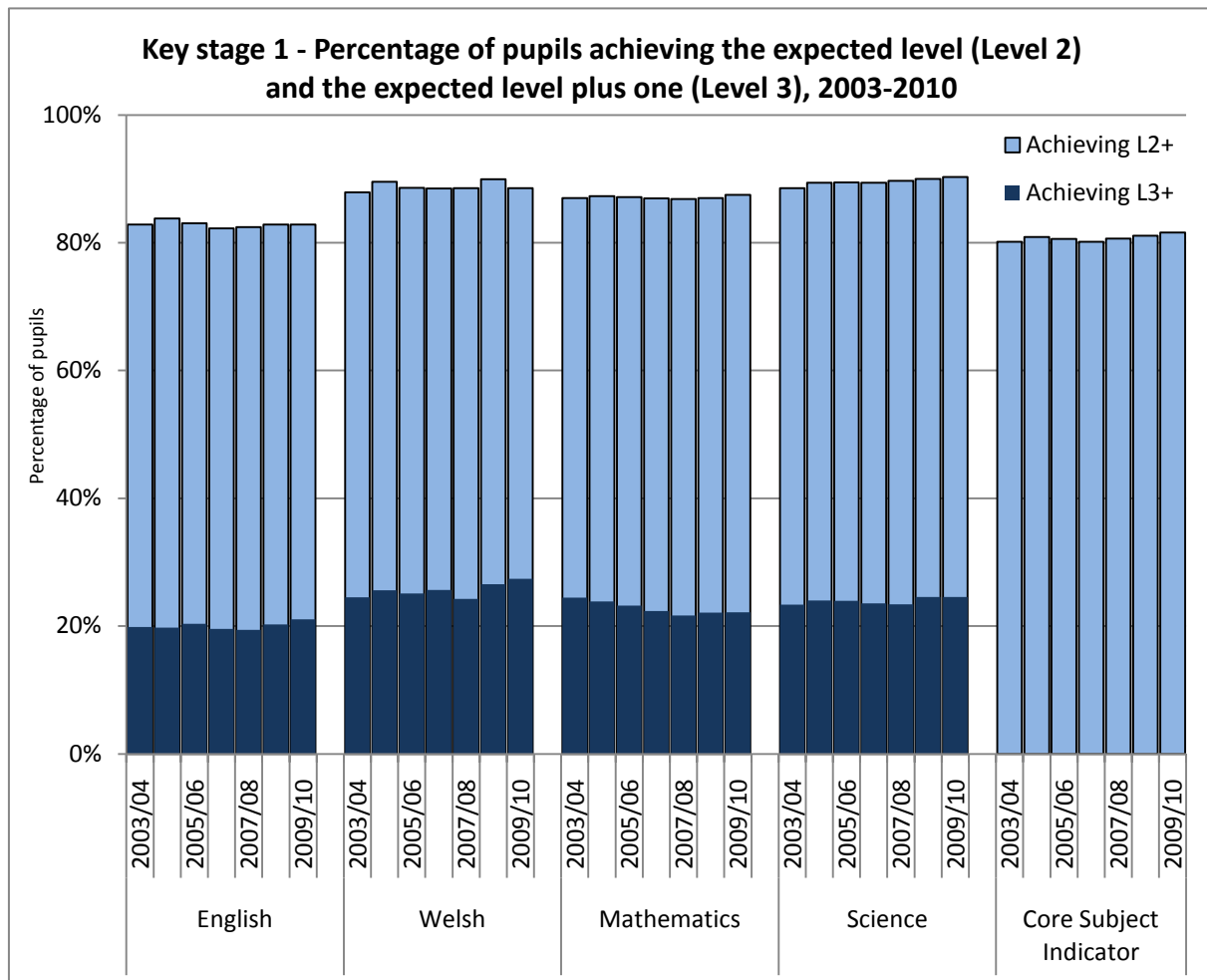
- 24 Several recent Estyn survey reports have identified shortcomings in schools that do not provide enough challenge for more able and talented pupils. For example:
- 'Best practice in mathematics for pupils aged 3 to 7 years' (2009) reports that teachers do not always assess more able pupils accurately or give them work that challenges them enough;
 - 'Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged five to seven years' (2009) confirms that in a majority of schools, more able and talented pupils can become disillusioned and lack motivation because they are too often required to complete more of the same kind of work, such as undertaking longer writing exercises rather than undertaking work that challenges their creative, thinking and or problem-solving skills; and
 - 'Innovation in key stage 3' (2010) states that only a very few secondary schools identify more able and talented pupils through data received from their partner primary school, resulting in low teacher expectations and poor provision to extend the learning experiences of these pupils as they begin key stage 3.

An international perspective

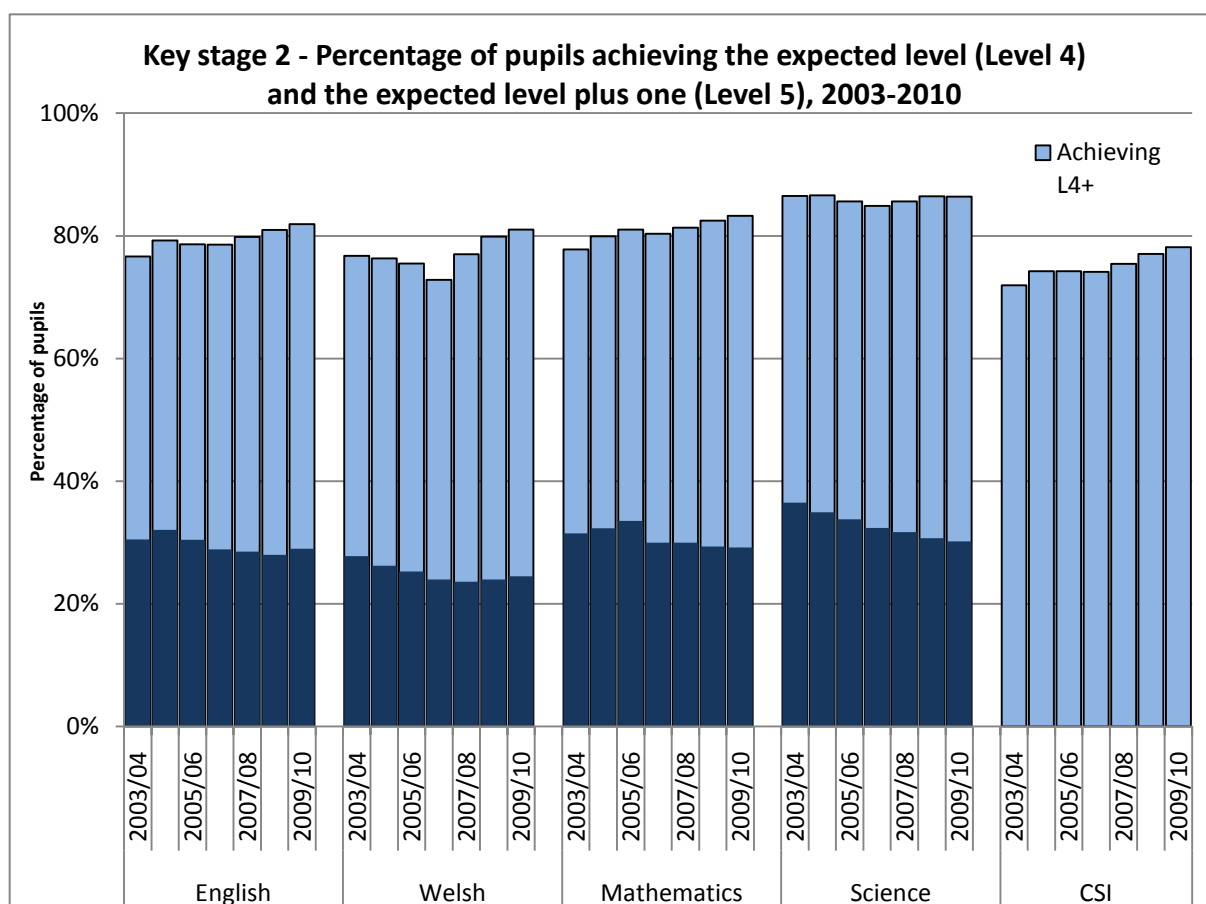
- 25 In Wales, schools are encouraged to meet the needs of all learners including the more able and talented pupils by planning differentiated activities for groups and individuals within their classes. Other European countries provide for more able and talented pupils in a variety of different ways. Appendix 2 describes how some European countries address the needs of more able and talented pupils.

1 Standards achieved by more able and talented pupils

- 26 HMCI's Annual Reports for 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 highlighted the underachievement of more able and talented pupils. Too few primary pupils in Wales achieve above the expected level for their age in end-of-key-stage teacher assessments in the core subjects of English or Welsh, mathematics and science. (They are expected to reach level 2 at seven years old in key stage 1, and level 4 at 11 years old in key stage 2.)



- 27 Between 2004 and 2010, the proportion of pupils attaining level 3 at the end of key stage 1 improved a little in all subjects except mathematics, where it decreased.



- 28 However, in key stage 2, although the percentage of pupils attaining level 4 and above in English, Welsh and mathematics has increased, the percentage of pupils attaining level 5 or above has decreased in all subjects. Very few pupils achieve level 6 in one or more core subjects and it is extremely rare for pupils in primary schools to attain level 7. In England, attainment at these higher levels is improving.
- 29 End-of-key-stage assessments provide an indication of pupils' ability in the core subjects only. More able and talented pupils often show ability, flair and talent across a broader range of areas than the core subjects. Even so, the teacher assessment results are useful in pointing out general underachievement of more able pupils at seven and 11 years of age.
- 30 The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report assesses the performance of students at 15 years of age in schools across more than 50 OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation) countries. The 2007 and 2010 PISA reports identify that in Wales a significant proportion of students attain standards below the UK and OECD average in reading, mathematics and science and the mean score of students in Wales is significantly below that of students in England. Both reports also find that the proportion of 15-year-olds achieving the highest levels in mathematics and reading is below the OECD average. The report concludes that, compared to the top-performing countries in the world, Wales has few high achievers.

- 31 School inspection reports published between 2008 and 2010 suggest that, although most schools are aware of the need to raise standards and make better provision for their more able and talented pupils, this is often an area of weakness. Recommendations frequently relate to improving standards and levels of challenge for more able and talented pupils, even in schools which are generally good. Only in a minority of schools is there good or excellent provision for challenging these pupils.
- 32 In a few schools where more able and talented pupils achieve particularly well, standards for all pupils tend to be higher than average. This is because most teaching and learning strategies which have a positive impact on more able pupils also improve standards for pupils of all abilities. In these schools, teachers expect their most able pupils to achieve the best they can, and they also challenge all pupils to reach the highest standards.

2 Provision for more able and talented pupils

- 33 More able and talented pupils are more likely to achieve high standards in schools where the following features exist:
- early identification, with a register of pupils listed as more able and talented, coupled with swift action to ensure appropriate challenge at all ages;
 - rigorous target-setting, tracking and monitoring of pupil progress, using a range of observation and standardised testing;
 - a practical policy that sets out all pupils' entitlement to an appropriately challenging and individualised learning experience that focuses on all pupils becoming independent learners and developing their higher-order literacy, numeracy, thinking, problem-solving, creative, and physical skills;
 - a sufficiently senior co-ordinator for more able and talented pupils and supportive senior teachers, teaching staff, governors, pupils, parents and other partners;
 - a consistent, whole-school approach to learning by teachers and support staff who have been trained to recognise, understand and respond to the needs of more able and talented pupils. These approaches include the use of flexible timetabling which allows pupils to choose activities that appeal to them and to mix with children of different ages;
 - good transition links between primary and secondary schools to raise teacher expectations and provide suitably challenging work for more able and talented pupils on entry to their first year in secondary school;
 - appropriate levels of resourcing allocated to provide additional provision for more able and talented pupils; and
 - a wide range of extra-curricular projects that cater for the needs of more able and talented pupils, such as mathematics and writers' 'squads', and activities supported by external agencies, such as summer schools and sports camps.

Case study 1 - Ynystawe Primary School, Swansea

Context

Ynystawe Primary School in the lower end of the Swansea valley has 195 pupils on roll from a wide range of social backgrounds. The school is committed to challenging all pupils to achieve the highest standards, including 17 pupils identified formally as more able and talented. The headteacher, the additional learning needs co-ordinator and the co-ordinator for more able and talented pupils ensure that all staff are fully committed to the school's approach, and provide training and mentoring for new staff.

Activity

A whole-school approach to learning, called the 'Leonardo effect', develops pupils' critical thinking and independent learning skills. During the first term of each year, pupils acquire skills and knowledge about a specific topic. In the second term, they manage their own learning about the topic. The third term is used to develop science and creative skills in relation to the topic. Teachers encourage pupils' creativity, research, investigation and problem-solving skills throughout the year. The headteacher evaluates standards through direct observation of lessons and through monitoring pupils' output. This information is used to ensure smooth transition between year groups and key stages. The school uses an in-service training day each year for staff to evaluate their work, analyse pupil outcomes, and to plan for the year ahead.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- motivational leadership that ensures a whole-school approach and staff commitment;
- shared understanding of the kind of teaching that supports and challenges more able pupils to achieve at the highest levels;
- consistent approaches that pupils and parents understand; and
- creative approaches to developing higher-order thinking, problem-solving and oracy skills.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- the most able pupils achieve level 6 in one or more core subjects at the end of key stage 2;
- many pupils demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding of specific topics and their skills in oral and written English are often above the levels expected for their age; and
- pupils' work in art and design is creative and imaginative.

Identification, assessment and tracking

- 34 More able and talented pupils are more likely to achieve high standards when schools use a combination of formative assessment, standardised testing, staff observation, discussion, and parental questionnaires to identify and diagnose their strengths, weaknesses and particular talents. It is important to track pupils' progress closely and to provide appropriately challenging and motivational tasks. In a very small minority of schools, the most able pupils have individual education plans, which are reviewed every term. Generally, schools that use individual education plans for more able pupils tend to track pupils' progress more accurately than those that do not. Consequently, staff and parents have a clearer understanding of the progress of these pupils, as well as the next steps in their learning.

Case study 2 - Ysgol y Wern, Llanishen, Cardiff

Context

The school provides education through the medium of Welsh. It has a mixed intake of pupils with many coming from relatively advantaged backgrounds, and others from less advantaged backgrounds. The school provides an extensive range of curricular and extra-curricular activities so that all pupils can find something they enjoy. It has an effective system of monitoring and tracking pupil progress which enables teachers to identify more able and talented pupils early and implement a suitably challenging programme of study for them.

Activity

The school uses a range of methods to identify and assess the specific needs of all pupils. This includes focused observations, effective marking, staff and pupil discussion, teacher assessments, parental questionnaires and standardised tests. Pupil progress is tracked systematically and regularly. All staff use data and other assessment information analytically to identify and target areas for improvement. In 2009, senior leaders identified a need to raise standards in literacy skills, particularly for more able pupils. The subject leader for Welsh and the local authority adviser trained staff on extended writing. The subject leader monitored Welsh lessons and shared her observations, and everyone agreed criteria for improvement. Staff and pupils created guidelines for individual target-setting which focused on specific literacy skills. Staff became familiar with Welsh Assembly Government guidelines for teaching higher-order reading and writing skills. The subject leader led sessions on assessing and moderating writing. Staff took part in moderation sessions with the partner secondary school. Teachers' planning was monitored every week to ensure continuity and progression. Teachers share examples of good writing with pupils regularly and pupils agree success criteria so that they can assess their own work accurately.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- improved outcomes for all pupils, although the developments were aimed at more able pupils;
- high-quality staff training, resulting in full support for the strategy; and
- clear focus on improving standards for all pupils.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- there was an improvement of 16 percentage points in the proportion of 11-year-olds achieving level 5 (one level above the level expected for their age) in Welsh in end-of-key-stage teacher assessments in 2010 compared to 2009;
- pupils' sentence structure in their written Welsh improved significantly; and
- many pupils discussed and determined their own success criteria confidently.

Policy and leadership

- 35 Schools which ensure that all parents understand the policy for identifying more able and talented pupils usually avoid misunderstandings and the potential conflict that may arise when schools organise additional or different provision for a proportion of their pupils. However, a significant minority of schools do not communicate their policy and practices for supporting more able and talented pupils effectively enough. This is due to the perception of the possible negative response from a small minority of parents. Schools that have clear criteria for identifying more able and talented pupils often also provide a wide range of opportunities so that most pupils can achieve success at a level appropriate to their ability.
- 36 The majority of schools in Wales consider the needs of more able and talented pupils as part of their additional learning needs provision. In these cases, the additional learning needs co-ordinator or special needs co-ordinator usually oversees more able and talented provision. Other schools consider more able and talented pupils separately and have a different co-ordinator. In either case, the responsible person is usually a senior leader in the school able to oversee the implementation of policy and practice. Provided the co-ordinator has the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding, and motivates staff and pupils successfully, there is no significant difference in how it is co-ordinated.
- 37 A very small minority of pupils, who are not more able and talented, may be overly encouraged by their parents to perform at a level that is beyond them. Often, these pupils feel that they have failed when they do not live up to unreasonable expectations. Very occasionally, schools choose to move pupils up one or more year groups so that they move through school with pupils who are older. Sometimes, such pupils fail to cope emotionally and socially, resulting in isolation and frustration.

Curriculum and transition

- 38 More able and talented pupils gain from individualised or personalised approaches to learning because they benefit particularly from having control over how they learn. In schools with provision that is geared towards individualised learning, there is often a whole-school approach to the teaching of skills, especially thinking, problem solving and learning skills. Assessment for learning strategies are firmly embedded and used to help pupils know how well they are doing and how they can improve. Pupils and teachers set challenging targets which are relevant to their specific needs, and children actively monitor and review them. Pupils undertake regular self-assessment and peer-assessment and talk about their strengths and areas for improvement confidently and with understanding. They contribute to curriculum planning from an early age, often by discussing what they already know about a topic and what they would like to know. Pupils create class topic webs which staff use to inform planning. Teachers in these schools incorporate opportunities for individuals and groups of pupils to develop specific skills at appropriate levels while learning about their planned topic.

Case study 3 – Eveswell Primary School, Newport

Context

Eveswell Primary is a large, two-form entry school with 433 pupils on roll. All staff are committed to cater for the needs of more able and talented pupils.

The school has successfully developed individualised learning strategies. Staff encourage pupils to achieve the highest standards. By identifying each pupil's ability and talent, all children feel valued and are more motivated and engaged in learning. The co-ordinator for the more able and talented monitors and evaluates provision and pupil progress carefully.

Activity

After analysing the 2008 end-of-key-stage teacher assessments for pupils at 11 years of age, the co-ordinator identified that boys underachieved at level 5 compared to girls.

The school reviewed its procedures for identifying more able and talented pupils and staff felt they needed to use more than just standardised testing in their procedures. As a result, training focused on better analysis of pupil outcomes using a range of assessments, such as cognitive ability tests (CATS) to evaluate pupils' reasoning skills and more diagnostic use of scores for pupils in Year 4.

In this way, the school identified a higher number of boys who had not previously been considered to be more able and talented. Staff selected a wider range of 'boy friendly' resources, especially class novels, as the basis for teaching English to motivate and challenge the boys. The school also improved its information and communication technology (ICT) resources in order to interest and engage boys in more challenging activities.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- identification of the underachievement of boys compared to girls;
- the use of a range of assessment techniques and other methods to identify more able and talented pupils accurately;
- support from senior leaders to fund additional resources; and
- the identification of clear success criteria against which improvements are measured.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- the school now identifies more able and talented pupils more accurately; and
- the gap between boys and girls attaining above the level expected for their age (level 5 or higher) has closed to 2 percentage points.

- 39 The quality of transition between schools is a significant factor in the long-term success of all pupils. This is particularly the case for those who are more able and talented because they provide an even greater challenge for the receiving school. Where links between schools are well-established and focus on pupil outcomes alongside social aspects of transition, the receiving school builds on the information it receives about pupils. This usually results in better outcomes for these pupils. However, where transition systems are poor and the receiving school 'starts afresh' with all new entrants, more able pupils tend to suffer the most. Work is too easy for them and secondary teachers' expectations are not high enough. This leads to frustration and, often, negative attitudes to school that can lead to disengagement from learning.

Case study 4 – The 'Blue Skies Project' in the Dyffryn Aman cluster in Carmarthenshire

Context

Pupils from the Dyffryn Aman cluster of primary schools move on to their next stage of learning at 11 years of age when they enter Dyffryn Aman Comprehensive School. All primaries within the cluster provide education mostly in Welsh or bilingually.

Activity

In the summer term of every year, each primary school in the cluster uses standardised tests, teacher observation and staff discussion to identify the most able 10% of its Year 5 pupils. The pupils in Year 6 and Year 7 take part in a programme of challenging activities, including team-building, development of leadership skills, mathematical investigations, drama workshops and a residential visit. All aim to improve the critical-thinking skills and higher-order learning skills of the more able pupils, and also to encourage the development of their personal, social and emotional skills.

The co-ordinator for the more able and talented pupils in the secondary school leads the project and is supported by staff from the primary schools and specialist providers. Teachers ensure the support of parents through good communication by letter and personal contact. The success of the project is monitored through pupil questionnaires and analysis of standardised skills tests in Year 7. Teachers track pupil progress throughout the primary schools and into the secondary school using the same, colour-coded system.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- consistency between primary schools in how they identify more able and talented pupils;
- a focus on critical thinking and higher-order learning skills;
- positive relationships between primary and secondary schools; and
- consistent use of an agreed electronic tracking system by all schools, enabling effective data transfer, and monitoring of pupil progress.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- there has been an improvement in pupils' learning skills, especially oracy, listening and thinking;
- pupils develop their personal, social and emotional skills effectively and cope well with transition; and
- effective transfer of data from primary to secondary school gives teachers accurate information and this helps them to establish high expectations of more able and talented pupils.

Resourcing and additional support for pupils

- 40 In the most effective schools, pupils have equal access to additional provision relevant to their needs. However, access to additional provision is too inconsistent across Wales. For example, sometimes clusters of schools work together using a single funding stream. In order for all schools in the cluster to derive equal financial benefits, the group may agree to finance an equal number of more able and talented pupils from each school to attend a particular event. This may mean that some more able pupils do not have an opportunity to attend, while other pupils, who have not been identified as more able and talented, fill the places available.
- 41 Too often, schools identify pupils who are more able, but do not do enough to ensure that they reach the highest standards. Nearly all schools allocate additional resources to pupils with special educational needs, but many schools are reluctant to do the same to support more able and talented pupils. This is because they are confident that more able pupils will achieve the expected standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 without additional provision. In many cases, these pupils could

achieve even better standards if schools supported them appropriately.

- 42 More able and talented pupils benefit significantly from additional extra-curricular provision which is aimed specifically at their talents and offers opportunities to work with other talented pupils. Talented musicians benefit significantly from playing in ensembles regularly, able writers flourish by working alongside authors and poets and pupils with sporting capabilities need high standard coaching and competition to improve their skills. However, access to additional provision that is relevant to the needs of more able and talented pupils is uneven across Wales. The quality of support and breadth of additional opportunities depends too much on the arbitrary availability of skills and resources in a school, cluster of schools or local authority.
- 43 Estyn's Annual Report of 2008-2009 noted the underachievement of more able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. All the schools surveyed say that pupils from all backgrounds can access the additional provision available. In all the schools surveyed, no pupils were denied access to any available provision and evidence from inspection reports confirms that nearly all schools provide equal opportunities for their pupils.
- 44 However, only a few schools actively ensure that more able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds receive specific support to overcome barriers to their learning. This support includes nurture groups (to improve the behaviour of more able pupils who struggle to achieve), guidance for families, additional, small-group extra-curricular activities tailored to their specific talents, and focused support for subjects in which pupils underachieve. These schools identify pupils' potential and recognise that disadvantage of one kind or another is an obstacle to their success.

Case study 5 – Cwmclydach Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Context

The school is in a socially disadvantaged area in the Rhondda Valley. Over 40% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and the school has above average numbers of looked-after children and pupils with special educational needs.

Activity

A looked-after pupil identified as being more able and talented had behavioural difficulties preventing effective learning. The headteacher and the co-ordinator for the more able and talented pupils used the child's individual education plan to work closely with the carer, the pupil and staff. The individual education plan focused on supporting the pupil to improve his behaviour and work.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- particularly effective communication between the school and the pupil's carer, including regular meetings to support the carer in working with the child at home;

- inclusion of all interested parties in the meeting – pupil, carer, headteacher, the co-ordinator for more able and talented pupils and the class teacher; and
- involving the carer in working at home with the pupil on projects, and further developing the pupil's higher-order reading and writing skills.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- the pupil's attitude to work, motivation and achievement improved considerably.

- 45 Many primary schools provide additional provision for their more able and talented pupils only after they enter key stage 2 at seven years old, despite often identifying these pupils early in the Foundation Phase. Most schools believe that the Foundation Phase curriculum allows teachers and support staff to meet the differing needs of individuals successfully without the need for additional provision. In theory this should be the case, where expectations and targets are high, planning of opportunities for different abilities is meticulous and flexible, and staff are skilled in challenging pupils, assessing their progress accurately and building on pupils' skills systematically. In practice however, practitioners do not always provide the most able pupils with activities which extend their learning or develop their higher-order skills well enough from an early age.

Case study 6 – Glan Gele Infant School, Conwy

Context

The school is in one of the most deprived areas of Conwy. Over 30% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school was recently the first infant school in Wales to achieve the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) Cymru Challenge Award. The headteacher is the co-ordinator for the more able and talented pupils and ensures that the school's policy and strategies are applied consistently throughout the school. Nearly half of their pupils are recognised as having a particular ability or talent and access additional provision in school. While this is often in traditional areas of the curriculum, such as mathematics, reading or sport, other less mainstream talents are also encouraged, such as ability when learning in the outdoors. The school also addresses the needs of pupils who are potentially more able, but present poor behaviour.

Activity

The school identified a group of twelve Year 1 and Year 2 boys who had the potential to achieve above that expected for their age in English in end-of-key-stage 2 teacher assessments, but were not progressing as well as expected. They attended a boys-only literacy session once a week. The teacher prepared a group education plan which was shared with parents. Parents are in full agreement, understand the purpose of the group and are supported to help their sons at home.

The boys help to choose topics which interest and motivate them, such as space travel. Teacher expectations are high, the pace of the lesson is challenging and activities are timed to maintain focus. Lessons are carefully planned so that they link closely to previous learning and encourage the development of literacy and other skills, such as creative thinking and graphic design. Pupils work with a range of experts, such as commercial graphic designers, whenever possible so that they always see examples of high-quality work.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- accurate identification of issues which need addressing;
- encouraging risk taking in teaching and learning; and
- focus on higher-order speaking, reading and writing skills.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- pupils' writing and spelling improved; and
- half of the group achieved level 3 in English at the end of the key stage and the others achieved well (at level 2a which borders on level 3).

3 Local authority support and challenge for schools

- 46 The support and challenge provided by local authorities for their schools in addressing the needs of more able and talented pupils vary considerably across Wales. All local authorities in this survey are committed in principle to this aspect of their work. Most authorities have a school improvement officer with overall responsibility to act as a co-ordinator to develop the effectiveness of schools in improving the achievement of more able and talented pupils, but the resources devoted to their work are limited.
- 47 The training and support provided by the local authority co-ordinator for the more able and talented depends on the priority given by the local authority to the provision, the skills, knowledge and understanding of the co-ordinator, and the time allocated for this work to be carried out. A few local authorities have effective, experienced co-ordinators with well-established systems in place to support the work of schools in this area. However, these co-ordinators have many other responsibilities and undertake this work as a small part of their wider role in supporting schools. In a few local authorities, the responsible person has not received Welsh Assembly Government training. As a result, the officers concerned do not always have enough confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding to support schools in this area.
- 48 Few local authorities actively encourage schools to be assessed for the NACE Challenge Award. Many feel that the preparation of the portfolios required as part of the assessment process is too burdensome and costly. Nevertheless, where local authorities have encouraged schools to undertake the assessment, it has proved beneficial for the schools and has ensured that the whole school has focused on provision and outcomes for pupils.
- 49 A minority of local authority co-ordinators arrange training programmes for school staff, using the expertise of specialist from NACE. These programmes generally provide high-quality training and help to ensure good levels of attendance by teachers. This level of support, however, is not commonplace among the majority of local authorities. In a few local authorities, this work is not seen as a priority. Some local authorities have only recently identified a co-ordinator. In such cases, policies and procedures are still at an early stage of development.

Case study 7 – Blaenau Gwent local authority

Context

Blaenau Gwent is one of the most deprived authorities in Wales. In only three of its 27 primary schools is the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals below the Welsh average. The local authority co-ordinator for more able and talented pupils represents Wales on the board of trustees of NACE. The co-ordinator provides all schools in the authority with a policy and useful resources, including parent and pupil questionnaires, and a programme of training. The co-ordinator encourages all schools to recognise that they have pupils who are more able and talented.

Activity

In 2008, the adviser audited all schools in the local authority. A working party was established to write a handbook for schools on the use of the Welsh Assembly Government guidance. All schools were provided with a range of recommended resources.

The local authority co-ordinator arranges annual conferences for headteachers and school co-ordinators. The conferences feature specialists presenting on current issues in the education of more able and talented pupils.

The local authority expects schools to identify and register all of their more able and talented pupils and place their names on their additional learning needs register. Provision for more able and talented pupils is always a focus for school link adviser visits. The co-ordinator actively encourages the sharing of good practice between schools. All schools receive regular newsletters, and five schools have set up a professional learning community which has provision for more able and talented pupils as a focus. Currently, the authority is developing a database for schools to use to track the progress of these pupils.

Despite being a relatively small local authority, a good range of extra provision exists centrally for more able and talented pupils. Although funding for centralised activities is scarce, schools value the provision and contribute financially towards their cost.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- the local authority's commitment to the education of more able and talented pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- the knowledge, expertise and commitment of a local authority co-ordinator who has encouraged nearly all schools in the authority to improve their provision; and
- an inclusive philosophy, whereby, when teachers challenge more able pupils, this raises standards of pupils of all abilities.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- the majority of schools now make good or better provision for their more able and talented pupils, resulting in improved standards; and
- representatives of nearly all schools in the authority attend conferences and use the materials and resources provided effectively in their schools.

- 50 A few local authorities have formed focus groups that meet regularly to address the issue of better provision for more able and talented pupils. The responsibilities of the groups vary but, in the best examples, they develop policies, organise special events, produce training materials and resources and enable the sharing of good practice between schools.

- 51 Two local authorities use consultants, who are not full-time local authority employees, to support schools with more able and talented pupils. They organise activities, events and extra-curricular clubs for these pupils.

Case study 8 – Pembrokeshire local authority

Context

Since 2002, Pembrokeshire local authority has employed a former adviser to co-ordinate strategies and whole-school approaches to support more able and talented pupils across the authority. Nearly all schools take advantage of the support and activities.

Activity

Many schools in Pembrokeshire have “Buzz Clubs” for key stage 2 pupils and “Buzzlings” for Foundation Phase and key stage 1 pupils. These are extra-curricular clubs that provide weekly opportunities for more able and talented pupils to take part in a wide range of challenging activities.

The consultant organises Buzz Challenge Days when pupils from Buzz Clubs meet at a designated venue to take part in a major challenge. During a “Digital Wizardry” day, for example, pupils designed and populated an area on the local authority educational portal on the web aimed at supporting more able and talented pupils and their families. Pupils prepare and carry out research before the event and complete post-challenge projects.

The Enterprise Fair is an annual event, which is held in a shopping area in Haverfordwest and is supported by local businesses and the general public. Pupils develop their business ideas throughout the year and sell their products at the fair.

Good and excellent features

The good and excellent features include:

- effective co-ordination of activities across the authority;
- the co-ordinator’s knowledge of the provision available in each school;
- schools’ planned provision for their more able and talented pupils that focus on higher-order literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills; and
- equal opportunity for all schools to access provision.

Impact and benefit

As a result of this work:

- many schools in the local authority provide good extra-curricular activities for more able and talented pupils;
- schools receive good support and training for addressing the needs of more able and talented pupils; and

- individuals have been motivated to develop their talents in later life. For example, a pupil talented in art and design eventually set up a successful, home-based jewellery business following her involvement in the Enterprise Fair.

- 52 Many local authorities organise additional activities for more able and talented pupils. For many years, musically talented pupils have benefited from county music ensembles. The majority of local authorities have now extended this county-wide music provision to include a wider range of opportunities such as writing 'squads' that provide regular opportunities for talented young writers to work together, often with professional authors and poets, to extend their writing skills. A few authorities offer youth theatre, visual arts squads and sporting centres of excellence. Local authorities often ensure effective delivery in these sessions by using poets and local artists, or specialist teachers. These sessions often result in pupils producing work of a high quality which is then show-cased in centres, such as local libraries.
- 53 With a few exceptions, local authority co-ordinators have little knowledge of the work that individual schools are doing to improve provision and outcomes for more able and talented pupils. As a result, very few local authorities actively promote the effective sharing of best practice between schools within and across local authorities. A few schools across Wales have established cluster-based professional learning communities with a focus on improving provision for more able and talented pupils to enable schools and local authorities to share good practice. However, in most cases, schools have set up these professional learning communities themselves and, although local authorities are supportive, only a few provide specific help and guidance. The majority of professional learning communities are newly established and there is little evidence as yet of improved outcomes for pupils.
- 54 Few local authorities support schools well enough to evaluate the impact of strategies for addressing the needs of more able and talented pupils. Evaluations of improvements in provision and outcomes for pupils are often anecdotal, almost always qualitative, and only rarely supported by data. In most schools, the monitoring process lacks rigour and does not focus enough on pupil outcomes.
- 55 Local authorities do not use the data they have available to them effectively enough to evaluate the progress made by more able pupils. No local authority questioned as part of this survey could provide specific data on the performance of pupils identified as being more able and talented. The majority assert that, in schools where there has been a focus on challenging more able and talented pupils, the proportion of pupils achieving above the expected level for their age has increased. However, most have no systematic way of monitoring this or relating it to specific strategies or activities which have been undertaken. Where local authorities provide schools with targets for pupils based on end-of-key-stage 1 attainment (such as Fischer Family Trust data), this information is not used consistently to track the progress of more able pupils. Where local authorities analyse outcomes at Year 6, this is too late to identify and address pupil underachievement. School improvement officers only occasionally discuss these issues during visits to schools and only rarely is attention given to monitoring outcomes for specific groups of pupils, such as the more able and talented.

4 The impact of Welsh Assembly Government strategy

- 56 Recent progress in how a few schools and local authorities address the needs of more able and talented pupils is partly a result of the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy and funding.
- 57 In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government committed £50,000 to develop quality standards for the education of more able and talented pupils, published in 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More able and Talented Pupils'. The funding also provided training for local authorities and schools, and supported the cost of The Challenge Award and training of local authority assessors. The Welsh Assembly Government has approved funding of a further £30,000 to facilitate further training and support between 2010 and 2013. The guidance and standards are useful and provide a practical way for schools and local authorities to audit their provision and raise standards achieved by more able and talented pupils.
- 58 Since the publication of the quality standards, many schools and local authorities have raised the profile of the education of more able and talented pupils. Most schools and local authorities are aware of their responsibilities to this group of pupils. All local authorities and many schools have a designated person responsible for leading developments in this area. Provision for more able and talented pupils is now a feature of many school improvement plans and many local authorities indicate that the publication of the guidance has prompted them to include the matter in authority-wide strategic plans. However, only about a half of local authorities mention the needs of more able and talented pupils in their most recently published Children and Young People's Plans.
- 59 Representatives of nearly all local authorities have attended conferences or accessed training provided by the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE). These national conferences and training provide good opportunities for schools and local authorities to share ideas and best practice and to raise questions with specialists in the field. However, the impact of this training on schools has been varied. Where local authority advisers have disseminated advice and training successfully, schools in the authority have improved the provision for their more able and talented pupils. However, too often this has not been sustained because personnel who originally received training have moved on or retired and their successors have not always received update training. This means that, while pupils in a few authorities have access to an acceptable, and sometimes good, range of provision, there are significant inequalities across Wales.
- A few local authorities have not taken full advantage of the availability of the Welsh Assembly Government training and a significant minority of schools are not aware of the guidance that is available. This means that they have not prioritised their actions to respond as effectively as possible to the national strategy and guidance.
- 60 Nearly all schools where provision for more able and talented is good use the quality standards to support their work. They use the documentation effectively to guide and support staff in their work with more able and talented pupils. Senior leaders and co-ordinators use it to design training materials and, as a result, schools and teachers

have received consistent messages about how to improve provision.

- 61 The majority of schools visited as part of this survey use the guidance as an audit or self-assessment tool to evaluate provision for more able and talented pupils. These schools report that the nationally agreed standards provide them with a sound basis from which to work. Only a very few schools across Wales have chosen to be assessed for the National Association for Able Children in Education Challenge Award, awarded to schools which reach the standards in 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More able and Talented Pupils' (Welsh Assembly Government/National Association for Able Children in Education, 2008). There are currently seven schools who have gained the Challenge Award. Four schools are awaiting accreditation and ten others are working towards it. In these schools, the process has focused the school's efforts on ensuring high standards for pupils, bringing staff together in their understanding of the importance of consistency throughout the school, celebrating their success with parents and the community and sharing their experiences with other schools. Schools that use the guidance effectively, but choose not to be assessed for the award, often develop good or better provision nonetheless. Choosing not to be assessed does not necessarily mean that improvements are not well led or monitored robustly. In these situations, leaders and staff are fully committed to raising standards for more able and talented pupils.
- 62 Many of the most successful schools and local authorities have developed the strategies they use with more able and talented pupils over many years. They have used the quality standards to help audit and refine their practices even further and, in a few cases, prepare for assessment for the Challenge Award. The survey confirmed that most, although not all, of the schools who had achieved or were working towards the Challenge Award had developed good and sometimes excellent provision which, in nearly all cases, resulted in improvements in pupil standards.
- 63 The Welsh Government does not regularly analyse or evaluate the impact that improvements made by schools and local authorities have on outcomes for more able and talented pupils.

Appendix 1

Evidence base

In producing this report, we used inspection evidence from primary inspection reports and considered end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 data for the period 2008-2010.

We visited a representative sample of 16 primary, infant or junior schools across Wales, a primary/secondary cluster and four local authorities. We also considered written evidence from another 13 local authorities.

We obtained learners' views by asking a sample of pupils in all the schools visited to complete questionnaires and by speaking to a sample of pupils in all the schools visited. We interviewed representatives of the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE).

We reviewed the following literature:

- 'A Curriculum of Opportunity: Developing Potential into Performance' (ACCAC 2003);
- 'Educating Pupils who are More Able and Talented: Guidance for Local Authorities' (WAG 2003);
- 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More Able and Talented Pupils' (WAG/NACE 2008);
- 'Innovation in key stage 3' (Estyn 2010);
- 'Ensuring all learners achieve their potential: an evaluation of local authority strategies' (Estyn 2010);
- 'Transition plans and grant: an evaluation of the impact of transition plans on primary and secondary school partnerships at key stage 2 and key stage 3' (Estyn 2010);
- 'Improving numeracy in key stage 2 and key stage 3' (Estyn 2010);
- 'Best practice in mathematics for pupils aged three to seven years' (Estyn 2009);
- 'Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged five to seven years' (Estyn 2009);
- 'A report on the quality of initial teacher training in additional learning needs and working with others' (Estyn 2009);
- Estyn Annual Report 2008, 2009 and 2010;
- 'Supplementary guidance for inspectors: more able and talented learners' (Estyn 2010);
- Bradshaw, J., Sturman, L., Vappula, V., Ager, R. and Wheeler, R. (2007). 'Achievement of 15-year-olds in Wales: PISA 2006 National Report (OECD Programme for International Student Assessment)' Slough: NFER;
- Bradshaw, J., Ager, R., Burge, B. and Wheeler, R. (2010). PISA 2009: 'Achievement of 15-year-olds in Wales'. Slough: NFER;
- PISA report 2006 and 2010;
- NACE case studies of Welsh schools who have achieved or are working towards the NACE Challenge Award;

- NACE evaluations of the training programme provided for schools and local authorities; and
- a representative sample of local authority Children and Young People's Plans and Education Strategic Plans.

We also acquired information from European countries who are members of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates.

Appendix 2

Examples of how different European countries support more able and talented pupils

The strategies below are relatively new. As a result, no firm conclusions can be drawn about the relative success of the different approaches. However, they serve as comparisons to the Welsh system and provide pause for thought. What is clear is that many of our European counterparts are also seeking the most effective way to educate their more able and talented learners.

In Germany, every region turns one of its primary schools into an Entdeckertagsschulen (Discovery Day School) for one day every week. These schools offer special training, tasks and workshops for talented and gifted pupils. Pupils from neighbouring schools attend these instead of their usual schools on that day. Specialists in particular subject areas provide resources and teachers are trained to assess their learning needs. This programme has been running for about two years and as yet no evaluation of the outcomes has been undertaken.

Pupils in the Netherlands aged four to 12 years who have an IQ of 130 or higher can attend a Leonardo school. The Leonardo curriculum is designed to suit the interests and abilities of these very able children. The school uses specialist teachers to provide lessons in English from the age of four and Spanish from the age of eight, as well as philosophy, computer science, mathematics, business and enterprise. Pupils make decisions about what they want to learn and there is an emphasis on pupils learning to learn. Lessons in social skills, music and dance are important features of the curriculum and pupils learn to play games of strategy, such as chess. The school provides all pupils with a laptop computer with wireless internet access to use at school and at home to improve their IT skills and to encourage the use of new media.

In Scotland, schools are encouraged to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils in class through matching the work closely to their needs and abilities. The University of Glasgow provides support for teachers, more able pupils and their families through the Scottish Network for Able Pupils (SNAP) website.

In the Czech Republic, provision for more able and talented pupils is guided by legislation. Every school is expected to develop its own programme. In some cases, these pupils have individual education plans. The principal of a school is allowed to move a more able pupil to a higher year class, but, before doing this, the pupil has to be tested by a panel of at least three people.

Belgian schools are free to organise their own methods to address the needs of more able and talented pupils. In agreement with parents, more able pupils sometimes start primary school a year earlier than usual, but need to be independently assessed before doing so. In some schools, specialists teach more able pupils in small, mixed-age groups for a few hours a week. Other schools simply adapt the curriculum and may teach more able pupils with older children. Belgian educationalists acknowledge that, whilst many pupils cope with this, others struggle socially and do not achieve as well as they may have if they remained with their peers. Some schools acknowledge this and focus on developing pupils' social skills alongside their academic education.

The remit author and survey team

Sarah J Morgan HMI
Lynda Newton AI
Janet Waldron AI