

## **News release**

15 May 2008

### **Schools need to be more involved in community life**

Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, has published a report today about how well community-focused schools serve their communities. The report calls for schools to encourage their local communities to use school facilities and resources more.

The inspectorate has published a report looking at how well schools and local authorities are using funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to provide a range of services and activities to meet the needs of pupils, their families and the wider community.

“Across Wales as a whole, the Community Focused Schools Grant has improved access to school resources, especially for sport facilities and information and communications technology (ICT). The other most commonly-mentioned benefit is an improvement in relationships, communication and mutual understanding between schools and their local communities”, says Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales.

The grant, used alongside the schools’ own funding and resources, can be used to fund a range of different activities such as community allotment and garden projects, school energy teams (monitoring the use of energy and promoting sustainable development), road safety courses for cyclists, and schemes to integrate Gypsy Travellers into the community.

Before the introduction of the grant, many schools throughout Wales had already established activities focused around the community. The funding - made available from 2005 to 2008 - has enabled local authorities and schools to build on what they already offer to the community, and

has encouraged them to take on new initiatives and developments. However, it is likely that significant numbers of projects will not meet any of the three specific criteria for funding, and only a few schemes will achieve the full potential of the Community Focused Schools Scheme and bring significant benefits to their local community. This means that learners in some communities will enjoy much greater access to out-of-hours learning and other services than elsewhere.

The main barrier to further development is the failure of local authorities to establish adequate systems for monitoring and evaluating their progress. This has not been helped by uncertainty surrounding future funding arrangements, which has made it difficult for local authorities to plan for the medium and longer term. Estyn found that most local authorities' believe that they and their schools will be unable to maintain the same level of community focussed activities without the grant. Because of this, local authorities cannot set targets for improvement or feed information into their planning for the future.

ContinYou Cymru and their partners have been highly influential in encouraging and helping to shape the development of Community Focussed Schools in Wales, by publishing documents to advise schools and local authorities on how to address barriers to implementing Community Focused activities. This advice, on tackling obstacles including issues related to health and safety, caretaking and cleaning, child protection, accessibility of premises, and terms and conditions of staff, has proved invaluable where local authorities' risk assessment plans have not been robust enough to identify and remedy issues posed by the community use of their school buildings.

Estyn's report also calls for local authorities and schools to work together more to offer the best opportunities to their communities. In many authorities, co-ordination of the Community Focused Schools activities of schools, either working individually or in clusters, is ineffective or weak. As a result, there can be unhelpful duplication of activity, the impact of the grant is dissipated, or the activities offered are not well matched to the needs of the wider community.

The Welsh Assembly Government recently announced that funding would be made available for a further three years from April 2008.

**ENDS**

## Notes to Editors:

Estyn's report, 'Provision of community-focused services and facilities by schools', has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Welsh Assembly Government with an evaluation of how well schools and local authorities use the community-focused schools grant. The objectives of this grant, together with the arrangements for its distribution, administration and audit, are set out in National Assembly for Wales Circular No 31/05.

The evidence base for the report includes:

- an analysis of local authorities' end-of-year progress reports for 2006-2007;
- an analysis of local authorities' responses to a questionnaire distributed by Estyn;
- information provided by ContinYou Cymru;
- inspectors' visits to five local authorities;
- inspectors' visits to a sample of schools and other community-focused settings in the five local authorities; and
- additional documentation relating to CFS work in the five local authorities.

Full copies of inspection reports are available on Estyn's website at [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

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