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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

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Schools tackle underachievement amongst disadvantaged pupils

In a report published today, Estyn says that schools need to do more to sustain the long-term benefits of projects funded now by the Welsh Assembly Government RAISE grant.

Estyn's report comments on the work schools across Wales have done in the past year in planning and implementing the £32 million of funding allocated to schools in 2006-7 and 2007-8. The grant aims to 'raise attainment and individual standards in education' (RAISE) of disadvantaged pupils.

Estyn reports that most of the schools involved in the initiative have a clear picture of the link between socio-economic disadvantage and underachievement, and most have set up a range of useful projects with the RAISE funding to tackle this problem.

Schools have concentrated mainly on raising standards of pupils' literacy, numeracy and attitudes to learning. Some schools have also set up a variety of other projects including after-school clubs, a wider curriculum for older pupils, and projects to improve attendance, and to develop pupils' critical thinking and team building skills.

Estyn reports that new work has been closely related to schools' development plans and links well with strategies already in place. However, there is a significant shortcoming in planning for

sustaining the benefits of the RAISE grant in the longer term, through, for example, training staff in new teaching and learning approaches.

“Nearly all schools use a wide variety of data to measure pupils’ progress and many have set realistic but challenging targets for their pupils. Although it is too early to judge the impact of projects on pupils’ attainment and achievement, most pupils are responding positively to the opportunities provided for them,” says Susan Lewis, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales.

However, the introduction of the RAISE initiative gave schools too little time to plan innovative projects for tackling the impact of disadvantage. In its report, Estyn calls for the Welsh Assembly to consider how best to support schools and local education authorities in implementing the initiative and in developing the role of regional coordinators.

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Notes to Editors:

- Estyn's report "The impact of RAISE funding - an interim report" was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and is published at www.estyn.gov.uk.
- The report focuses on the early stages of the RAISE initiative. Future reports will judge the impact of projects on pupils' attainment and achievement.
- In April 2006, the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills announced plans to release £32 million of funding over two school years to raise the level of performance of disadvantaged pupils.
- The Welsh Assembly Government sent a letter to all local education authorities (LEAs) giving details of the schools selected to receive the grant. They based the selection on a free school meal entitlement of 20% and above. Selected schools also had to have 50 or more pupils of statutory school age. The letter identified the grant each school would receive in 2006-2007.
- The Welsh Assembly Government asked schools to prepare two-year plans for the use of the grant and to agree the proposed use of the funding with their LEA and with the Welsh Assembly Government. They also provided a list of eligible uses of the funding and a set of criteria against which they would evaluate each bid.
- Following the announcement of the RAISE programme, the Welsh Assembly Government's remit to Estyn for 2006-2007 was amended to ask Estyn to evaluate the extent to which schools that receive the RAISE grant are working with their LEAs to promote the Assembly's social justice agenda, by addressing the link between socio-economic disadvantage and underachievement. In undertaking this work, Estyn was to work with LEAs to evaluate the effectiveness of their work to challenge and support schools that receive RAISE funding.

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