

News release

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Young people have their say in schools

School councils made up of pupil representatives are well-established in most secondary schools in Wales and have had some influence on deciding how their schools are run. However the impact of the school council is significant in only a few schools. In the majority of schools, the impact of the school council is limited to influencing decisions about practical arrangements, such as matters about school uniform, toilet facilities and meal options.

Looking beyond school councils, schools need to engage all pupils more broadly in decisions about teaching and learning, says a report published today by Estyn, the education and training inspectorate.

In a few schools, where the impact of the school council is significant, pupils have been involved in the appointment of senior staff, influencing how money is spent and developing policies such as substance misuse, recycling and anti-bullying. In one North Wales school, the school council helped the senior management team to decide what subjects would be taught post-16. The schools changed the range of subjects on offer in response to pupils' interests.

“In all areas of learning in Wales, providers should ensure that young people have opportunities to get involved in making decisions about their education and training. The statutory regulations¹ have strengthened the status of school councils and had a positive impact on pupils' decision-making but many providers can and should do more”, says Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales.

¹ The School Council (Wales) Regulations 2005

Only a minority of the schools that Estyn surveyed have appointed pupils to be members of the governing body, in accordance with the statutory regulations. Most schools are in the early stages of developing links between school councils and governing bodies. Estyn's report recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government should provide schools with further guidance on the role of associate pupil governors.

Less than a third of teachers have used the Welsh Assembly Government website www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk which aims to support the development of school councils. The forum sections of the website have not been used by teachers, governors or pupils since it was created a year ago. However, most teachers surveyed feel that the website is easy to use and find the case studies the most useful aspect. Estyn recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government makes sure that the website, and other guidance, meets the needs of school councils that are already well-established.

Across other education sectors in Wales, young people do not always have the same say on issues which affect their lives. All further-education colleges have student representatives on the governing body and increasingly learners are consulted about how they want to learn. Nearly all youth support services work hard to make sure young people have a voice. Trainee teachers have good opportunities to express their views on their course through questionnaires and discussion groups. Estyn also found that about half of the local authorities inspected this year consult effectively with learners. However, in work-based learning not enough learners have the chance to get involved in decision-making.

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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, 'Having your say – Young people, participation and school councils', has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- The evidence base for this report includes:
 - Reports on 43 secondary schools, 17 work-based learning providers, nine local authority education services, five further education providers, four youth support services and one initial teacher training provider, all inspected between September 2006 and July 2007.
 - Statistical data relating to the use of www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk provided by the Welsh Assembly Government
 - Findings from a telephone survey of 35% of secondary schools and visits to 10% of secondary schools inspected between September 2006 and July 2007
- 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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