



**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**EDUCATION & YOUTH SERVICES**

**SELF EVALUATION  
DOCUMENT  
JANUARY 2016**

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### Current performance:

- Outcomes at all key stages have improved in recent years. There have been particularly positive improvements in primary school categorisation (under the national model) and in learner outcomes at Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.
- The percentage of learners leaving school without a qualification and the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) are low. At 1.3% in 2014 the proportion of Year 11 NEETS was lowest in Wales and lowest ever Flintshire figure.
- School inspection outcomes throughout the current six year inspection cycle are in line with the ranking expectations for Flintshire.
- Public confidence in local education is high. People in Flintshire gave the second highest rating for the state of education in the 2015 National Survey for Wales (7.1 Flintshire, 7.2 Conwy).
- Support for additional learning needs and social inclusion is good.
- The level of attendance in secondary schools is a strength, with an upward trend of improvement. There are few permanent exclusions and some innovative prevention programmes to support schools to engage pupils to retain good attendance, e.g. work with traveller community by Youth Services and Inclusion Staff.
- The Authority has made good progress in developing its School Modernisation programme.
- Senior leaders understand clearly the impact of wellbeing, safeguarding and regeneration on educational outcomes.

### However:

- Although at December 2015 there are no schools in Estyn intervention, the proportion of schools requiring follow-up activity after an inspection is still too high
- Attendance at primary schools continues to fluctuate and remains below the Welsh average
- We remain committed to securing continuous improvement in all phases of education, including improving the percentage of pupils achieving higher levels in subjects and CSI at the end of each key stage

- In contrast to earlier self-evaluations there are signs that we need to focus increased effort in renewing school improvement approaches to secure improved learner outcomes at Key Stage 4, including raising level 2 inclusive in 6 schools by raising maths and /or English outcomes
- Continue work to reduce the gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils by improving outcomes for FSM pupils
- Schools need to focus on further developing Welsh 1st language and performance of pupils in National Tests.

### Capacity to Improve:

- Key plans align well at all levels and senior leaders work in a positive way with a range of strategic partners across public services and third sector to set high level priorities together.
- The Authority and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and developing a learning culture in the county.
- The Authority has a track record of identifying and intervening where hurdles to effective working hinder progress.
- Senior leaders have taken difficult decisions which are responded to proactively.
- The Authority analyses data and first-hand evidence well to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of services and monitor trends and unmet needs.
- The Authority has addressed all of the recommendations from previous Estyn inspections well.
- The Authority has a good record of effectively managing its education budget and improving efficiency and utilising additional external grants to enhance our offer.
- Scrutiny has examined difficult aspects of the authority's work successfully, and has informed decision making by the Cabinet well.
- The collaborative arrangements for School Improvement in North Wales are maturing and are beginning to "add value" to local educational provision.
- Scrutiny has examined difficult aspects of the Authority's work successfully, and has informed decision making by the Cabinet well.

However:

- The Authority still needs to take further key decisions in relation to school organisation to deliver efficient use of resources to benefit learners.
- The Authority needs to have successfully implemented major organisational and service change to meet budgetary constraints for forthcoming years.

## ***Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?***

### ***Quality Indicator: 1.1 Standards***

**Outcomes:**

- **Results and trends in performance compared with national averages, similar providers and prior attainment**
- **Standards of groups of learners**
- **Skills**

Whilst performance against headline attainment indicators over the last three years has, overall, been below our expected levels at Foundation and Key Stage 2 when compared to other Local Authorities, almost all key indicators are steadily improving. Outcomes across all main indicators in Foundation Phase in 2015 improved on performance in 2014 including the Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator (FPOI). Core Subject Indicator (CSI) 2015 performance improved on the previous year by 1.8%, with progress made by both boys and girls. This improvement trend continues across virtually all areas of learning/subjects except for W1L at KS2 which dipped. Data also shows that performance at the higher level in FPO6 improved across all areas of learning compared to 2014. At KS2, performance at the higher level 5 also improved across nearly all subject areas with a slight dip of 0.3% in Welsh First Language compared to 2014.

Improving primary school outcomes remains a key priority within the Council's Education Improvement and Modernisation Strategy. A new target setting tool has recently been introduced by GwE for schools across the region and is being used effectively to support them in this process. Challenge Advisers have scrutinised these targets with school leadership

teams to encourage high aspirations in order to improve future performance. This system builds upon a previous Local Authority target setting process which has proven to be successful, as reflected in improving outcomes across the primary phase.

At Key Stage 3 outcomes continued the trend of improvement in 2015 with county aggregate outcomes higher than in 2014 in all core and non-core subjects. Improvement and outcomes exceeding targets were secured in English, Welsh, Maths, Science, CSI overall as well as CSI for both boys and girls. Outcomes were both improved and above target in eight out of nine non-core subjects. Performance in IT, whilst up 1.8% on 2014 was just 0.2% short of the target set. Targets have also been set with schools for performance in Level 6 and Level 7 and were CSI to be calculated on these levels, outcomes would also show a positive trend.

KEY STAGE 3 2013 to 2015 – CSI									
SCHOOL	CSI L5+ %			CSI L6+ %			CSI L7+ %		
	2013	2014	2015 Prov	2013	2014	2015 Prov	2013	2014	2015 Prov
LA TOTAL	80.0	84.3	87.2	37.8	44.0	48.1	8.2	11.2	13.0
Secondary Schools Only TOTAL	81.5	85.8	88.2	38.5	44.8	48.7	8.3	11.4	13.1

The Welsh Government Statistical Bulletin “achievement and entitlement to free school meals in Wales 2014”, published on 28 January 2015 reports Key Stage 3 CSI for mainstream maintained schools in Flintshire as being at 85.8% compared to an expected benchmark comparison of 86.2%.

At Key Stage 4 in 2015 the outcomes achieved by learners in mainstream schools were less than target on 2014 in indicators. Whilst Flintshire has historically performed well, some schools experienced a significant dip in performance in 2015 which has been investigated and remedial action taken.

“Achievement and entitlement to free school meals in Wales 2014” reports the percentage achieving the Level 2+ indicator in Flintshire mainstream maintained schools as being at

65.1% compared to an expected benchmark comparison of 62.3%. Average Capped Points in Flintshire is 355.5 with the benchmark at 357.9.

### Flintshire Inspection Outcomes

Inspection outcomes over the current six year inspection cycle in Flintshire have been in line with expectations given Flintshire’s deprivation ranking. There are no schools currently in an Estyn intervention category as at December 2015.

The spring and summer terms of 2015 have seen a significant number of successes in removing primary schools from categories of follow up. However, the overall aim is to reduce the number of schools being placed in follow up in the first instance and have more schools achieve judgements of good or excellent

Schools Inspections 2014-15	Inspection Judgements	Follow Up Categories
11 Primary Schools Inspected	7 judged Good/Good 1 judged Good/Excellent	1 invited to submit Excellent practice case studies  2 LA Monitoring
	1 Adequate/Good  2 Adequate/Adequate	3 Estyn Monitoring
Current Performance  Prospects for Improvement	Good = 73%  Good/Excellent = 82%	
7 Primary Schools in follow up from 2013-14 cycle		3 removed from LAM, 1 recommended for removal -pending Estyn decision August  1 removed from EM, 1 awaiting autumn revisit (making good progress)  1 removed from Special Measures (pending verification)

2 schools in follow up from 2012-13 cycle		2 removed from In Need of Significant Improvement
2 Secondary School Inspected	1 judged Good/Excellent 1 judged Excellent/Excellent	Invited to submit Excellent practice case study
Current Performance  Prospects for Improvement	Good = 50% Excellent 50%  Excellent =100%	

#### Key Question Performance

Sept 14 – July 15	Number	%
11 Schools (9 Pri/2 Sec)		
Good or Better All 3 KQ	8	73%
Good or Better KQ1	8	73%
Good or Better KQ2	9	82%
Good or Better KQ3	9	82%
Adequate in 2 or more KQ	2	18%
Unsatisfactory in one or more KQ	0	0%
Excellent in one or more KQ	1	18%

#### Comparative Performance across Flintshire Schools

81 schools in total (67 Primary, 12 Secondary, 2 Specialist)

@ July 2015	Number	%
No Follow Up	74	91.4%
LA Monitoring	4	4.9%
Estyn Monitoring	3	3.7%
Significant Improvement	0	0
Special Measures	0	0
	81	100%

Good outcomes have been maintained in Estyn inspections in the funded non-maintained sector during the last academic year. Of the four settings inspected, three received a 'good' judgement for current performance and prospects. Of those, one setting was judged to be 'excellent' in a quality indicator and invited to write a case study. One setting which had only joined the Early Entitlement scheme a couple of months previously has been placed in Estyn Monitoring but is responding positively to support. During the year as a whole, four other settings were removed from Local Authority Monitoring. In the recently published HMI thematic review of 10% provision, Flintshire was used as an excellent practice case study.

#### Progression & Outcomes

Children and young people progress successfully to the next stage in their education and from school to further education, training or employment. The percentage of young people who are NEET has been significantly below average for Wales and has been on a downward trend between 2009 and 2014 (with 2013 as an exception). Work to minimise the level of young people not in education, employment and training is a high priority for the Local Service Board's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. The 14-19 Network had a particular focus on reducing Year 11 NEETS in 2014 and the partnership working with all providers and Careers Wales reduced the figure to just 1.3% in 2014, (3.6% in 2013) this was the lowest value recorded in Wales. Significant improvement has also been secured on the wider indicators of engagement for 16 to 24 year olds.

The trend in participation and attainment in Welsh and Welsh as a second language are improving overall. There was a slight decrease in the proportion of learners achieving a Full or Short Course GCSE A\* to C in 2015 compared to 2014 (52.5% compared to 53.0% ). Opportunities to engage in broader language initiatives within universal services e.g. Youth Services and URDD collaborations have improved and continue to underpin positive outcomes. Schools are now starting to plan for the cessation of the Short Course from September 2017

Overall, vulnerable learners and those learners who are at risk of underachievement achieve well. These learners have responded well to targeted interventions which have impacted on standards of wellbeing and consequently outcomes. For example, the percentage of learners leaving school without a qualification has significantly decreased in 2014 at key stage 4 with 99.7% achieving a recognised qualification compared to 99.3% in 2013. Wales Government discontinued this collection after 2013

In 2014 the average points score for Looked After Children (LAC) was 358 (199 in 2013) which was in the top quartile, whilst the performance learners from traveller families from Foundation Phase through to KS3 continues to show a general positive trend of Improvement, as demonstrated by the table below:

Percentage Achieving FPOI/CSI				
Key Stage	2012	2013	2014	2015
FP	26%	50%	57%	60%
KS2	33%	61%	50%	77%
KS3	20%	50%	50%	66%

Outcomes at Key Stage 4 for the cohort of Flintshire learners who are entitled to FSM are good compared to their counterparts across Wales with the Flintshire outcomes higher than Wales in each of the last three years. In 2014 93.2% of Flintshire FSM learners achieved the

L1 threshold compared to 87.8% across Wales. At level 2+ in 2014 the figures were Flintshire 37.3% and Wales 27.8%. In 2015 LA 35.2, Wales 31.6l

Learners in alternative provision for those not attending school, and those supported by the Integrated Youth Provision Service, gain useful relevant qualifications. Many of these learners develop skills and experiences which help them to continue in education and training as evidenced through the low percentage of NEET (1.3%) for the county in 2014. In addition, a good percentage of learners gain accreditation or informal recognition for their participation in the Integrated Youth Provision Service and wider youth support services working within high schools and our specialist grant funded support services and health services.

<b>Key sources of evidence:</b>	<b>Key issues &amp; challenges:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance data for FP; KS2; KS3; KS4; KS5 + national tests               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA Core Data Set</li> </ul> </li> <li>• LA Annual Report to Elected Members</li> <li>• 2015 National categorisation data [primary and secondary].               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of Estyn judgements for primary/secondary schools</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to raise attainment in Key Stage 4, with particular focus on Level 2 inclusive and higher grades</li> <li>• Secure improvements in Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 outcomes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards in Welsh 1st Language</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Secure improvements in the outcomes of new literacy and numeracy tests</li> <li>• Reduce the proportion of schools requiring follow-up activity after an inspection</li> <li>• Outcomes achieved by those at risk of not maintaining their secondary school place through Key Stage 4.</li> </ul>

### **Quality Indicator: 1.2 Wellbeing**

#### **Outcomes:**

- **Attitudes to keeping healthy and safe**

- Participation and enjoyment in learning
- Community involvement and decision making

Overall, school inspection reports indicate that learners exhibit good standards of behaviour, and that they are involved well in decisions about their life in the authority's schools or maintained settings. The inspection reports also show that learners participate well in learning activities. There are good outcomes in relation to the targets in the local authority and partnership plans.

Attendance is high in secondary schools and is consistently above the Welsh average. WG verified data for the school year 2014/15 confirms there is a marked improvement in attendance at secondary level (93.8 % to 94.2%), with unauthorised absence in both the primary and secondary sector recorded as 0.3%, the lowest value in Wales. Attendance within the primary sector shows a slight fluctuation at 94.7% as compared with 94.8% in 2013/14.

Permanent exclusion levels are low. The local authority continues to work with schools to reduce the number of school days lost to exclusion. The Managed Moves protocol is fully embedded and is used as one of the tools to support this.

Learners participate well in a comprehensive range of activities which contribute towards improving their wellbeing. Standards of wellbeing are good in nearly all schools inspected in the current cycle. Pupils enjoy happy, safe and purposeful environments. Standards of behaviour are good and children and young people develop their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and behaviours well.

Learners engage well in provision which supports them to lead healthy lifestyles. They gain awareness of aspects such as substance misuse and receive recognition for learning achieved. Nearly all learners involved with school based counselling service report a positive impact on their lives and make considerable gains in confidence and in personal and emotional awareness. These learners respond well to interventions and demonstrate

improvements in attitudes, behaviour, and educational attainment. Four Flintshire Primary Schools have successfully gained the National Quality Award for Healthy Schools

Youth Services in Flintshire are now delivered in an integrated way with enhanced collaboration between providers in all sectors. Youth Justice and Drugs and Alcohol teams have been integrated into the Youth Services portfolio to form the Integrated Youth Provision (IYP) service. The IYP service has a varied scope and reach across all partners and utilises the Welsh Government Youth Support Grant and the Families First grant to support third sector provision. Young people participate well in IYP service activities across all sectors. The service has an outcomes focussed plan to steer direction and to measure impact. Increases in Duke of Edinburgh Award participation and the broadened scope and reach with better outcomes are particularly encouraging. The prevention element within Youth Justice has been enhanced by the collaborative work between all elements of the IYP Staff and volunteers. The plans to co locate these staff within the new delivery model will further enhance these opportunities. The targeted work with groups has enabled coproduction work with several partners to benefit our most vulnerable young people.

The evidence from data is that there is good take-up of programmes of physical activity and participation rates in specific schemes are particularly high. Participation levels in sports development programmes and extra-curricular sports activities are good. The percentage of learners involved has increased over the last three years; in particular girls have been targeted and their participation has increased. The impact of these activities on healthy lifestyles is analysed well and learners report positive impact on their lives. The opportunities offered by grant funded projects e.g. Families First also enhances and sustains behaviour changes and decreases inequality of opportunity for access to provision.

Learners participate in, and influence the development of, strategic documents. They also develop specific versions to aid accessibility for other children and young people. Learner views shape decisions in some policy areas and school inspection reports indicate that learners are involved well in decisions about their lives in school and in our young people's focused work outside formal education e.g. in Integrated Youth Provision.

The percentage of learners continuing in education or employment post 16 is amongst the

best in Wales. The level of young people not in education, training or employment is the lowest in Wales. Rapid positive progress is also being made with wider indicators such as job seekers allowance claimants between the ages of 16 and 24. The Authority's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework has been praised by the Welsh Government. The Families First programme young people focused projects have been reviewed and a process of re-commissioning has been undertaken to ensure funding is targeted at the identified areas of need. This has resulted in some funding being directed towards a younger age range to identify those at risk of becoming NEET earlier and set up prevention strategies. Integrated Youth Provision has developed an innovative new project (Resilience project) in partnership with the third sector. Resilience will complement the emerging TRAC project and will offer key workers to support the TRAC delivery. The Dragons Den strategy for engaging employer mentors and young people in entrepreneurial activities is rapidly being rolled out across other Authorities following positive impact in Flintshire.

Key sources of evidence:	Key issues & challenges:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government statistical bulletins (attendance)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to raise attendance levels</li> <li>• Continue to reduce the number and length of fixed term exclusions</li> </ul>

## ***Key Question 2: How good is provision?***

### ***Quality Indicator: 2.1 Support for school improvement***

#### **Outcomes:**

- Local Authority support, monitoring, challenge and intervention
- The Authority's work in raising standards in priority areas, including curriculum support
- Support for school leadership, management and governance

The Local Authority provides effective and appropriate monitoring, support, challenge and intervention for all schools, including special schools and pupil referral units, delivered through GwE as a joint education service between North Wales Authorities. Flintshire's Chief Education Officer is regional lead director for the service, whilst the lead member for education is an active member of the Joint Committee. Senior officers contribute to the leadership of school improvement strategies locally, regionally and nationally through leadership of professional networks.

Partnership agreements clearly set out arrangements to support, monitor, challenge and intervene in schools. Work with specific schools in amber and red categories has been characterised by clear timetables for action and definitive agreed targets and outcomes. As the service which undertakes termly monitoring visits on behalf of the authorities, GwE is well-informed about standards of achievement in schools, and this is supported by the judgements of the institutions themselves in evaluation questionnaires.

Data and contextual information are used forensically to categorise schools and to agree on an appropriate level of intervention and support. Challenge Advisers now know their link schools well which has also resulted in better quality pre-inspection reports for Estyn.

Effective use has been made of a vast range of data on standards and quality of education to monitor and evaluate performance and to challenge schools and individual subject departments but the impact of the work has been more significant in underperforming schools where a high percentage have made more mature use of data when evaluating and findings trends, when identifying areas for improvement and when prioritising courses of action in relation to standards. A more mature level of approach is also evident in these schools re: target setting procedures e.g. more intelligent use of assessments, FFT data, FSM family performance thresholds and lines of regression etc. However, a more consistent approach must be taken to ensure that schools across the performance range are challenged on their performance and specifically on the achievements of individual pupils/groups of pupils.

Regular contacts are made with every school to monitor and challenge standards and quality of leadership. Those schools of concern locally or/and in an Estyn follow-up category are visited more frequently. The findings of these visits are used to help authorities determine a risk

category for their schools and to target additional support. In each instance, a report is sent to the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, with GwE's work now firmly integrated into local School Performance Monitoring Practice. As a result of this additional support and the intensified scrutiny and accountability most schools have made good progress. In specific instances, the Challenge Adviser attends meetings of the Governing Body and School Performance Monitoring Group to present their reports. Each monitoring visit has a focus area, however standards of achievement and progress towards priorities and targets are a common thread. Self-evaluations and School Development Plans are crucial to driving improvements within institutions and are therefore central to all discussions with schools.

Under the standard model, the autumn visit focuses additionally on outcomes; the spring visit on standards of achievement in learners' books; and the summer visit on quality of leadership at all levels. In an attempt to ensure consistency and transparency of visits, a matrix is used to reach a judgement on the quality of the various elements. This ensures that regional themes are operational, that good practices are identified and shared, and that further support is targeted on a risk basis. As a result of the above action [and specific focus on joint observation and scrutiny], the capacity of the Senior Management Teams and Middle Leaders to evaluate quality of teaching and learning in schools, has improved. However, a minority of schools need further support to evaluate standards in specific departments.

There has been a relentless focus on standards in those schools which have been targeted and there is evidence from a number of sources, including Estyn inspection and end of key stage performance that a high percentage of those schools have improved radically since 2013-2014. It is judged that GwE's strategies and procedures for challenging and supporting those schools which were significantly underperforming have been very effective and have resulted in firm improvements.

Although there are strengths in the support element of GwE's work with amber/red category school e.g. developing more robust self-evaluation procedures and more effective use of data, which has resulted in improvements across both sectors, it is judged that further work remains to be done to ensure that a more appropriate balance is struck between challenging and supporting so that all schools can easily access quality guidance, across a range of aspects and

priorities. This is the key idea behind the new approach taken by GwE from 2015-16 where schools will no longer be in receipt of just generic support.

High performing schools are encouraged to participate in peer challenge and support mechanisms, school to school support projects and pioneer programmes where this is appropriate. Flintshire schools are disproportionately represented in national pioneer programmes, recognising not only that they have school improvement expertise to share but also their willingness to collaborate.

### **Developing Leadership:**

Flintshire is well represented on the National Leadership Development Board, with practitioners also contributing to leadership development regionally and locally. As well as prioritising leadership as part of termly monitoring visits, we have intensified the work with a number of schools and individuals using a targeted approach. There are several examples of Challenge Advisers working with 'good practice' school head teachers to provide target schools with guidance and support – in the form of individual sessions or group workshops. Good practice has been shared in strategic forums and presented directly to category schools too. A range of training or guidance sessions have been delivered by either the LA or GwE for senior and middle leaders across a range of developmental work. GwE are developing and delivering training across the range of leadership positions, including middle and senior leaders. Effective NPQH selection, support and assessment processes are operational with current recognised effective leaders within the education sector in North Wales used for delivery of the programme.

With regard to Headteachers' Performance Management procedures, all Challenge Advisers have been trained to act as a member of the relevant Governing Body panel. Effective use is made of the Autumn Term Monitoring Visit to collate evidence for determining possible objectives and progress is monitored in subsequent meetings.

Specific work has been undertaken with schools where Governance is causing concern, including advising, coaching and strengthening governing bodies to increase the rigour of challenge and support within the school community. Work has been undertaken collaboratively

in North East Wales to upskill Governors and Elected Members with priority given to improving their understanding of data and of the requirements of challenging Headteachers. The Authority has placed appropriate emphasis on supporting governing bodies to analyse performance data more robustly. As a result most governing bodies have a good understanding of how their school performs in relation to other, similar schools.

### **School to School Collaboration:**

GwE Challenge Advisors monitor and evaluate progress on a termly basis to ensure accountability and effective progress across the region and school>school collaboration is now included as a line of inquiry in all termly monitoring visits. School leaders jointly presented progress with the Flintshire model to a recent meeting of the Authority's Scrutiny Panel.

As part of the wider strategy, and the multi-layered approach, GwE and the Local Authorities, in partnership with Headteachers, have identified best practice relating to leadership and teaching and learning. Schools/departments and individuals, supported by GwE funding, will operate as lead practitioners to support peers. In Flintshire, Mold Alun is leading for Science developments across the region. The Secondary Forums have continued to operate with administration and leadership passing over from the LA to GwE. The established model will ensure that we will have ease of access to a wider support package for schools and that the support is rooted in best regional practice. The model also allows for capacity building at our best performing schools.

### **Literacy and Numeracy**

A regional Literacy and Numeracy Strategy has been developed in collaboration with key partners including representatives from schools, LA teams, who are still delivering support on specific aspects of this agenda (e.g. Welsh Advisory Teams, Foundation Phase) and the National Support Programme.

Generally, in the 2014 National Tests GwE's performance was above the Wales average on the SS>85 indicator in all except the Welsh Reading test. Performance was strongest in the Numerical Reasoning test. A common area for development in 3 of the 4 tests is the % of

learners achieving the higher score indicator of >115. During the coming year the analysis of the National Tests will be used to support the targeting of specific schools.

Support continues to be allocated in response to requests from Challenge Advisors and focuses on individual teachers with regards to planning and delivery of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. In schools where the support is most effective, the AP's input, as part of a wider team including the Challenge Advisor, leads to an improvement in the quality of teaching, as noted by Estyn or GwE reviews.

Training on Numerical Reasoning for Numeracy Co-ordinators, offered to the region's primary schools in November 2014, was over-subscribed. 270 places were available on 9 sessions in venues across the region. A further training event on Extended Writing was offered in Flintshire only in response to identified commissioning need. All training is followed-up by practical class-based support in targeted schools.

#### **Promoting and Developing the Welsh Language:**

The Local Authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) was approved by Welsh Government and is the driver for improving Welsh outcomes for learners and promotion of the Welsh language and Welsh medium education. The WESP Forwm meets regularly and demonstrates strong partnership working between the LA and its partner organisations e.g. Mudiad Meithrin, Menter Iaith Sir y Fflint, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Coleg Cambria and Syfflag. The partnership has proved effective in developing and enriching opportunities for learners in individual school communities.

#### **Developing 14-19 provision:**

An effective regional infrastructure has been operational for a number of years and an experienced steering group, under the lead of a regional co-ordinator, oversees all developments related to the phase. As a result, the region has ensured that all maintained secondary schools and FE colleges within North Wales have met their statutory local curriculum requirements at pre and post 16. Aspects of the work have led to national recognition and specifically in relation to collaboration between FE Colleges and schools. The focus of the local

14-19 Network is on Youth Engagement and Progression, in line with national guidelines and in 2015 the Network has introduced courses for KS4 learners designed to help maintain the place of more learners at their school. The Network has also arranged IOSH training for staff from all schools the Inclusion Service in arranging Extended Work Experience placements as a response to Careers Wales withdrawing from this activity.

### **Developing the Foundation Phase:**

Foundation Phase Officers meet regularly to standardise practices across the region, and on a termly basis with Challenge Advisers as part of LA/GwE meetings in order to share information. The Challenge Advisers have collaborated with the LA's to effectively deploy the Foundation Phase officers in target schools as required. GwE and Foundation Phase Officers have also conducted end of phase moderation sessions with target schools. Training for the introduction of the Foundation Phase Profile has been successfully delivered to all schools ready for implementation in September 2015.

### **School Performance Monitoring Group:**

The School Performance Monitoring Group has been successful in securing improvement in targeted schools. Selection of schools to be part of the Monitoring Group is based on:

- LA/GwE agreed outcomes on 'Capacity to Improve'
- Estyn Outcomes
- Data Profile
- Risk Factors e.g. change of leadership

The methodology has been extended to secondary schools with Holywell High School, John Summers High School, St Davids High School and St Richard Gwyn Catholic High School being identified as schools in need of a similarly intense level of support and challenge. This is an important given the increasingly positive profile of primary sector performance (evidenced through learner and school national categorisation model outcomes) against increasing issues being identified in the Secondary sector.

The national categorisation system is ensuring consistency in how schools are evaluated and

supported. The Partnership Agreement ensures that schools have a good understanding of this process and of the level of support they can expect in order to bring about improvement. In most cases, the criteria are used appropriately to target strategic intervention.

The proportion of schools identified as requiring follow-up monitoring as a result of inspection remains too high in comparison with other authorities. The Authority has recently used appropriate powers to improve schools through the School Performance Monitoring Group and issues warning notices where required.

Challenge Advisers and Officers analyse performance data well and provide good support for schools' self-evaluation procedures. Officers produce performance reports on schools that are detailed, with an appropriate level of challenge. Whole school reviews, jointly undertaken by GwE Challenge Advisers, Local Authority officers and schools' senior management teams, have improved capacity at school level and help to develop the concept of shared leadership. Effective strategies have been established to respond to national priorities that focus on raising standards in priority areas. For example, support for literacy is good with a strong emphasis on improving reading skills. Good progress has been made in supporting schools and other young people focussed providers to improve standards and quality of provision for 14 to 19-year-olds.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Key sources of evidence</b></li> <li>• LA/SchoolPartnership Agreement</li> <li>• Examples of :</li> <li>• Hub meetings</li> <li>• Pre termly monitoring visit briefing documents for Challenge Advisers</li> <li>• Termly monitoring visit reports</li> <li>• Quality assurance monitoring reports by SMT for termly visits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Key issues &amp; challenges</b></li> <li>• Reduce the number of schools requiring follow-up activity as a result of inspection</li> <li>• Ensure that Regional / Hub arrangements deliver value for money</li> <li>• Impact on performance and outcomes in targeted schools</li> <li>• Increase level of challenge and support for 'coasting' good schools so that they</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of feedback from stakeholder survey following all termly visits.</li> <li>• Prospectus of GwE Development Programme for Leadership.</li> <li>• School to School Regional Strategy</li> <li>• Action Plan re: deployment of underspend to support S to S Strategy</li> <li>• Regional Literacy and Numeracy Strategy</li> <li>• Report to Education &amp; Youth Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee on Federations &amp; Clusters and school performance</li> </ul>	<p>become excellent schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further strengthen the role of the Governing Body as a 'critical friend' in schools</li> <li>• Further improve the quality of support to improve self-evaluation and improvement planning in schools</li> <li>• Further develop work done by Gwynedd and Ynys Mon re: use of Language Charter to promote the development of the Welsh language across the region</li> </ul>
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## **Quality Indicator: 2.2**

### **Support for Additional Learning Needs**

#### **Outcomes:**

- **Work to meet its statutory obligations in respect of children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN)**
- **Work in raising standards for children and young people with ALN**
- **Provision for children and young people with ALN, including provision that is commissioned and/or provided by or with other agencies**
- **Work with parents and carers of children and young people with ALN**

There are clear and widely understood protocols and decision-making processes to assess and decide on support for pupils with additional learning needs. Nearly all pupils with additional learning needs have access to an appropriate range of support and make good progress.

Assessments are carried out at an early stage. Timescales for completing the statutory process and issuing statements are good (87.7% without exceptions, 100% with exceptions for 2014-15). This is significantly above the Welsh average of 64.5% and 95.6% respectively. Pupils placed by the Authority in independent special schools have their learning and behavioural needs assessed before placement and monitored subsequently.

There is effective and co-ordinated advice and support for parents and carers of children and young people supported through the Parent Partnership, which has a positive impact on outcomes. The Family Information Service provision is a central one stop shop with an excellent website which also supports parents and carers to access appropriate up to date relevant information and support and signposts to a varied menu of provision from all sectors. There is good continuation of services and effective transition support to help children and young people move between different stages of learning.

Support for additional learning needs and inclusion is good. Many of the pupils with statements, and others identified as having additional learning needs, achieve well and are in

mainstream schools. Well-developed consultation with schools enables the authority to delegate most of its resources for additional learning needs. It effectively monitors the impact of these resources on pupils' progress.

The authority has been successful in reducing the number of appeals to the SEN Tribunal for Wales and this figure remains consistently low (1 appeal in 2013-2014 and 1 appeal in 2014-15)). It is working to reduce the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs whilst balancing this with appropriate access to support for pupils.

Schools receive good training to develop their expertise in meeting a range of needs. Appropriate training is helping staff to understand pupils' additional needs in order to support individual development planning. The local authority is responding proactively to the proposed integration of Person-Centred planning into the national reforms. All key inclusion officers have accessed detailed training and the programme has now been extended to include representatives from all schools and Pupils Referral Units and officers with the target of completing all settings by the end of July 2016.

Officers work together and share information well. They make good use of provision mapping to hold schools to account about pupils' achievements.

<p><b>Key sources of evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SENTW Annual Report 2014 (when published)</li> </ul> <p>Education Improvement Plan</p>	<p><b>Key issues &amp; challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity of schools to provide tiered provision for Children &amp; Young People with ALN and to record the progress of pupils with ALN</li> <li>• Support schools in readiness for ALN Reform.</li> </ul>
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## ***Quality Indicator: 2.3 Promoting social inclusion and wellbeing***

### **Outcomes:**

- **Work to promote social inclusion and wellbeing of all children and young people, including behaviour, preventing exclusion and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS)**
- **Promoting attendance and keeping children and young people in education, employment and training**
- **Youth support services and personal support**
- **Safeguarding arrangements**

School attendance rates generally follow an upward trend. School attendance is a high priority both for the Welsh Government and local authorities in their aim to improve standards. Flintshire secondary schools have demonstrated a consistent trend of improvement with figures being above the national average for Wales. Unauthorised absence in both primary (0.3%) and secondary schools (0.3%) are at the lowest values in Wales for both sectors.

### **Key sources of evidence:**

**Improvement Plan**

## ***Quality Indicator: 2.4 Access and School Places***

### **Outcomes:**

- **The provision of an appropriate range and number of school places**
- **Admission to schools**
- **Co-ordination of early years and play to ensure sufficiency**
- **Co-ordination of youth support services to ensure access to entitlements**

Since 2010 and the formation of the Schools Modernisation Strategy the Authority has undertaken the following work:

- New Primary School in Connahs Quay (Ysgol Cae'r Nant) – September 2012
- Closure of Ysgol Rhos y Cae School - Sept 2013
- Closure of the Croft Nursery and transfer of provision to the neighbouring Queensferry and St. Ethelwold's Primary Schools – July 2014
- New Welsh medium satellite provision in Shotton (Ysgol Croes Atti- Glannau Dyfdrwy) - September 2014
- Construction of new Shotton Primary School (Ysgol Ty Ffynnon ) - September 2014
- Hawarden Village Primary school – buildings joined April 2016
- The Local Authority has completed its statutory proposal programme of infant and junior amalgamation. Amalgamations reduced the number of schools from 14 infant/junior schools to 7 primary schools.
- Post 16 transformation proposals have been approved in relation to Buckley, Holywell, and Connah's Quay, with further proposals underway at Shotton/Queensferry and Saltney.

The Authority has also reached implementation phase of its 21st Century Schools and Post 16 Transformation programmes. The Outline Business Case for both of the latter programmes has received ministerial support. (2014-2017 Band A Programme Circa £64m). The £200m+ North Wales Capital Procurement Framework jointly led by Flintshire and Denbighshire is now in place. This is recognised as sector leading by Welsh Government, with a range of innovations in social commitments and efficiency. Good progress has been made with the detailed build for the £31m investment in the Holywell Community Campus and the £14.7m post-16 Hub in Connah's Quay.

As At September 2015, Flintshire's level of surplus places (17.75% primary, 20.15% secondary and 18.9% overall) is better the Welsh average, but not yet meeting Ministerial targets. There is a key need to continue our programme to reduce unfilled places in schools to ensure that resources are used to maintain and improve learners' educational experience and outcomes by maintaining low pupil teacher ratios and an appropriate learning environment. This work will be undertaken through the linked capital programme and revised modernisation strategy. Current work includes consultations at Llanfynydd, Flint Mountain and Gwespyr/Picton (primary) and Queensferry (secondary).

The modernisation of the school estate has been a key corporate priority for the authority for many years and remains so. We will develop its strategies to ensure that we are maximising the potential investment opportunities that may be available via Welsh Government funding.

The Authority has an up to date Asset Management system and data from the system is used to influence decision making on Capital investment in schools. Priorities for investment for the schools capital programme are clear, linked to strategy, funded and agreed and based upon up-to-date information and to data contained within the Authority's Asset Management system.

An accessibility strategy has been in place since 2004, all schools have accessibility plans, physical barriers in all schools have been identified the Authority has undertaken a rolling programme of ensuring a network of schools in all areas of the County are made fully accessible. This programme of improvement continues and is linked to the capital programme & the modernisation strategy.

The Authority has made significant investment in its school buildings since 2001, removing surplus places and reducing the number of schools. The authority has developed a system to analyse the benefits arising from its investment in terms of improving the condition, suitability and efficiency of its schools, and is contributing to a Welsh Government task group in this area.

Despite this significant investment, the Authority's data shows that the school portfolio still requires significant further investment:-

**Schools - Condition Category (January 2015)**

Category	Percentage %
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<b>A</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>0</b>

**Schools -Suitability Category (Sept 2014)**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>13%</b>

Admission arrangements are determined in accordance with the School Admissions Code and are made clear to schools, parents. Children moving in to the area are accommodated in relevant schools without delay. A high percentage of parental preferences continue to be met in the main admissions round. However, due to oversubscription at some schools in both the primary and secondary sector the number of appeals has increased in recent years. All appeals are heard in accordance with the requirements of the School Appeals Code within 30 school days.

There is a good range of early years, play and youth support services provision which meets the needs and children, young people and their families. The authority regularly audits this provision and provides appropriate support to secure ongoing improvements in quality.

There is an appropriate range of early years Foundation Phase learning and play provision which meets the needs of children and their families. The authority works effectively in partnership with the voluntary sector to plan and deliver provision, using surplus capacity in primary schools where it is appropriate to do so. Two new Welsh medium early years' providers have been approved in 2015 to meet the demand identified through sufficiency

surveys. The authority monitors the standards within maintained and non-maintained settings well and provides well-targeted support to improve the quality of the learning provided.

The authority co-ordinates youth support services effectively, based on a thorough analysis of need. As a result, young people can access a range of appropriate support services.

<p><b>Key sources of evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Draft School Modernisation Policy</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Key issues &amp; challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Capacity to address the renewed programme of school modernisation.</b></li> </ul>
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### ***Question 3: How good are leadership & management?***

#### ***Quality Indicator: 3.1 Leadership***

##### **Outcomes:**

- **The impact of leadership**
- **Strategic direction and meeting national and local priorities**
- **Elected members and other supervisory boards**

Officers and elected members share a common vision, values and purpose focused through the Authority’s streamlined improvement planning arrangements. This is embodied through the Local Authority’s streamlined Improvement Plan. Leaders communicate high expectations for securing improvement and challenge schools positively to good effect, for example, through the School Standards Monitoring Group.

Policies and initiatives are implemented consistently. Officers and elected members use relevant management information about performance to address issues of underperformance and to set objectives and targets that are strategic priorities. Progress against the Authority’s priorities is monitored corporately and the outcomes for schools are

generally improving.

Cabinet members now show determination in challenging and supporting services and taking difficult decisions to bring about necessary improvements, for example, on the school modernisation programme.

The Local Authority and its partners have a clear commitment to learners and developing a learning culture in the county. Senior leaders have very high aspirations for children and young people and they understand clearly the impact of wider regeneration and social care on educational outcomes. Service structures and resource planning effectively support the delivery of the shared priorities embedded in the Single Integrated Plan for Flintshire and services recognise and understand how they contribute to the outcomes.

Senior management restructuring has enhanced the team's agility and ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances. Senior leaders work in a sophisticated way with a range of strategic partners across public services to set high level priorities together and deliver their vision for the people of Flintshire. Senior leaders have put structures in place to guide cooperation and lead by example. The extensive use of secondments, joint appointments and collaborative initiatives means that staff at all levels recognise and understand each other's strengths whilst working confidently within their own specialisms.

The Authority has a track record of identifying and intervening where hurdles to effective working hinder progress. Difficult decisions are responded to proactively. Where appropriate the Leadership, other elected members, the Chief Executive or other senior managers intervene effectively to overcome obstacles. Systems leadership and the delegation of resources support the efforts to place the learner first. Leadership is shared and operational staff can take decisions promptly to support learners and their families so that they stay engaged in learning.

Scrutiny task and finish groups (including the School Performance Monitoring Group) have successfully examined key aspects of the authority's work, and have informed decision making well. Elected members have developed their understanding and expertise through working in small groups to analyse specific aspects of education. In addition, the ongoing

programme of scrutiny committee is raising the level and quality of challenge to schools.

Key sources of evidence:	Key issues & challenges:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Service Board Single Integrated Plan</li> <li>• Flintshire County Council Improvement Plan</li> <li>• Revised Operating Structure</li> <li>• Wales Audit Office Annual Report (June 2014)</li> <li>• Annual Report of the School Performance Monitoring Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedding revised organisational structures</li> <li>• Review of Education Services in Wales – implications for school improvement and local authorities</li> <li>• Attracting good leaders to senior roles in schools</li> </ul>

### ***Quality Indicator: 3.2 Improving quality***

**Outcomes:**

- **Self-evaluation, including listening to learners and others**
- **Planning improvement**

- **Involvement in professional learning communities**

Leaders, managers and elected members have an accurate picture and understanding of the authority's strengths and weaknesses. They routinely make good use of a range of rigorous monitoring activities.

The Authority undertakes a wide range of self-evaluation activities that cover most aspects of the work of the service. It analyses data and first-hand evidence well to make accurate evaluations of the quality and impact of services. The arrangements also identify clearly the areas for improvement and help ensure that progress against strategic and other plans is reviewed effectively.

The Authority engages well with partners, service users and other stakeholders in its evaluation processes and in planning for improvement. For example, the Integrated Youth Strategy "Delivering Together 2014 – 2018" featured full engagement of young people's representatives in its development.

Performance data is consistently used to monitor progress and plan for improvement. There is a sustained focus on achieving progress against the Authority's priorities. The Authority regularly seeks the views of students, schools and the Authority's partners.

The Authority has effective performance management arrangements which bring about improvements. They also help ensure that objectives for individual officers link well to operational and strategic priorities. Key plans align well at all levels and help elected members to understand and make effective use of performance information. The well-defined performance management cycle allows them to monitor the progress of improvement plans and take timely remedial action.

The area benefits from well-established professional learning communities within and across schools from across the Authority to enable schools to develop and share their professional knowledge. There are effective networks of professional practice with other authorities and their partners. A priority for GwE is the enhancement of subject support networks and school to school support arrangements.

Collaborative working across local authorities is seen as a priority and this is developing at a good pace. Senior officers have contributed significantly to the development of a regional and national school improvement developments and regional collaborations for supporting programmes.

The Authority has addressed well all of the recommendations from previous Estyn inspections.

<b>Key sources of evidence:</b>	<b>Key issues &amp; challenges:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Service Board Single Integrated Plan for Flintshire</li> <li>• Flintshire County Council Improvement Plan</li> <li>• School Improvement Plan</li> <li>• Draft Integrated Youth Strategy</li> <li>• Q2 Performance Report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing to build a school-led resilient school improvement system, through enhanced collaborative working</li> </ul>

### ***Quality Indicator: 3.3 Partnership working***

#### **Outcomes:**

- **Strategic partnerships**
- **Joint planning, resourcing and quality assurance**

Partnership activities make a strong contribution to widening the range of choices for learners and this has benefits for their standards and wellbeing. The Authority takes a leading role in developing joint working practices and promotes trust and good communication between partners.

The Authority's officers focus well on joint planning and resourcing as well as building capacity for continuous improvement. The Authority has strong links with the community, good liaison and communication with schools, parents/carers and works effectively with other agencies enabling officers to deliver joined-up programmes that improve outcomes and wellbeing for learners. The Family Information Service is an important conduit to enable access to relevant up to date information to all to support these aims.

Senior managers demonstrate significant commitment to developing strategic partnerships across all aspects of the practice of the Authority. Through the work of Local Service Board (LSB), the Authority and its partners have joint ownership of priorities and outcomes. These aims are communicated clearly in the LSB's Single Integrated Plan.

The Authority makes very good use of its partnerships to deliver services which improve outcomes and wellbeing for children and young people. These include effective partnerships between the Authority, the police, local health board, voluntary agencies, other local education authorities and integrated youth support services. The Authority monitors and co-ordinates the work of these partners well. Individual partners have a good understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses in the services they deliver and collective contributions and co-production can be evidenced.

Partnership working between the Authority, further and higher education establishments, employers and secondary schools in developing the work of the 14-19 network is recognised as good. They successfully promote co-operation and remove unhelpful competition between providers. They also enable school governors, the college, employers and the Authority to plan, monitor and resource an effective 14-19 curriculum that meets the needs of learners well. Collaboration in development and transition to the new post 16 hub at

Connahs Quay has been recognised by the Welsh Government through publication of a national case study.

Partnership working between education, children's services and health are very good. Highly effective, integrated planning across partners supports the smooth transition of pupils with complex needs into education, across key stages and from school to adult services.

Partnership working between schools and the Authority is good. There is a high level of trust and a common understanding of the need to work together to raise standards and to improve services for all children and young people.

The Authority has valuable information about the range of interventions supporting children, young people and their families and utilises several data sets and evaluation reports to feed in to the overarching Single Integrated Plan. This includes useful outcome data on the progress of children and young people, and on the outcomes of collaborative delivery approaches.

Many externally funded initiatives track the progress of learners and service users and their families effectively, e.g. Families First, Flying Start and Youth Support Grant. In the best examples, early bespoke interventions with families make measurable contributions to improved educational outcomes for learners e.g. the Team Around the Family Impact assessment report. There is also a new Integrated Youth Provision Plan which has a results based accountability evaluation methodology approach.

However, the partnership does not yet fully capture the overall performance of partner interventions or track consistently the progress of children and young people. This means that opportunities are missed to make the best use of resources and interventions across sector and service boundaries. In particular, the early intervention work by wider support services with learners and their families is not yet fully known and built upon by schools or school improvement services. The Family Information Service support should be used to address this area of concern in future.

<p><b>Key sources of evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single Integrated Plan</li> <li>• Improvement Plan</li> <li>• School Improvement Plan</li> <li>• Draft Integrated Youth Strategy</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key issues &amp; challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the most of partners' information on vulnerable families in planning for progression</li> <li>• Maintaining partnership priorities in a time of diminishing resources</li> </ul>
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### ***Quality Indicator: 3.4 Resource management***

#### **Outcomes:**

- **Management of resources**
- **Value for money**

Education reform and investment has remained a priority for the Local Authority despite the challenging financial climate. The high strategic priority given to the education service is reflected in the Authority's allocation of both revenue and capital resources. The schools' delegated budgets have been protected from efficiency reductions in recent years.

Business partner arrangements in human resources and finance have been strengthened in recent years. The method of distributing funding has been completely renewed following fundamental review with schools. Meanwhile, human resources policies have also been reviewed through collaborative working at local, regional and national level.

The Authority's spending decisions relate adequately to strategic priorities for improvement and benefits for schools and their learners. Recent work on medium term financial planning and the fundamental review of the school funding formula give further positive prospects as does completion of school workforce remodelling as part of the single status agreement.

Staffing, accommodation and financial resources are soundly managed and deployed to support learning and improvement. The Authority reviews the outcomes of its financial plans

to make sure that money is spent wisely and has a positive impact on standards.

Partnership activity provides good value for money because it contributes to extensive opportunities and improved outcomes for learners in aspects which the Authority and its schools alone could not provide.

The Authority has been successful in securing grant funding for both revenue and capital projects but is also committed to contributing half of the current £64m school modernisation investment in schools from its own resources.

School balances are at an unprecedentedly low level in the secondary phase. Primary balances have increased during 2014-15 in the primary phase. The Authority is proactive in providing schools with appropriate support and challenge in those schools where surpluses are too high and where there are deficits.

The Authority has a good record of effectively managing its education budget and improving efficiency. Joint working with a range of partners has been effective in increasing the Authority's capacity to support learners.

Overall, the Authority's schools continue to provide good value for money and the Council is seeking further efficiency within the education system (WAO 2015).

**Key sources of evidence:**

- Medium Term Financial Plan
- School Funding Formula

School balances report

**Appendix 1:**

**Excerpt from WAO Annual Improvement Report- March 2015**

Flintshire schools continue to provide good value for money and the Council is seeking further efficiency within the education system

The National Survey for Wales, conducted on behalf of the Welsh Government, indicates that the public in Flintshire has more confidence in the local education service than in any other council in Wales.

Results in Flintshire primary schools in 2014 consolidated the improvements of the previous year. The proportion of seven-year olds achieving the expected standards was slightly below the Wales average while the proportion of 11 year-olds achieving the expected standards was the same as the Wales average at 84.5 per cent. In secondary schools, 84.3 per cent of 14 year-olds achieved the core subject indicator, the fifth highest proportion among councils in Wales. At key stage 4, performance fell slightly compared with 2013, but the proportion of 16 year-olds who gained five or more good GCSE grades that included the important subjects of mathematics and English or Welsh (first language) remained well above average and was the third highest in Wales.

Eligibility for free school-meals – a proxy measure for levels of deprivation – is well below the national average in Flintshire. We would therefore expect school performance in Flintshire as a whole to be above national averages. Levels of attainment in primary schools are therefore a little below what might be expected. Performance in too many primary and secondary schools nevertheless compared unfavourably with that in schools elsewhere in Wales with similar levels of deprivation.

We reported last year that there had been a steady fall in the number of 16-year old school leavers in Flintshire who are not in employment, education or training. However, in 2013 (the latest year for which data is available), the proportion increased sharply to 3.6 per cent, only marginally better than the national average.

Attendance rates in secondary schools have been among the best in Wales in recent years and continue to compare favourably with the Wales average.

The Council is responsible for ensuring an adequate supply of school places in an efficient manner. By merging infant and junior schools, the Council reduced the number of primary schools it maintains from 71 to 68 during 2013. Nevertheless, the capacity of the primary and secondary school systems increased slightly. In January 2014, there were some 4,300 surplus

places in Flintshire schools (15.9 per cent of the total) distributed across the 80 schools. Surplus capacity remains lower in Flintshire than the Wales average of 17 per cent, but the gap closed during 2013. Thirty per cent of Flintshire schools have significant surplus capacity as defined by the Welsh Government as compared with 24.7 per cent across Wales.

The Council continues to address the modernisation of its schools estate and recognises the potential for further efficiencies. Plans to co-locate primary and secondary schools on a single site in Holywell are innovative and likely to improve significantly the working environment for pupils and staff. Prudent concerns about the future viability of another secondary school have led to the postponement of plans to refurbish the school.

As in previous years, the cost of Flintshire's education system as a whole remains well below that in most Welsh councils. For 2014-15, the Council set an education budget (excluding specific grants) of £109.6 million, equivalent to £4,781 per pupil compared with an average across Wales of £4,939 per pupil. Although there are areas to improve, the broadly positive outcomes outlined above suggest that the schools service continues to provide good value for money.

The Council has reviewed its school funding formula and implemented the resulting changes. The Welsh Government has calculated that, in 2014-15, the Council delegated 81.3 per cent of relevant funding to its schools. This is a slightly lower rate than in other councils in North Wales. The Council has recognised the need to review the support services that it provides for schools and the way that they are funded. This review process has the potential to increase the level of delegated funding and increase schools' accountability for procuring the level of support they require.