

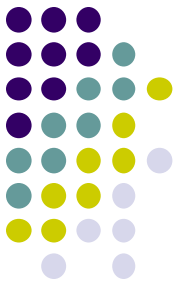


Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Priority review of Band 1, and Band 4 and 5 schools that have continued to improve

July 2013

Why is this review being undertaken?



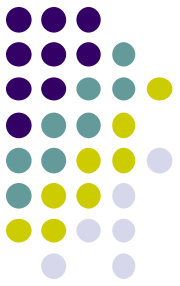
On 10 October 2012, the then Minister for Education and Skills launched the national implementation plan *Improving schools*, which sets out our expectations and aspirations for improving our education system.

The Secondary School Banding system helped identify which schools should be supported. During 2012/13 schools in Bands 4 and 5 received additional financial support of £10,000 and many schools provided with support demonstrated improvements. Band 4 and 5 schools have seen an increase in learners achieving the Level 2 threshold including a pass at grade C or above at GCSE in English or Welsh First Language and mathematics of roughly five percentage points in 2012. Band 1 schools have seen a decrease in learners achieving the Level 2 threshold of roughly three percentage points in the same period.

We want to identify lessons learnt from Band 1 schools that have maintained high levels of performance and Band 4 and 5 schools that have improved that can be shared to inform the improvement journey for other schools.

This focus on improvement and progression is vital if we are to secure improvements across the education system.

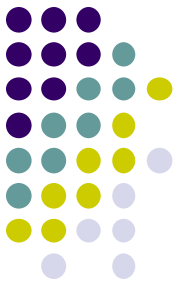
What does the data tell us?



Banding information published on 18 December 2012 along with the statistical release for GCSE examination results in Wales also published in December 2012 tells us that:

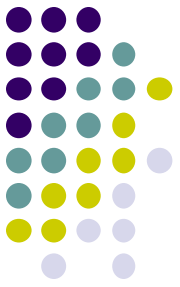
- 61 out of the 79 Band 4 and 5 schools last year saw improvements in the percentage of learners achieving the Level 2 inclusive
- schools identified as Band 5 schools in 2011 have seen the overall percentage of learners achieving the Level 2 inclusive increase from 36.0 per cent in 2011 to 41.8 per cent in 2012
- Band 4 schools have seen the overall percentage of learners achieving the Level 2 inclusive increase from 41.7 per cent in 2011 to 46.5 per cent in 2012
- Band 1 schools have seen the overall percentage of learners achieving the Level 2 inclusive decrease from 63.2 per cent in 2011 to 59.8 per cent in 2012
- of the 29 schools in Band 1 last year, 12 remain in Band 1 for 2012.

What is the scope of this review?



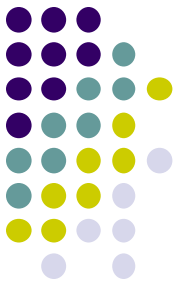
- This review was carried out by the School Standards and Delivery Division in partnership with officials from the School Management and Effectiveness Division of the Department for Education and Skills.
- The review analysed data to draw out initial hypotheses.
- It sought to test the hypotheses by visiting a sample of 15 schools that have improved from their 2011 Band 4 or 5 position in 2012 and four schools in Band 1 that have maintained improvements in 2011 and 2012.
- The report of the review identifies:
 - what worked in the improving schools
 - six interlinked and interdependent themes for success – **Leadership; Higher expectations for learners; Pupil tracking and data; Planning for improvement; Curriculum; and Parental engagement**
 - case studies
 - recommendations.

What worked in the improving schools?



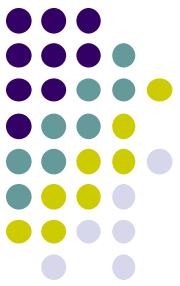
- There were explicit high expectations for all learners.
- A clear identification of the need to implement action at pace.
- Explicit action in strategic planning for improvement, with clear leadership in identifying, setting and working to priorities. Where needed this included a tight focus on a smaller number of priorities to maximise learner outcomes.
- The above approach had the full buy-in of the senior leadership team and middle management. Clear follow through actions were set in place across the whole school.
- Concentration on effective pupil tracking, tackling under-achievers across the board as well as C/D borderline learners to improve outcomes.
- Knowing and understanding data and using it effectively to set learning and teaching targets which translate into improved learner outcomes.
- Effective use of appropriate interventions informed by robust pupil tracking data. In Band 1 schools these tended to be embedded into the cycle of continuous school improvement.

Leadership



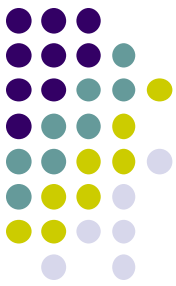
- In Band 1 schools improvement was perpetual and strongly embedded. Priorities were clearly communicated by means of actions, expectations and timeframes which were actively monitored.
- In the former Band 4 and 5 schools there was an identified and urgent need for change. This drove action to be taken at pace with clearly communicated priorities and a plan for delivery.
- Energy and effort was focussed in driving a common understanding and consistency of message in communicating priorities; responsibilities; and actions. The expectation to deliver improved outcomes was explicit. Schools developed different approaches to ensuring consistency – all approaches involved key staff at senior and middle management with follow through across the school.
- Middle management and in some cases a wider leadership network was actively engaged in working in a joined up way and were held to account for delivery of improved outcomes. This method of operating was fully embedded within Band 1 schools but was also evident in the former Band 4 and 5 schools.
- Arrangements for communicating and monitoring outcomes across the school were regular and planned with a clear purpose and focus on improvement. There was clear follow through in engaging and holding staff to account in delivering school improvement.
- Band 1 schools reported that performance management and a focus on improving pedagogy was integral to improvement. Learner, class and department outcomes were monitored alongside lesson observations. Progress was tracked to improve assessment and raise standards with clear expectations, accountability and appropriate challenge.
- Leadership is further elaborated in the case study which follows.

Case study: Leadership



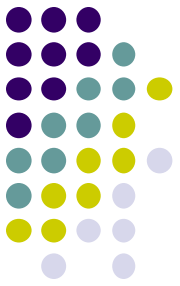
Context	<p>An 11-18 mixed, English-medium school. As at January 2012 there were 204 pupils aged 15 at the school. The school serves a large number of rural communities with most students coming from English speaking homes.</p> <p>The percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) has remained fairly constant at between 4 and 5 per cent in recent years, with the three-year average as at January 2012 being 4.6 per cent (significantly below the national average of 17.4 per cent).</p> <p>In 2011 the school was in Band 1. The school remained in Band 1 in 2012.</p> <p>The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and three assistant headteachers.</p>
Issue/ Focus	<p>The school has clear plans for continuous school improvement, based not on a single factor but as a result of paying close attention to the detail of all relevant contributory factors within a self-critical learning organisation.</p>
Action	<p>The whole-school ethos of continuous improvement is underpinned by the school's Mission Statement and Code of Conduct, providing an inclusive learning environment and a culture of recognising and celebrating achievement. The school's Academic Planner drives the school's year. All of the school's activities for the forthcoming academic year can be found in the planner, such as parents' evenings, examination periods and 'monitoring of progress' sessions. This is complemented by the school's Self-Evaluation/Quality Assurance Planner, which clearly timetables reviews of self-evaluation for different learning areas and year groups. For these learning reviews, senior staff discuss with the learning manager's priority areas for the review. All teaching staff are observed, through peer observation, across all year groups. Extended self-evaluation processes are becoming more embedded across the school including a growing input from the student voice.</p> <p>There's a tight and clear focus on roles and responsibilities both within the SLT and in the school. The SLT's roles, which are reviewed regularly, are specific and fully support school systems, the monitoring of student progress with regular analysis and use of internal and external data.</p>

Case study: Leadership (continued)



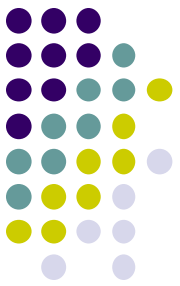
Action (continued)	<p>The school also has a tight structure of meetings on a four-weekly cycle. The focus of the meetings have been sharpened, ensuring that there are discussion items, not only presenting items purely for information. For example in week four of the cycle, all academic staff and pastoral staff meet together, for one hour, with a focus on self-review and sharing good practice. Within the cycle are weekly line management meetings to provide support, challenge and to monitor.</p> <p>School development planning is integral to continuous improvement in the school. The school has a clear self-evaluation process that is aligned to the whole-school meetings cycle with a clear focus on the sharing of good practice. The school reviews its School Development Plan mid-year, to take stock and check for any areas of improvement or what needs to be sharpened. It is kept brief and cascaded to all staff. The Plan drills down to subject level, with 21 school priorities (some are national) and it drills down to what each priority means to different subjects.</p> <p>The school has set up its own Leadership and Management Group for staff development, which is seen as key to the school's improvement journey. Through this group members have access to bespoke leadership and management training delivering ongoing benefits for individuals, teaching teams resulting in a significant impact on learning and teaching across the school.</p>
Outcomes	Despite the high levels of performance already seen at the school, the school has demonstrated improvements over recent years. Consequently the school was placed in Band 1 in both 2011 and 2012.

Higher expectations for learners



- Learners knew their current performance, their targets and what they had to do to achieve their potential. This was communicated to them in a way that they understood and could engage with. This included mentoring and individual one-to-one discussions with learners; the staff involved varied but, included subject teachers, heads of year, heads of department, pastoral leads and in some cases senior leaders.
- All staff were aware of the current performance and targets for their learners and consistently communicated high expectations.
- Learners' current performance, targets and in some cases predicted results were communicated to parents/carers. As well as regular reporting, often termly or half-termly in learners' planners, a number of schools reported direct engagement and targeted work with parents/carers.
- A number of schools actively engaged learners in understanding the data and targets against which the school was monitored. In doing so the link between the schools targets and the impact of each individual's results was made clear – creating in a positive sense the benefit for learners and the whole school.
- Early entry was carefully considered as part of a planned strategic approach to improvement pushing beyond and not settling for a C grade.
- Learners knew that the school had high expectations for them and that they were cared about as individuals. For vulnerable learners (both higher and lower abilities) this often involved regular feedback and positive reinforcement.
- Schools identified specific interventions to support learners sometimes demonstrating both an individual and innovative approach to securing funding and/or the circumstances to make this happen.
- Higher expectations for learners is further elaborated in the case study which follows.

Case study: Higher expectations for learners



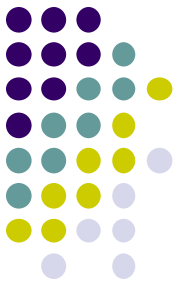
Context	<p>An 11-18 mixed, bilingual school. As at January 2012 there were 133 pupils aged 15 at the school. The school serves a very large catchment area where a high proportion of pupils either live in small villages or in the countryside.</p> <p>The percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) has been increasing over recent years, with the three-year average as at January 2012 being 16.0 per cent (below the national average of 17.4 per cent).</p> <p>In 2011 the school was in Band 5. By 2012 the school was in Band 2.</p> <p>The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the headteacher and two deputy headteachers.</p>
Issue/ Focus	<p>Following the publication of secondary school banding in December 2011, where the school was placed in Band 5, the school immediately responded to the challenge of being placed in this band, with a focus on setting higher expectations for its pupils.</p>
Action	<p>First and foremost the school prioritised raising the morale of staff within the school and building a sense of urgency and real momentum. This was done by holding full staff meetings and full leadership team meetings, where they had frank and honest discussions. One of the key messages from these meetings was that in order to drive forward the school improvement agenda, every pupil would need to achieve one grade higher in each subject – every D grade would need to become a C grade, every C grade would need to become a B grade and so on.</p> <p>This was facilitated by the school's targeting and tracking system. The system is well-established and accessible by all in the school. It compares each pupil's likely grade against his or her target grade for each subject. The target grade for each subject is set by the SLT, based on prior attainment and Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data. The target grades are challenging and aspirational – the school believes that any pupil achieving Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 3 should be able to achieve a C grade or higher at GCSE.</p> <p>Within the spreadsheet-based system the school is able to easily track where pupils are falling short of their target grades – any grade which is one lower than the target grade is highlighted in yellow; grades that are two lower than the target grade, or on the C/D border are highlighted in red. Pupils are assessed against their target grades</p>

Case study: Higher expectations for learners (continued)



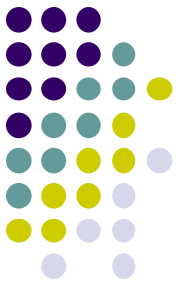
<p>Action (continued)</p>	<p>three times during the academic year.</p> <p>Following the first assessment in the academic year, the SLT reviews the target grades for each pupil in each subject, looking again at the possibility of setting higher target grades for some pupils. To facilitate this, the school makes use of the FFT data looking at the likelihood of pupils achieving a C grade in English/Welsh First Language and Mathematics, given their prior attainment.</p> <p>This information is then used by the school to identify target groups of pupils in danger of not achieving the Level 2 including English/Welsh First Language and Mathematics (L2 incl. EW & M), for focussed and specific intervention and revision. In order to deliver the revision, the school timetables an extensive programme of classes, delivered after normal school hours, during the holidays, during lunchtimes and by making good use of time from other subjects that have completed the curriculum early.</p> <p>The target grades for Key Stage 4 are shared with parents and pupils alike at the start of Year 10. The school holds assertive mentoring sessions with Year 10 and Year 11 pupils, led by the Leadership Team (LT). Each pupil is assigned to one of the three members of SLT, or eight subject leads. Pupils' progress, and their target and likely grades are presented to each pupil in a report and discussed during the mentoring sessions. The pupils reports have recently been updated with a section for 'Pupil's comments' whereby each pupil is able to provide written commentary regarding their likely and target grades in each subject. This information is also shared with parents during parents' evenings to prompt discussion. This had a positive impact in raising aspirations and supporting and challenging pupils to maximise their potential.</p>
<p>Outcomes</p>	<p>According to the 2012 secondary school banding results, the school is now placed in Band 2.</p> <p>One of the main drivers in the school's improving banding score was an improvement in the Capped Points Score indicators across the board – the school moved from being in the bottom quarters for these indicators to the top quarters, with its Capped Points Score improving from 316.5 in 2011 to 333.1 in 2012.</p> <p>Similarly the school saw improvements in its points in English/Welsh First Language, and Mathematics when set against FSM levels, moving from the bottom quarters in 2011 to the top quarters in 2012.</p>

Pupil tracking and data



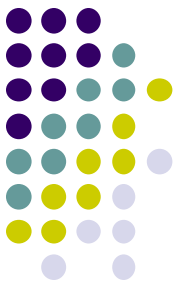
- Effective use and interpretation of data was essential. There was a clear understanding of the vast amount of data available and that which was relevant and meaningful was identified and used well.
- Understanding the data led to consistency and rigour in use, interpretation and monitoring the progress of individual learners, whole classes and subject areas.
- Better informed target setting followed clearer understanding and more effective use of data, leading to higher expectations and earlier identification of issues.
- There was an expertise in knowing, understanding and using data effectively. Responsibility for the interpretation of data and target setting varied with different models reported as working successfully. In some cases an individual with particular expertise would initially analyse and interpret data, which was then cascaded and owned by all. In other schools responsibility for the initial analysis and interpretation varied. In some cases this was completed by small teams, in others this was delegated to departments with challenge and rigour provided to departments by the leadership team.
- All staff understood and used data effectively. It was vital for sophisticated pupil tracking that all staff understood and used the data, this can not depend on one person. Many schools implemented a Venn diagram system for tracking the read across in mathematics and English/Welsh. This allowed schools to target learners who were likely to get mathematics but not English/Welsh and vice versa. Some schools also identified the read across with science.
- Systems were established to enable access to real time, up-to-date information.
- Further and more detailed information on pupil tracking is contained within the Effective Pupil Tracking Priority Review.

Planning for improvement



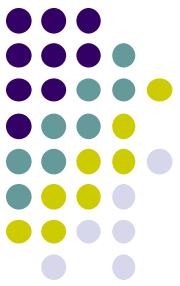
- There was no single solution. However, robust ownership, leadership and accountability in planning for, monitoring and following through improvements were vital.
- Schools were at different points in the improvement journey. Priorities varied from a single or tight focus in Years 10 and 11 (usually on mathematics and/or English/Welsh) through to complex whole-school approaches involving all staff.
- In the former Band 4 and 5 schools there had been an identification of agreed priorities – moving away from ‘fire fighting’, leading to sustaining improvement as the focus. There was a school-wide understanding of the priority areas.
- Effective pupil tracking from Year 9, and in some cases from Year 7, through to Year 11 was evident, tackling underachievers as well as borderline learners with an explicit articulation of high expectations for learners at all ability levels.
- In a number of schools and particularly (but not only) in Band 1 schools, improvement and interventions began in Key Stage 2 working with primary schools and Years 5 and 6 to prepare for entry in Year 7.
- Many schools commented that the School Effectiveness and Pupil Deprivation Grants were essential. The main identified benefit of the Band 4 and 5 funding was that it was flexible. A number of schools used funding to secure additional staff or for supply cover to free up key staff to work in smaller groups or with particular learners.

Curriculum



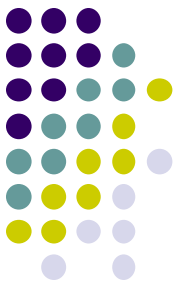
- There were two aspects identified: the pedagogical, such as changes made to teaching that supports learning differently and engaging learners in that process; and resources, such as flexibility in delivering learning in smaller groups.
- Flexibility in the curriculum came in a variety of ways from releasing learners to focus on a smaller core of subjects, through to completely individualised learning programmes. In some cases this involved external partners and the school in delivering joint programmes which were owned by the school.
- Schools identified their most vulnerable learners and had adapted the curriculum to meet their needs. While this required effort and commitment from staff and learners, the positive impact went beyond improving outcomes for individual learners.
- Some schools had developed opportunities in using literacy and numeracy to make links across subject areas and increase opportunities for staff to work together.
- All schools had developed a system to map and manage the read across in English/Welsh and mathematics. In some cases the read across was far broader with collective department meetings where staff worked together to ensure learners achieved the Level 2 inclusive. There was a clear focus on increasing opportunities for learners to achieve.
- Schools recognised the strengths and skills of teachers and support staff and used resources flexibly to best match learners' needs.
- Flexibility in the curriculum is further elaborated in the case study which follows.

Case study: Curriculum



<p>Context</p>	<p>An 11-18 mixed, English-medium school. The school serves a town and surrounding villages. As at January 2012 there were 246 pupils aged 15 at the school.</p> <p>The percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) has been increasing over recent years, with the three year average as at January 2012 being 8.6 per cent (below the national average of 17.4 per cent).</p> <p>In 2011 the school was in Band 4. By 2012 the school was in Band 1.</p> <p>The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the Headteacher, one Deputy Headteacher and three Assistant Headteachers.</p>
<p>Issue/ Focus</p>	<p>The school has developed a programme of individual learning pathways to meet the needs of Key Stage 4 pupils, and has also prioritised tackling disaffection and reducing levels of absenteeism to support the raising of outcomes.</p>
<p>Action</p>	<p>The school has developed individualised learning timetables for pupils in Key Stage 4, demonstrating significant flexibility across the curriculum and teaching.</p> <p>The timetabled curriculum of 25 one-hour sessions per week, has been arranged to serve two important principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ that all children are valued equally and should be resourced accordingly; and ➤ that all children should follow a broad and balanced curriculum. <p>The school leadership team identified that communication was key to enabling flexibility, and developed practical strategies to make sure that opportunities for discussion were available. There is dedicated time within the school timetable (1 hour, every week) for Academic Coordinators and a member of the SLT to meet, discuss and review individual pupils and their needs. The group considers and agrees whether further support is needed or can be made available and adapts the timetable flexibly, which may involve KS4 pupils attending and being supervised in a Sixth form lesson for example.</p> <p>In the group meeting teachers negotiate individual programmes, working through the detail of where time can be made available. The group then agrees where this time can be best allocated in order that pupils don't just achieve the minimum but that they reach their full potential.</p>

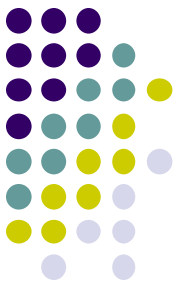
Case study: Curriculum (continued)



Action (continued)	<p>Pupil performance in English, mathematics and science is monitored very closely. This is considered against the pupils' preferences, abilities and talents across the curriculum and when appropriate curriculum time is made available to focus study time where it is needed and will be of most use. It should be emphasised that this is a comprehensive consideration involving key staff, the pupils and their parents before any action is taken to move pupils across the timetable. This is not extra free time, which simply reduces the curriculum. Pupils are allocated to additional lessons to improve their opportunities and outcomes.</p> <p>Quality information is critical to the successful implementation of this individualised approach. Pupils know and understand the school's expectations and targets for them. They own their timetable and focus their attention on what they need to do to achieve across their subjects.</p> <p>Pupil data is available to all staff using the School Information Management System. The school developed an effective pupil tracking system that is accurate, comprehensive and yet simple for all staff to use. Teaching staff and pupils know their targets and all work towards them.</p> <p>From year 7, termly teacher assessments consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ pupils' progress – for each subject, teachers identify pupils as working above target, on track to achieve target, or working below target;➤ pupils' attitude to learning – graded as, Excellent, Very Good, Good, Satisfactory, Inconsistent, Disappointing, or Unacceptable; and➤ seven factors impeding progress (FIP)¹ – when a FIP is flagged by a teacher it means that there is a deficiency in that area. <p>This information is collated for each pupil as a termly spot-check which enables the early identification of any issues, areas for attention and concern.</p> <p>In year 9 the Learning Manager looks across the spot-checks to identify trends/patterns and intervene. Pupils are identified to the Pastoral House Team and Area Coordinators for interventions. In choosing their options every pupil in year 9 has a one to one interview with their group tutor about their choices. In addition, identified students receive further support in this process and have an additional meeting with the year 9 Learning Manager and/or the Deputy Headteacher to ensure (as much as possible) that they are making informed choices.</p>
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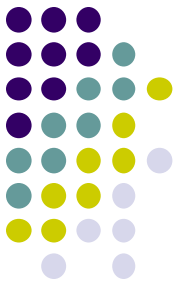
¹ The seven factors impeding progress (FIPs) are **Attendance, Behaviour, Classwork, Homework, Listening, Organisation and Punctuality**

Case study: Curriculum (continued)



Action (continued)	<p>In year 10 and year 11 Area Coordinators continue to review spot-checks to identify any students that are not on track or where there are patterns of FIPs across subjects that are a cause for concern. The forum group then considers borderline pupils and how to address performance.</p> <p>This level of flexibility is only possible through the whole school support which is informed by accurate information. The effectiveness of the pupil tracking system enables the early identification and subsequent consideration of appropriate interventions and actions, thus ensuring that students are on a learning pathway that offers the best opportunity for positive outcomes.</p>
Outcomes	<p>According to the 2012 secondary school banding results, the school is now placed in Band 1.</p> <p>The school demonstrated improvements in the Level 2 including English/Welsh first language and mathematics and in the Capped Points Score indicators across the board.</p> <p>Similarly the school saw improvements in its points in English/Welsh first language and mathematics when set against FSM levels, moving from the bottom quarters in 2011 to the top quarters in 2012.</p>

Parental engagement



- Effective communication was the priority.
- Parents/carers were regularly informed of learners' performance and their targets.
- A number of schools reported focused engagement with parents/carers, empowering parents/carers to help including:
 - providing subject support to understand the specifics of what is involved/required to achieve a C grade
 - providing subject specific classes for parents/carers on how to support revision.
- Communication with parents/carers was also reported as critical on issues such as:
 - raising learner self-esteem
 - celebrating success at all levels
 - targeting learner apathy.
- It was clear that parental engagement was important, however this review was not able to give sufficient time to identify the detail of success in this area.

Recommendations



- School improvement and planning for further development must be a continuing priority. In order to be sustainable this must be embedded.
- Planning for improvement must be implemented with pace and purpose.
- Effective leadership at senior and middle levels is essential to drive improvement. The leadership role of teachers should be developed strategically as part of a shared vision for leadership throughout the school.
- Aspirations for improvement must be explicit and linked to individual learners' needs, with targets communicated to learners and parents/carers in a way that they understand and can engage with.
- Expertise in considering the wealth of data available, owning and analysing what is useful is critical and must be cascaded throughout the school into an effective pupil tracking system. Teachers and middle leaders, as well as the senior leadership team must be proficient and consistent in using that system to target appropriate support to learners.
- There should be planned arrangements for communicating read across between subject areas. As an absolute minimum this should be in the read across between learners who are likely to get mathematics but not English/Welsh and vice versa. This could be through regular timetabled meetings between heads of departments. The arrangements for mapping and monitoring read across are essential and should be easily accessible, such as the Venn diagram approach.

Thanks to all the schools who gave their time to participate in this Priority Review.



Alun School	Brynteg Comprehensive School	Caldicot School
Castell Alun High School	Coedcae Comprehensive School	Cwmtawe Community School
Dyffryn School	Gowerton Comprehensive School	Pencoed Comprehensive
Rhyl High School	Risca Community Comprehensive School	St Alban's R C High School
St Julian's Comprehensive School	Willows High School	Ysgol Greenhill School
Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni	Ysgol y Berwyn	Ysgol Uwchradd Bodedern
Ysgol Uwchradd Tregaron		