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Schools Challenge Cymru: introduction for Pathways to Success schools



Information

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Audience	Pathways to Success schools, Schools Challenge Cymru advisers, regional education consortia and local authorities involved in the delivery of the programme.
Overview	This document sets out some further information about the Schools Challenge Cymru programme.
Action required	This document should be referred to by Pathways to Success schools and Schools Challenge Cymru advisers as they participate in the programme.
Further information	Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Schools Challenge Cymru IQUALS Division Department for Education and Skills Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ Tel: 029 2082 6997 e-mail: SchoolsChallengeCymru@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills
Related documents	<i>National model for regional working</i> (2014) <i>Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools</i> (2014)

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Ministerial foreword

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Schools Challenge Cymru. As Pathways to Success schools you will be at the centre of our drive to raise standards across our national education system.



When I became the Minister for Education and Skills, I placed breaking the link between deprivation and attainment alongside literacy and numeracy as the top priorities for my department. For too long pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have not fulfilled their potential, which means that Wales's potential as a whole is not being realised. Schools Challenge Cymru is a focussed effort to break that link – acknowledging the challenge, but not accepting lower expectations of our pupils from deprived backgrounds.

The Challenge provides resources and expertise to schools, but does not give them the solutions on a plate. Pathways to Success schools will be given support in finding, owning and being accountable for their own solutions to the challenges they face, and in ensuring they can get it right for every learner.

Wales's long-term economic health depends on unlocking the potential of all pupils, but there is a further moral purpose. Education can transform lives, and I want all children to have the best education, regardless of personal circumstance. By working together, by sharing a commitment to all children and by wanting the best to be normal, I believe that all children can achieve. Schools Challenge Cymru seeks to remove the obstacles to that achievement.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Huw Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Huw Lewis AM

Minister for Education and Skills

Welcome from Champion, Professor Mel Ainscow CBE



I am pleased to join the Minister in welcoming the schools that will take part in Schools Challenge Cymru. From my recent work in various parts of Wales I have noticed a widespread desire to see a coordinated strategy for moving the education system forward. Pathways to Success schools will be at the centre of such a strategy, demonstrating what is possible when there is a collective will to achieve high standards for all of our children and young people.

My work with schools over many years convinces me that they usually have a greater capacity to improve themselves than is currently being mobilized. Put simply, *schools know more than they use*. It follows that the best starting point for improving schools is with the practices that already exist. For me, everything else follows from this assumption.

Making better use of existing expertise is particularly important if we are to address the challenge of equity. In order to develop schools that make sure that all young people get a fair chance, we have to make available school practices that break down the barriers that prevent the participation and learning of some of our pupils. We also have to develop organizational conditions that encourage teachers to work together in experimenting with such practices.

None of this is simple, of course, and certainly it does not happen by chance. Effective leadership will therefore be a key factor. Most important, however, is the collective will to make it happen.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be 'Mel Ainscow'. Below the signature is a horizontal line, possibly a separator or a decorative element.

Introduction to the programme

This introduction explains the initial arrangements for supporting the development of the Pathways to Success schools. It is anticipated that these arrangements will evolve and change as those involved use the opportunities provided by Schools Challenge Cymru to innovate in order to find more effective ways of educating and improving the life chances of all our children and young people.

Schools Challenge Cymru is an acceleration and concentration of the Welsh Government's school improvement efforts, focussed on secondary schools in Wales that face the largest challenge in terms of circumstance and stage of development. It will also involve their cluster primaries.

Though the OECD's recent report on Welsh education stated that Welsh students' performance is less dependent on socio-economic background than the OECD average, the Welsh Government wants to do far more to break the link between poverty and attainment.

Within the overall strategy for school improvement set out in the National Model for Regional Working,¹ Schools Challenge Cymru involves schools that have been in lower Bands over the past three years, and where there are particularly high levels of pupils eligible for Free School Meals. The Challenge aims to empower and equip these Pathways to Success Schools to be able to achieve continuous self-improvement by building on existing good practise, mobilising additional support and monitoring the impact of their efforts.

The schools in the Challenge are at different stages in their improvement journey and will all have their own strengths and areas for improvement. It is expected that all will have something to give others in the cohort and something to gain. The enhanced collaboration encouraged by the Challenge should stimulate improvement in Wales's wider education system.

The Challenge does not presume where a school should focus its efforts: it is about empowering and resourcing the school to take control of and be accountable for its own improvement journey.

There are four main themes for the Challenge, drawing on the experiences of the London and Greater Manchester Challenges. These are leadership, learning and teaching, the pupil, and the school and the community – including parents or carers.

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/national-model-for-regional-working/?lang=en>

Schools in the Challenge have four core entitlements:

- A 'school on a page' template that provides a snapshot of where their school is on its improvement journey and what its strengths and areas for improvement are.
- A committed, experienced Adviser to support and challenge the school on how it can improve, and to help broker support
- A Single School Development Plan, showing how the schools efforts for improvement are drawn together, including an entitlement to draw on additional resource, as needed.
- An Accelerated Improvement Board to support the school's leadership through its improvement journey.

This document sets out some more detail against these entitlements, and sets out the themes that underpin the Challenge: Leadership, Learning and Teaching, the Pupil, the School and the Community.

While focussing on the Pathways to Success schools, the Challenge will stimulate wider change by developing an evidence base of what works best, and by establishing strong connections between schools to help spread that learning.

Core entitlements

Contextual Analysis

Given the need to start the Challenge on a common basis, each Pathways to Success school has been provided with a 'School on a Page' template. This provides a simple framework for summarising the situation in the school. In this way, the schools will have a common language to compare their situations and explore possible areas of cooperation.

The template builds on what has worked well in Central South Wales, and should help schools in identifying where efforts may be best concentrated. It provides a 'snapshot', which, alongside schools' understanding of the challenges they face, will help to identify strengths, areas for improvement and current improvement programmes that will inform the school's discussions with their Adviser.

The Adviser

Each Pathways to Success school will be assigned a Schools Challenge Cymru Adviser who will take an active role in each school's improvement process, with an expected commitment of up to 25 days of support to each Pathways to Success school per annum.

The Advisers are highly experienced individuals, each with an impressive track record of achieving school improvement and transforming education for children and young people. They will provide support and challenge to Pathways to Success schools in preparing their plans for improvement. They will work with senior staff in analysing the school context, providing them with support in formulating appropriate and effective improvement strategies. In so doing, they will be in a position to locate and broker additional support from other schools and external agencies that will strengthen these improvement efforts – acting as a gatekeeper to ensure improvement efforts are fully aligned and effective.

The Single School Development Plan

Pathways to Success schools will be supported by their Schools Challenge Cymru Adviser in drafting a Single School Development Plan – a comprehensive map of the next stage of the school's improvement journey, with stretching targets for success. These should be completed by the end of the Summer Term (July 2014).

Schools will, of course, already have plans for improvement. These will form the basis for the Single School Development Plan, demonstrating how existing resources (including the Pupil Deprivation and School Effectiveness Grants) will be used to drive improvement according to the priorities identified through the contextual analysis. The Plan will set out the targets the school has set itself for improvement, demonstrating how it intends to achieve these through its involvement

in the Challenge. It will also provide the context for practitioners' performance management and professional development, and indicate how the school intends to develop its staff in relation to its priorities and targets.

Through the involvement of its Adviser, it will define how additional resources provided through Schools Challenge Cymru will be used to support rapid improvement. The Schools Development Plan should identify any additional resources that may be required in terms of infrastructure investment. In identifying capital investment need it is imperative that it is specifically targeted and of appropriate scale to support rapid improvement in schools. In recognition of the importance of effective planning and self-evaluation for school management, as identified by Estyn, the Welsh Government will be introducing regulations in September 2014 for School Development Plans. The proposed regulations² will require all schools to set out in their Plan their short and longer-term improvement priorities and targets, the main measures to be taken to raise standards, the resources dedicated to this and the key outcomes expected. The Challenge supports Pathways to Success Schools in preparing their Development Plan in advance of it being a compulsory requirement from September 2015.

Once the Single School Development Plan has been drafted by the Headteacher and Adviser, supported by the school's senior leadership, they should be agreed by the Accelerated Improvement Board. They will then be discussed by the Champions Group, who will look at all Plans to ensure there is broad consistency in their quality, that resources are allocated where they will make greatest impact, and advise on whether the targets set out in the Plans have the right balance between ambition and what is possible.

The Accelerated Improvement Board

Each participating school's efforts will be supported by an Accelerated Improvement Board, to be convened and chaired by the Headteacher. The membership of this Board will be the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, a representative of the Local Authority, a Headteacher of a cluster primary, and the SCC Adviser.

The Accelerated Improvement Board will meet monthly. The main task is to ensure that the improvement strategies are being implemented effectively and that rapid progress is being made.

² <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/education/the-education-school-development-plans-wales-regulations-2014/?lang=en>

Roles and responsibilities

The Champions Group

The Champions Group will support Professor Mel Ainscow in ensuring Schools Challenge Cymru is successful. They will achieve this by:

- Identifying and sharing best practice, providing scrutiny, expertise and intellectual rigour
- Working with the SCC Advisers, to scrutinise and agree the development plans that will bring focus and coherence for each of the Challenge schools
- Providing the support and challenge to the Consortia, Advisers and schools to ensure we deliver on school improvement
- Occasionally visiting schools with Advisers, providing another view, drawing on their experience, and offering ideas and solutions where there is a particularly difficult issue to resolve
- Offering advice to Welsh Government officials on the programme's design and delivery
- Monitoring the implementation and impact of the initiative more widely – drawing on their extensive knowledge and expertise of what success looks like; and
- Providing constructive challenge to and scrutiny of the Challenge's emerging policies and proposals

The Champions Group consists of highly experienced professionals, each of whom have been or are Headteachers, and have an outstanding record of improving schools. The members are as follows:

- Professor Mel Ainscow (Chair)
- Dewi Lake, Headteacher Ysgol y Moelwyn Secondary School
- Debbie Lewis, former Headteacher Herbert Thompson Primary School
- Sir Alasdair MacDonald, Raising Attainment Advocate and formerly Headteacher of Morpeth Secondary School, Tower Hamlets
- Alan Tudor Jones, former Headteacher Cwmtawe Secondary School.

Pathways to Success Schools

Working with the Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers outlined above, Pathways to Success Schools have the front-line responsibility for driving their own improvement. They must therefore determine what their biggest opportunities for improvement are, and how they can use the Challenge's resources and expertise to deliver against them.

Pathways to Success schools will also be able to share their experience of school improvement with each other and work collaboratively to tackle common issues. Schools Challenge Cymru will also give opportunities for Pathways to Success schools to meet and forge links with schools within and beyond their consortium, enabling them to support, advise and encourage each other in moving forward.

Cluster Primary Schools

The transition between primary and secondary schooling is recognised as being a significant point in a pupil's education. The Challenge will support collaboration between Pathways to Success Schools and their cluster primaries to ensure that transition is planned effectively, that any specific obstacles to a successful transition are overcome, and any other joint activity that the Pathways to Success and Primary believe would benefit their pupils and improve their outcomes.

Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers

Working directly with Pathways to Success Schools, the Advisers will be employed by the Regional Educational Consortia and funded by Schools Challenge Cymru. Accountable to the Minister, they will report regularly to the Champions Group on their work with the schools.

The Advisers will work as a national team, meeting monthly as a cohort to share learning, problem solve and participate in their own continuous professional development. They will also liaise with the Challenge Advisers, who will work with schools that are not part of Schools Challenge Cymru – as outlined in the National Model for Regional Working. In this way, they will cooperate in making sure that the progress of the Pathways to Success Schools contributes to improvement across the education system.

Local Authorities

Local authorities have the statutory responsibility for schools and school improvement. They will designate a lead officer as a link with the regional consortium to facilitate open discussions and share information on their proposals and decisions in key areas.

These include, for instance:

- their overall vision and development priorities and their impact on schools
- school organisation and the delivery of 21st Century School strategies
- provision for special education and additional learning needs
- behaviour support and education welfare services; youth engagement strategies
- safeguarding arrangements; and,
- arrangements to promote effective procurement and business support.

Mindful of these duties, it is expected that a representative from the local authority will sit on the Accelerated Improvement Board for each of the Pathways to Success Schools within their boundaries.

Consortia

Regional Educational Consortia work on behalf of local authorities to lead, orchestrate and coordinate the improvement in the performance of schools and education of young people. For Schools Challenge Cymru, Consortia have an added line of accountability to the Schools Challenge Cymru Champions Group, who will provide support and challenge throughout the duration of the Challenge.

Consortia will advise on the deployment of the Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers within the Pathways to Success Schools. Consortia will also have a direct link to the Welsh Government Schools Challenge Cymru Core Team who will provide policy advice and support and allocate programme funding. They will ensure that there is sufficient engagement between the Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers and the Challenge Advisers working as part of the National Model for School Improvement.

Schools Challenge Cymru Core Team

The Welsh Government Challenge Core Team will largely act in a national coordination and moderating role for the Challenge. Their responsibilities will include: the development and delivery of Schools Challenge Cymru policy, ensuring outcomes are monitored and the Challenge evaluated to ensure value for money is being achieved; central resource allocation and monitoring; stakeholder engagement and communications; and overall programme management. They will convene monthly Adviser meetings and provide Pathways to Success Schools with information on a regular basis, and respond to any queries. They will also play a key role in providing support and advice to Ministers, Consortia and the Champions Group, ensuring alignment with wider Welsh Government strategies and initiatives as the Challenge develops.

Delivering the commitment – all children can achieve

Schools will set out in their Single School Development Plan how they plan to tackle their own challenges and their own journey of continuous improvement. The following outline of the four themes of the Challenge may be helpful to think about when developing ideas for school improvement. A key part of the Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers' role will be in being able to share schools' approaches to improvement and their results with other Advisers, including the Challenge Advisers working under the National Model for Regional Working. This will help shape the Challenge and drive improvement across the system.

Given the Challenge's focus on breaking the link between deprivation and attainment, its overall success will be measured in how effectively attainment is raised by pupils eligible for Free School Meals.– most obviously measured by the Level 2 attainment of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, alongside L2 attainment for all pupils. This is in addition to the Pathways to Success Schools' own success measures. Other key indicators that will be used to gauge Pathways to Success Schools' improvement will include:

- Attendance levels
- Key Stage 2 – Levels achieved against core subjects in cluster primaries
- Key Stage 3 – Levels achieved
- Estyn Inspection ratings
- Banding and School Categorisation
- School and SCCA self-assessments, including leadership and school capacity to improve
- Pupil feedback, including self evaluation surveys

The Challenge has four main themes, with specialist support a further theme that not all schools will require. The following is some explanation of what those themes mean and examples of policies that exist in their support. In approving School Development Plans, the Champions Group will give careful consideration to how the plans reflect the Challenge's focus.

Leadership

Successful schools need effective leadership. Leadership is second only to classroom leadership as an influence on learning and outcomes. The Challenge supports Headteachers and senior staff in fulfilling their role as leaders to the full. In part, this will be about the school recognising its assets and ensuring they are fully deployed to best effect, and in part it is about developing a culture of sustained self-evaluation and improvement.

Effective leadership development adheres to the four key characteristics of professional learning: using data and evidence from research; reflective practice; coaching and mentoring; and effective collaboration with colleagues and external

partners. Leadership should ensure a whole school culture that is committed to improvement in the interests of all pupils, and to collaboration – both externally with other schools, and internally to share practice worth sharing and reduce in-school variation.

Developing a culture of strategic planning, effective self-evaluation and target-setting is vital to identifying and reducing variations in school performance. This is reflected in Estyn's common inspection framework (introduced in 2010) that places self-evaluation at the centre of school improvement. Self-evaluation is the means by which schools interrogate data, reflect, identify targets and plan how they will meet them. This is a process, not an event and should be a continuous, regular part of the school's working life. It should be based on a wide range of information about strengths and areas for improvement which is collected throughout the year.

Self-evaluation is not an exercise that can be carried out by the Headteacher or a task group working in isolation. It can be influential only when **all** practitioners contribute to the process, are aware of the findings and take action based upon them.

Learning and Teaching

The essential mark of any school's performance is the standard of learning and teaching. The Challenge has targeted schools where the pupils' circumstances may not be conducive to effective learning, and seeks to support schools in overcoming these obstacles.

The Welsh Government has a number of programmes in place to help improve learning and teaching that Pathways to Success Schools can consider drawing on. These include

- Direct peer-to-peer support in the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools programme,
- The Professional Learning Model
- The Literacy and Numeracy Framework and National Support Programme for Literacy and Numeracy
- The Teaching Leader and Future Leaders Programmes
- Hwb. the all-Wales learning platform which will host the national collection of digital resources from a wide variety of contributors. Hwb will host collaborative working areas that will facilitate professional learning communities across Wales.

This is not an exhaustive list. Schools will be encouraged to consider other ways of improving learning and teaching.

The Pupil

School improvement has at its heart the interests of the pupil. The Challenge is based on a belief that **all** children can achieve, regardless of personal circumstance, and a refutation of the lowered expectations all too often attached to pupils from deprived backgrounds. An important aspect of the Challenge should be the raising of pupils' ambition and personal expectations.

Schools may want to consider how their development plan can direct pupil-focused activities to secure improved educational outcomes for their learners. Whilst these should be based on the identified needs of their cohort of learners there should be a focus on brokering interventions that improve the attendance, attainment and achievement of their learners, raising their aspirations and ambitions to succeed in future learning, the workplace and later in life. The school and Adviser will be supported in this endeavour through effective signposting and the channelling of activities towards Pathways to Success Schools.

By September, further information will be produced on support that pupils can directly access as a core 'Pupil Offer'. This will be focussed on reducing the impact of poverty, and work with partners in the arts, sports and business.

The School and the Community

Successful schools work with parents, carers and the community in sharing responsibility for pupils' success. The Challenge's focus mean school improvement may need to go beyond the school gate and consider how parents, guardians and the local community can be engaged to drive improvement.

Estyn has reported that parents or carers of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be involved in their children's education, and some parents or carers may themselves have a negative recollection of school. The programme supports schools' efforts to draw in parents and carers, empowering them to take a confident role in the success of pupils and the school.

Many Pathways to Success Schools will already be working with a Communities First Cluster, and be using the Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Matched Fund to fund community-focussed projects to raise the attainment of learners from deprived backgrounds. This activity can be shared and built on to ensure best practice is understood and available to all Pathways to Success Schools.

Specialist Support

As Pathways to Success schools develop their Single School Development Plan, they may identify particular needs for the school not clearly covered in the four themes above - such as a need for capital improvement works. Where the need for specialist support is discussed and agreed by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors

and Adviser, they will be entitled to make a request for funding for consideration by the Champions Group. If the need for support is on an on-going basis, it will be developed and delivered with close engagement of the Accelerated Improvement Board.