



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Evaluation of Tranche 2 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project

March 2016



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**Evidence for  
Excellence in  
Education**

# Evaluation of Tranche 2 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project

## **Audience**

Schools, consortia and other organisations interested in school-to-school collaborative working.

## **Overview**

This report presents the findings of an evaluation carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of Tranche 2 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project.

The aim of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project is to raise standards within primary and secondary schools in Wales by facilitating school-to-school support, with the aim of accelerating improvement.

## **Action required**

None – for information only.

## **Further information**

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## **Additional copies**

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at [learning.wales.gov.uk](http://learning.wales.gov.uk)

## **Related documents**

*Mid-point evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Tranche 1 Pathfinder Project (2014)*

[learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/practitioner-schools-evaluation-tranche-1/?lang=en](http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/practitioner-schools-evaluation-tranche-1/?lang=en)

Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools Pathfinder Project – tranche 1 case studies  
[learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/lead-and-emerging-practitioner-schools-pathfinder-project-tranche-1-case-studies/?lang=en&r](http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/lead-and-emerging-practitioner-schools-pathfinder-project-tranche-1-case-studies/?lang=en&r)

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# Executive summary

## Introduction to the research

This report presents the findings from an evaluation carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of Tranche 2 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project.

Commissioned by the Welsh Government, this report builds on the findings from NFER's evaluation of Tranche 1 of the Pathfinder (NFER, 2014a and b). It explores participating schools' targets for the Pathfinder, the activities undertaken (including the role/contribution played by different staff), and participants' views on the effectiveness of their relationships with partner schools/staff. It also explores the factors that have enabled or constrained improvements in schools, and the extent to which participating schools' capability to drive their own improvement has been enhanced.

The aim of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project is to raise the standards of educational practice and attainment within primary and secondary schools in Wales by facilitating school-to-school support. During the Pathfinder, a Lead Practitioner School works with an Emerging Practitioner School to share, disseminate and implement good practice approaches to teaching and learning on a systematic basis for 18 months as set out in an intervention plan agreed with the Emerging Practitioner School (referred to as the Partnership Plan).

Tranche 2 of the Pathfinder was launched in February 2014, and involved four matched pairs of secondary schools and six matched pairs of primary schools (20 schools in total). The research was undertaken between March and November 2015. As such, this report provides an assessment of the performance of the Pathfinder at the end of Tranche 2.

## Research methods

The study comprised four strands:

- a review of schools' Partnership Plans
- a review of schools' self-evaluation toolkits
- two visits to each of the 20 participating schools; the first between March-April 2015, the second in July or September 2015
- the production of good practice case-study summaries for selected partnerships that showed signs of developing and sharing good practice. These have been published separately.

## Experience of the Pathfinder

Analysis of schools' Partnership Plans revealed that the two most frequently cited target areas for improvement identified by schools were:

- improving standards of teaching and/or learning
- raising performance in maths/numeracy.

Other targets included the development of leadership (at both the senior and middle leader level), developments in data tracking and assessment, and the professional development of staff. Most of the school partnerships chose to focus their partnership work on a relatively narrow range of priorities. This is perhaps not surprising, as doing so helped give focus to their efforts, and ensured the partnership's financial and staff resources were used efficiently and effectively.

### **Activities undertaken**

Schools' partnership activities could be grouped into three broad categories: teaching and learning; leadership; and using data and assessment. Most schools engaged in activities which covered all three categories, with a main focus on teaching and learning. Teaching and learning activities almost always focused on the core subjects and included a combination of lesson observation; joint moderation and planning; developing resources; and attending training. Leadership activities typically included promoting distributed leadership<sup>1</sup> among all staff (where the task of leading a particular aspect is undertaken by a range of members of staff across a school's workforce); developing middle leaders; and holding strategic-level discussions to diagnose issues and plan improvements. Partnership activities which aimed to improve schools' use of data involved strengthening existing data management systems or processes, or implementing new ones. This often coincided with reforms to schools' assessment processes, including a renewed focus on tracking pupil outcomes over time to better identify the trajectory of pupils' progress.

### **Views on partnership relationships**

The majority of interviewees reported that relationships had been positive between staff in the paired schools throughout the duration of the Pathfinder. Most interviewees highlighted a shared ethos of mutual trust, willingness and respect between the schools which had facilitated effective collaboration. Interviewees identified a number of factors which could both enhance and constrain partnership relationships. These included schools' location and proximity, as well as the similarities or differences in schools' pupil cohorts and characteristics. However, this did not seem to prevent progress being made in Tranche 2 schools, and indeed most staff were able to identify a range of positive impacts, including on their professional practice and on pupils and learning (see sections below).

### **Impacts on teachers' professional practice**

Refining approaches to teaching and learning was highlighted as one of the most important ways in which the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Project had impacted on participating schools. Schools reported that the partnership work had increased practitioners' confidence

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<sup>1</sup> Distributed leadership for learning and teaching can be broadly defined as a leadership approach in which collaborative working is undertaken between individuals who trust and respect each other's contribution.

to try different approaches and experiment with techniques that they had not used in the past. This led to changes that made the structure of lessons more dynamic, so that they became more interactive, and required learners to be active participants. Some teachers had changed their question and answer techniques to a model whereby they sought to delve into learners' understanding of concepts and issues, while the quality of the feedback they gave to learners had improved, and was more detailed than in the past.

There was also evidence that schools had used the Pathfinder to discuss ways in which the curriculum could be delivered more effectively. Most partnerships had focused on the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) in some way, including those which had collaborated to embed its requirements across the whole curriculum by looking for opportunities to make more explicit links between the LNF and individual schemes of work.

Moreover, the Pathfinder had encouraged some teachers to reflect on existing practice and to explore different ways of working. As part of this, some of them had revised the way they used data to support teaching and learning. In addition, they reflected on how to tailor the teaching and learning more closely to the needs of individual learners or classes/groups.

### **Impacts at the whole-school level**

The evaluation found evidence of school-level changes amongst Tranche 2 Pathfinder schools. The way learners were supported had changed in several schools, as practice in one school (be that the Lead or Emerging Practitioner School) influenced what was happening in the other. There was evidence that the partnerships had led headteachers to reflect on their leadership style and practices, and leadership teams had been restructured in light of the work with the partner schools. At the same time, some schools had strengthened the role of middle leaders by examining how they could take responsibility or contribute more effectively to leading other practitioners.

There was evidence that whole-school systems and processes had been refined and strengthened. Staff described how the work in which they had been involved had promoted greater harmonisation across the different phases/year groups or departments.

Schools had strengthened their capacity to use data. This was reflected in the way they collected and managed information and, more importantly, how that data was used both to support teaching and learning (as noted above in relation to professional practice) and more broadly to help and support individual learners.

### **Impacts on pupils and learning**

In several school partnerships it was noted that working with the Lead Practitioner School had led the Emerging Practitioner School to raise their expectations of what learners should be able to do.

There was also evidence that learners were becoming more aware of their targets and the kind of work that they should be producing and consequently they were more likely to reflect on their own needs and challenges. For example, they were able to self- and peer-assess and set down their own success criteria.

This was in addition to the impact of work to standardise the judgments that were made by practitioners when assessing and moderating work. For example, some Lead Practitioner Schools modelled the kind of work which should be accepted of a learner judged to have reached a particular level by providing examples of learners' work with associated levels which influenced the expectations in the Emerging Practitioner Schools.

At the same time, the amount of hands-on experimental work that learners were able to experience had increased and lesson discussions were said to be more likely to be led by learners. Schools indicated that as a result, learners' motivation had improved and they were more engaged with teachers and the learning process. All of these changes were related to work to strengthen learners' voices, through formal processes for them to make their views known about their own learning and other work to nurture their independence and their enjoyment of their work.

### **Extent to which impacts will be sustained**

Most interviewees agreed that the kind of activities which the partnerships had supported were ones which could be embedded in practice and should not require ongoing support. These 'structural and procedural changes' included activities in areas such as teaching and learning, assessment, pupil tracking, school management and professional reflection. However, many interviewees also articulated the belief that effective and lasting change required attitudinal and cultural change, and that this needed to occur alongside the structural and procedural changes described above. Moreover, while many interviewees were confident that the structural and procedural changes were becoming embedded in practice, there appeared to be more uncertainty as to the extent to which sufficient numbers of staff in Emerging Practitioner Schools had undergone the attitudinal and cultural changes required for their schools to make sustained improvement. Nonetheless, staff in the Lead Practitioner Schools believed that the Pathfinder had nurtured a greater willingness on the part of staff in the Emerging Practitioner Schools to engage with other practitioners outside their own school and that they had become more willing to discuss practice and consider issues around standards. These are attributes that current and future school improvement initiatives and infrastructure can build on further.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The main conclusion from the evaluation of Tranche 2 schools is that, overall, most interviewees reported that the Pathfinder model of organising and facilitating national school-to-school improvement had been effective in supporting and accelerating improvement in participating schools. This was true for both the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools which have taken part. The interviews with staff in Tranche 2 schools suggested to us that the consistency of the high-quality and effective nature of the relationships between staff in the two schools had improved since Tranche 1. We attribute this improvement to two main factors. The first, to improvements in the school matching, recruitment and briefing process, facilitated by the Welsh Government and the Project Champion. The second, to the 'emotional intelligence' shown by senior leaders who recognised their own and other people's emotions and sensibilities, and used this information to guide their thinking and behaviour. This was particularly the case amongst those in the Lead Practitioner Schools and appears to have been a useful characteristic in helping to foster positive working



relationships. This is not to say that such behaviours were not evident amongst senior leaders during Tranche 1 of the Pathfinder, but this was particularly evident in Tranche 2.

The report concludes by presenting six evidence-informed recommendations for the future development of school-to-school partnership working in Wales more widely.

We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- 1. Ensures that there is a coordinated strategy for school improvement based on a tiered approach that responds to the different level of need shown by schools in Wales.** The potential of collaborative partnerships between schools to contribute to such work is already recognised in strategic objective 4 of Qualified for Life and should also be recognised in the National Model for Regional Working and other school improvement initiatives. At the same time, it is important that initiatives designed to support school improvement complement and support each other and do not cause initiative overload or duplication. The approach should recognise that every school is on an individual improvement journey.
- 2. Builds on the positive gains made by staff who participated in the Pathfinder by embedding effective professional development activities into continuing professional development opportunities across Wales. In particular, there is a need to ensure that school leaders develop the skills of working with other schools, by looking at leadership requirements and the content of leaders' professional qualifications.** More broadly, this approach could also involve the development of training materials and activities that draw on the experiences of those involved in the Pathfinder, for example in areas such as managing change, teaching and learning, leadership and using data and assessment.
- 3. Facilitates the sharing of the good practice identified in the Pathfinder to ensure that it has maximum impact on schools across Wales.** This could be done by supporting dissemination events in each of the four consortia. These events could include workshops where **senior leaders and teachers from Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools share practice and lessons learned from participating in the Pathfinder.**
- 4. Encourages further school-to-school collaboration as the Pioneer Schools begin the work of reforming the curriculum and professional development arrangements in Wales.** The method of working which developed during the Pathfinder project could be used by Pioneer Schools as they address the task of developing the new curriculum, strengthening professional development, and embedding digital literacy. While the Pioneer Schools need to develop their own approaches, the evaluation shows that there is great scope for school-to-school collaboration as a way of stimulating professional discussion and sharing ideas.

We recommend that schools:

- 5. Ensure their improvement work results in a 'joined-up' approach to school improvement.** Schools should consider the support being received from different sources and draw this together to avoid duplication of effort. Systems for coordinating this activity should be introduced as part of the four-stage 'annual cycle of school improvement', which the Welsh Government believes should be adopted by all schools in order to inform their school development plans.
- 6. Continue to evidence and share the findings from their own research and evaluation activities relating to their school improvement work with other schools.** These findings could be shared through their own school networks as well as through the existing national resource sharing tools such as the 'Hwb' and the Learning Wales websites.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project

The aim of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project is to raise the standards within primary and secondary schools in Wales by facilitating school-to-school support, with the aim of accelerating improvement. Funded by the Welsh Government, the purpose of the Pathfinder is to establish and evaluate the effectiveness of a school improvement model whereby schools identified as underperforming (Emerging Practitioner Schools) are supported by schools already demonstrating excellent practice and outcomes (Lead Practitioner Schools). There have been two tranches of the project to date, and a bespoke programme involving special schools has also been delivered. This report focuses on Tranche 2 schools and included 20 schools in total.

Lead Practitioner Schools are high-performing primary and secondary schools, with a proven leadership track record that has resulted in high levels of performance and/or improvement over a sustained period. Emerging Practitioner Schools have already shown an early improvement of pupil outcomes, but some of these schools have a mixed record of in-school variability over the last two to three years<sup>2</sup> and the support of the Lead Practitioner School is designed to assist with stabilising this variability<sup>3</sup>.

During the Pathfinder, each Lead Practitioner School works with an Emerging Practitioner School to disseminate and implement best practice on a systematic basis for 18 months as set out in an intervention plan agreed with the Emerging Practitioner School (referred to as the Partnership Plan).

Lead Practitioner Schools receive funding to support an Emerging Practitioner School: secondary schools £90,000 and primary schools £30,000. Funding is subject to satisfactory evaluation of the Partnership Plan on a termly basis by the 'Project Champion'<sup>4</sup> to ensure that timely and consistent progress is made for each action point in the Partnership Plan against targets at the set milestones.

Following on from Tranche 1<sup>5</sup> of the project, Tranche 2 was launched in February 2014, and involved four matched pairs of secondary schools and six matched pairs of primary schools (20 schools in total).

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<sup>2</sup> The Emerging Practitioner School will have already shown an early improvement of pupil outcomes, although this may not necessarily be sustained.

<sup>3</sup> The criteria to join the Pathfinder as a Lead or Emerging Practitioner School for Tranche 2 are available online: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/practitionerschools/pathfinder-tranche-2-project/?lang=en> [21 October 2015]

<sup>4</sup> The Project Champion is employed by the Welsh Government. They are the schools' first point of contact and provide support to schools, whilst at arms length, ensuring that action plans remain on track.

<sup>5</sup> Tranche 1 was launched in May 2013, for 11 matched pairs of secondary schools and also 11 matched pairs of primary schools (43 schools in total – one lead secondary school supported two separate emerging schools). The findings from the midpoint evaluation of Tranche 1 were published in 2014 and are available online: <http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/practitioner-schools-evaluation-tranche-1/?lang=en> [28 October 2015]

## 1.2 Aims of the study

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by the Welsh Government in December 2014 to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project, in particular identifying where schools had been successful in raising standards and accelerating improvement for their pupils. This report provides an assessment of the performance of the Pathfinder at the end of Tranche 2.

## 1.3 Research methods

The study comprised four strands:

- a review of schools' Partnership Plans
- a review of schools' self-evaluation toolkits
- two visits to each of the 20 participating schools; the first between March-April 2015, the second in July or September 2015
- the production of good practice case-study summaries for selected partnerships that showed signs of developing and sharing good practice. These have been published separately.

Further details are provided below.

### 1.3.1 Review of schools' Partnership Plans

A rapid review of the Tranche 2 schools' Partnership Plans was undertaken, exploring areas such as:

- the focus of the work proposed in each partnership
- the management and organisational arrangements
- how the funding was to be used
- the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

The template for the Partnership Plans is provided in Appendix 1.

### 1.3.2 Review of schools' self-evaluation toolkits

As part of the earlier Tranche 1 evaluation, NFER developed a standardised evaluation toolkit (NFER, 2014b) to support participating schools in evaluating the impact and progress of the Pathfinder over five school terms (covering the full 18 months of the programme). Research evidence (for example, Chapman and Sammons, 2013) shows that the development of schools' self-evaluation capacity can help raise standards by allowing schools to monitor progress and, when needed, respond to school improvement challenges in a way informed by the evidence. The toolkit was designed to support this activity, and comprises a three step process:

**Step 1:** Schools are encouraged to read the 'Sutton Trust – Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit' (Higgins *et al.*, 2014). This toolkit is an accessible summary of educational research which provides guidance for

teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

**Step 2:** Schools are then encouraged to familiarise themselves with the 'DIY Evaluation Guide', also produced by the EEF (Coe *et al.*, 2013). The DIY Evaluation Guide provides advice for schools on how to evaluate whether the approaches they are using are having the desired effect.

**Step 3:** Once participating schools have familiarised themselves with the first two toolkits, Emerging Practitioner and Lead Practitioner schools need to work together to develop a Partnership Plan. Taking the form of an Excel spreadsheet, the NFER self-evaluation tool was designed to be short and easy to complete. It was designed to help schools to reflect on and capture:

- the outcomes and impacts of their school improvement work at the staff, school and pupil level
- the different types of evidence they could collect to demonstrate these impacts
- the strengths of the outcomes and impacts identified
- what was working well and what additional actions the schools could take to further improve the effectiveness of their school improvement work.

The toolkit was first introduced to Tranche 1 schools in March and April 2014 when the partnerships were already half way through the Pathfinder. However, it was available to Tranche 2 partnerships from the beginning of the programme. Consequently, the research team sought to explore how widely and frequently the toolkit had been used by Tranche 2 schools, and the extent to which it had helped shape and inform their development and evaluation activities.

An illustrative example of the self-evaluation toolkit is presented in Appendix 2.

### **1.3.3 Case-study visits to schools**

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impacts of the Pathfinder, two visits were undertaken to each participating school. The first visit took place between March and April 2015 and the second in July or September 2015. The timing of the visits allowed the research team to build a mid- and end-point assessment of the progress being made by schools. The purpose of the visits were to: (i) review progress from their starting position (as defined in the schools' own self-evaluation at the start of the project); (ii) establish the effectiveness of their school-to-school partnership working; (iii) identify issues/concerns and good practice; and (iv) explore the sustainability of the improvements and how this transposed across the wider school.

Across the two time points, the following numbers of interviews were undertaken:

- 29 with Headteachers/ Acting Headteachers
- 29 with Deputy/Assistant Headteachers
- seven with staff in other SMT roles
- 20 with Subject Leaders/Coordinators

- 28 with Classroom Teachers
- nine with staff in other management/coordination roles
- four with Learning Support Assistants.

The interviews were conducted using topic guides which focussed on a standard set of questions (see Appendix 3: Case-study instruments).

### **1.3.4 Good practice case studies**

The final strand of the project involved the production of good practice case-study summaries for selected partnerships, which included both primary and secondary schools. The partnerships were selected because they showed signs of developing and sharing good practice and collaborative school-to-school working that would be sustainable and able to be modelled by other schools outside of the programme. The case studies are published separately.

## **1.4 Analysis and reporting**

This report draws on an analysis of the data collected as part of the visits to 20 schools, supplemented with an analysis of their Partnership Plans and self-evaluation toolkits. As such, this report captures the perceived impact of the project, as reported by practitioners involved in Tranche 2 of the Pathfinder. The structure of the report is detailed below.

Chapter 2 explores schools' priorities and expectations, the activities undertaken (including the role/ contribution played by different staff), and participants' views on the effectiveness of their relationships with partner schools/ staff. It also explores Lead Practitioner Schools' views on the benefits and challenges of supporting more than one school (where applicable) and the extent to which participating schools evaluated and reflected on the work they were undertaking and the processes for doing this.

Chapter 3 examines the early and emerging outcomes resulting from participation in the Pathfinder. It also explores the factors that have enabled or constrained the effectiveness of the project.

Chapter 4 explores participants' views on the sustainability of the impacts/changes identified and how, at the time of interview, this had been transposed across the wider school. It also explores respondents' views on the effectiveness of the Pathfinder/school-to-school partnership working, and how, if at all, this could be improved.

The concluding chapter draws together the key messages from the different strands of the evaluation and provides an assessment of the effectiveness of the Tranche 2 Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project, and the extent to which the schools identified as underperforming have made the intended improvements. The report concludes by presenting seven recommendations for school-to-school partnership working in Wales.

## 2 Experience of the Pathfinder

### 2.1 Schools' targets/priorities

In order to better understand Tranche 2 schools' priorities for the Pathfinder, we analysed a total of nine Partnership Plans. We codified the partnerships' targets for improvement, as listed in Section 2.1 of the Partnership Plans. Partnerships could identify up to six but most identified two or three. It is perhaps not surprising that most of the school partnerships decided to focus their partnership work on a relatively narrow range of priorities, as doing so helped to target their efforts, and ensure that the partnership's financial and staff resources were used efficiently and effectively.

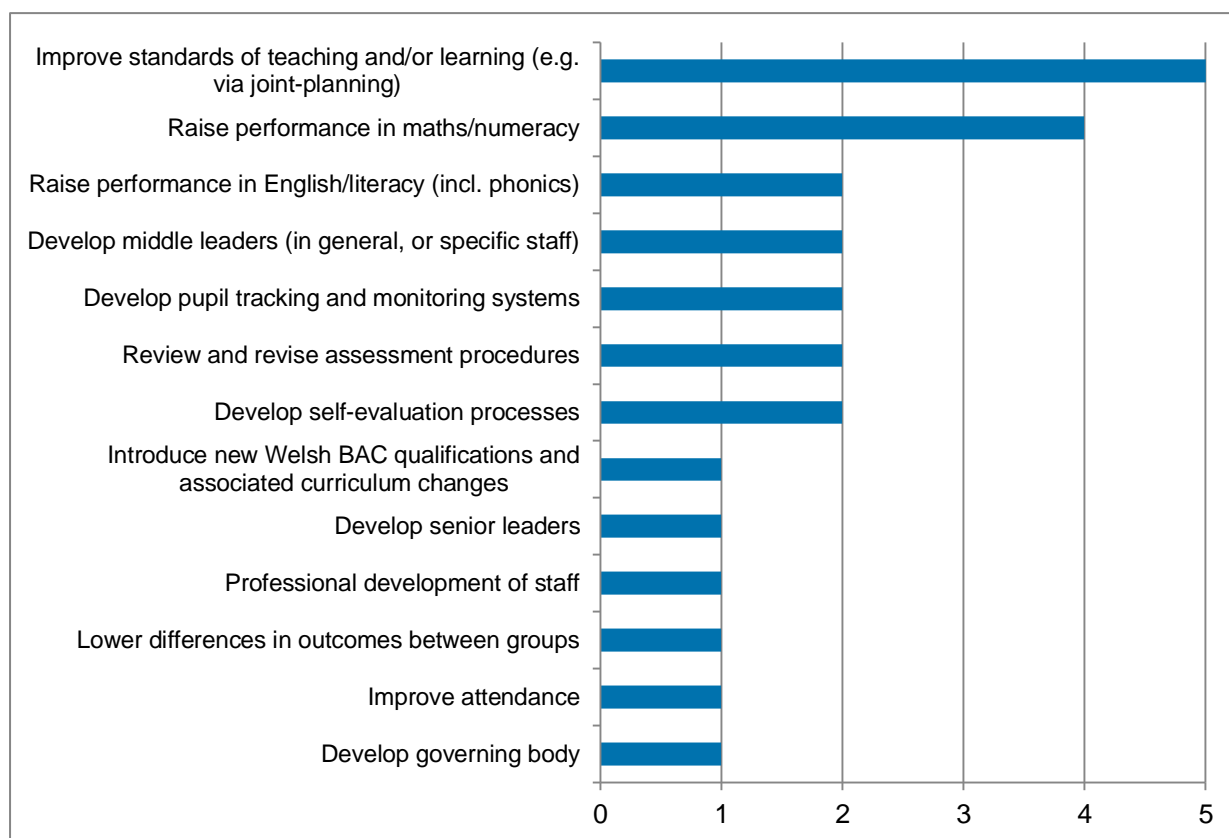
As shown in Figure 1, the two most frequently cited target areas for improvement identified by schools were:

- improving standards of teaching and/or learning; and
- raising performance in maths/numeracy.

Looking at Figure 1, it is interesting to see there is then a fairly equal distribution of secondary targets, including developing leadership (at both the senior and middle leader level), developments in data tracking and assessment, and the professional development of staff.

NFER researchers used the coding framework they developed for the Tranche 1 evaluation when looking at schools' targets, allowing for comparisons to be made between both tranches. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a large degree of similarity in target setting: the range of targets is similar, as is the frequency with which they were identified. For example, in both tranches, more partnerships prioritised the development of middle leaders over senior leaders. There are also some differences, for example in Tranche 1, literacy was prioritised over numeracy. In addition some Tranche 1 partnerships articulated the need to undertake an audit or needs analysis which does not appear to have emerged as a key target activity for Tranche 2 partnerships.

**Figure 1: Number of Tranche 2 Partnership Plans referring to different targets/priorities**



Source: NFER Evaluation of Tranche 2 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools Pathfinder Project, 2015

## 2.2 Activities undertaken

Schools' partnership activities can be grouped into three broad categories: teaching and learning; leadership; and using data and assessment. Most schools engaged in activities which covered all three categories, with a main focus on teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning activities almost always focused on the core subjects and included a combination of lesson observation; joint moderation and planning; developing resources; and attending training. Examples of teaching and learning-centred partnership activities include:

- Using video-streaming and recording technology to share effective teaching and learning practice, allowing staff in both Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools to reflect on, analyse and share teaching practice (i.e. to 'record, review and reflect').
- Providing opportunities for teachers from the partner schools to observe each other's lessons, and preparation/marking work.
- Holding a joint INSET day which focused on using tablets to enrich and support learning, and provided intra-departmental networking opportunities.
- Implementing 'walking talking mocks' with Year 11 students in the Emerging Practitioner School, with coaching from the Lead Practitioner School.



- Setting up joint working parties to plan approaches to implementing new curriculum specifications.
- Attending joint training on the components of excellent teaching and learning. In some cases, training was delivered by external consultants, and in others, by the headteachers of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools, either together or individually.

Leadership activities typically included promoting distributed leadership<sup>6</sup> among all staff; developing middle leaders; and holding strategic-level discussions to diagnose issues and plan improvements. Schools gave the following examples of leadership activities they had engaged in during the partnership:

- Jointly developing documents which clarify expectations of senior leaders, such as a 'leadership charter' which set out the schools' new 'vision' for its future leadership; or a middle leaders' competency framework.
- Holding a leadership 'away day' for senior staff which promoted skills development and reflective practice.
- Becoming members of national school partnership initiatives (focused on leadership, use of data, and the application of pedagogical principles dealing with diagnosis of need, appropriate intervention or therapy and testing) and attending events which facilitated strategic-level professional dialogue.
- Allocating new Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) to staff to raise accountability and standards.
- Providing tailored training for current and aspiring middle leaders.

Partnership activities which aimed to improve schools' use of data included:

- Exploring and strengthening existing data management systems or processes, or implementing new ones.
- Giving a presentation to governors on using data to challenge the school more effectively.
- The Lead Practitioner School 'marking' the Emerging Practitioner School's self-evaluation and constructively suggesting improvement.
- Partner schools evaluating each other's performance data and jointly developing strategies to increase challenge.

Assessment data was most frequently the focus of these activities, although some schools also focused on attendance and wellbeing data. Some schools also exhibited a renewed focus on tracking pupil outcomes over time to better identify the trajectory of pupils' progress. Pupil outcome data came from internal sources and external assessments such as the national literacy and numeracy tests. Schools also used data to support self-evaluation and reflection activities (discussed in Section 2.5). School partnerships engaged in these types of activities to a lesser extent than those which focused on teaching and learning, and leadership. In most cases, data use-oriented activities were led by a designated member of staff at each school (usually the deputy headteacher or data manager) who then cascaded their learning to colleagues to ensure that effective practice was shared and implemented across both schools.

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<sup>6</sup> Distributed leadership for learning and teaching can be broadly defined as a leadership approach in which collaborative working is undertaken between individuals who trust and respect each other's contribution.

All of the plans analysed stated that headteachers would lead the implementation of the partnership activities, almost always supported by their deputy headteachers. Indeed, deputy headteachers appear to play a varied yet instrumental role in delivering and overseeing the partnership activities. For example, they contributed to initially discussing and agreeing areas of focus, monitored the activities' progress, and designed, delivered and received training. Subject leaders, coordinators and faculty heads are also involved in a wide range of practical partnership activities. These include: learning walks, lesson observations, developing policies and procedures, attending training and disseminating lessons learned to other staff.

Participating Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools involved staff in partnership activities to varying degrees. For example, all staff were reported to have been involved in Pathfinder activities in around one third of the Tranche 2 partnerships. Where this occurred, staff typically participated in a range of activities including launch events, joint training, review meetings and discussions. Core subject leads and teaching staff at most Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools tended to be more heavily involved with partnership activities than other staff, as might be expected due to most partnerships' focus on developing teaching and learning in the core subjects.

The headteachers of partnered Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools tended to hold initial planning discussions, develop partnership plans, and take overall responsibility for achieving the plan's objectives. In a small proportion of these partnerships, Lead Practitioner School headteachers provided direct leadership support where this was seen as a priority for improvement in the Emerging Practitioner School.

In most partnered Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools middle leaders assumed greater responsibility for day-to-day leadership and coordination of activities. In some of these cases, interviewees reported that middle and subject leaders had assumed progressively greater responsibility for leading the partnerships. They attributed this to a concurrent growth in their skills and confidence, developed through their involvement with the partnership. As one senior leader commented:

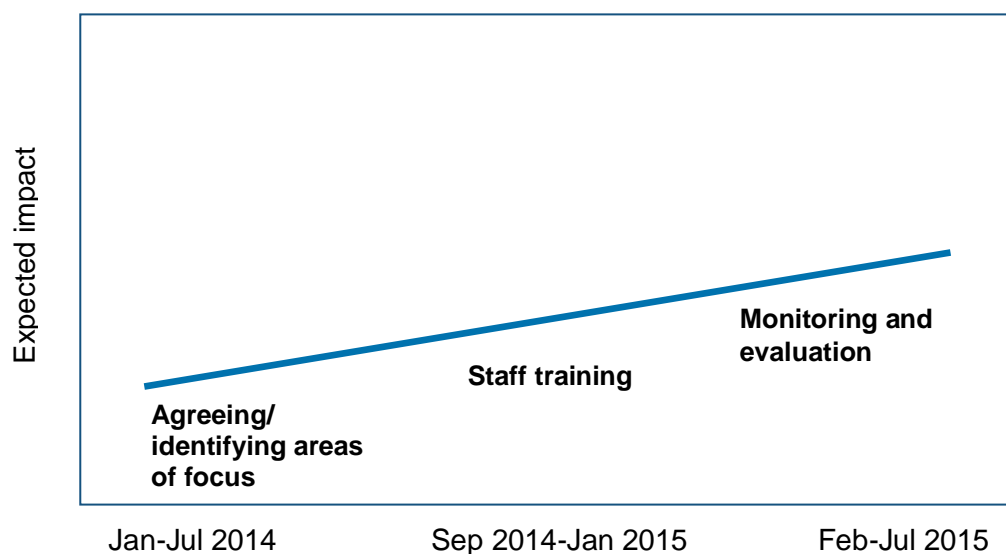
*Over time, we developed the leadership skills of other staff, so I have been able to take a backwards step and let other staff lead. We have empowered them to take it on, and that is something we would never have done otherwise.*

**Deputy Headteacher (Primary Emerging Practitioner School)**

### **2.2.1 The timing of different activities**

Figure 2 provides an indication of the types of activities planned at the beginning, middle, and end of Tranche 2 of the Pathfinder, as documented in schools' Partnership Plans.

**Figure 2: Timeline for Tranche 2 activities identified in schools' Partnership Plans**



The most common activity to take place at the beginning of the partnership period (characterised as January to July 2014) was **agreeing or identifying areas of focus for the partnership**. The types of activities schools engaged in included conducting and sharing school and/or pupil performance data or schools' needs analyses; discussing the schools' strengths and weaknesses; and identifying training needs.

The activity most frequently engaged in during the middle of the partnership period (September 2014 to January 2015) was **staff training**. Partnership plans indicate that schools delivered training on a range of topics including the core subjects, supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to reach their full potential, achieving excellence in teaching and learning, developing middle leaders, and developing governors.

During the final third of the Pathfinder (February to July 2015), the plans suggest most partnerships were focusing on **monitoring and evaluating the work undertaken**. Most schools report planning to undertake some form of data analysis to measure the impact of their partnership work. In general, however, partnership plans do not go into detail about how this will be achieved. Further exploration of the extent to which partnerships undertook self-evaluation and reflection activities is undertaken in Section 2.5.

### **2.3 Views on partnership relationships**

The majority of interviewees reported that relationships had been positive between the two schools throughout the duration of the partnership, highlighting a shared ethos of mutual trust, willingness and respect between the schools which had facilitated effective collaboration. Comments which reflect this include: 'There is a good understanding between the two schools with the opportunity to get involved with initiatives', 'The relationship couldn't be better. We have rolled out the partnership work across every aspect of school life', and 'Both headteachers have developed a friendship based on trust and respect'.

In the small proportion of cases where less positive partnership relationships existed, interviewees attributed this to professional differences between staff, a lack of clarity about the partnership's objectives, and a need for improved communication of the partnership's expectations on staff.

The key factors which enhanced the positivity of partnership relationships were:

- staff's openness to change and willingness to share
- a feeling of equality between staff at both schools.

Interestingly, interviewees conveyed that context both enhanced and constrained partnership relationships. Some interviewees reflected that partnering schools which had slightly different contexts (e.g. proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals [FSM] or those with English as an Additional Language [EAL]) had been conducive to partnership relationships because 'staff learn how to manage and overcome challenges in their own school through seeing different challenges in a different context'. In a few schools where contexts were different, some interviewees felt that it restricted the extent of shared learning which could arise from the partnerships. Schools cited this issue much less often than in Tranche 1, because the Welsh Government had addressed this concern when matching schools. Moreover, there were positive outcomes to report in those partnerships where this was highlighted as a concern.

Partner schools' location and proximity were also cited as both enhancing and constraining influences. In the instances where schools were based in different local authorities and belonged to different consortia, yet were not located a considerable distance from each other, interviewees considered this to have facilitated their relationship. This removed any element of 'competition' which might have arisen had the schools been based in the same local authorities and/or belonged to the same consortia. Close proximity also facilitated working relationships because it made it easier for schools to arrange and participate in face-to-face partnership activities.

Partnership relations were impeded when schools were based over 45 minutes' drive away from each other. In these instances, schools found it harder to arrange and engage in face-to-face partnership activities as they had to release staff for longer periods to accommodate travelling time. However, some of the interviewees from partner schools who were based further apart emphasised that despite the distance, they 'found ways to make it work'.

Further challenges to partnership relationships included the extent of schools' concurrent involvement with other school improvement activities (explored further in Section 2.4 below); staff turnover; and time pressure. The extent of schools' engagement with inspection and post-inspection improvements was also reported to have 'distracted' some schools from their partnership work.

The characteristics described above relate largely to the outlook of the schools concerned and the practical challenges they faced. At the same time, it is clear that the working practices that the partnerships adopted also influenced their success, as is shown in Table 1. Interestingly, most of the barriers were the converse of the enabling factors.

**Table 1: Factors acting as enablers and barriers to the pathfinder work**

Enabling factors	Barriers
Clear understanding of a school's development needs based on robust analysis	Refusal to acknowledge a school's position or development needs
A whole-school approach to change, underpinned by senior leaders working to the same agenda	Rigid sub-divisions using established autonomy to avoid engaging in whole-school approaches
A 'distributed leadership' approach to develop capacity	Leadership style that is unable/unwilling to delegate
Focus on pedagogy and learner wellbeing	Not being able to see the 'big picture' around teaching and learning or learners' wellbeing
Using data to tailor provision and support learner progression	Lack of capacity to use data/data management systems to best effect
Setting high expectations of learners	Culture of low aspirations
A mindset that both schools can learn from each other	One school assuming it has all the answers

Source: NFER (2015)

## 2.4 Schools' views on the benefits and challenges of supporting more than one school

One area of work that the Tranche 2 evaluation has been able to explore, that was not possible during Tranche 1, was the experience of teachers in Lead Practitioner Schools who had supported schools in both tranches of the Pathfinder, and/or had supported schools as part of *Schools Challenge Cymru* (Welsh Government, 2014b). At the time of the interviews, one Lead Practitioner School had acted as a Lead Practitioner School during Tranche 1, two of the Lead Practitioner Schools were supporting Pathways to Success schools as part of *Schools Challenge Cymru*<sup>7</sup>, and one Emerging Practitioner School was a Pathways to Success school.

Rather than focusing on the potential cumulative benefits of receiving support from both the Pathfinder and *Schools Challenge Cymru*, interviewees instead tended to compare the two programmes, and highlight the significantly different levels of funding between them: 'Schools Challenge Cymru has been better because there is more funding' (Subject Leader in a secondary Emerging Practitioner School).

<sup>7</sup> *Schools Challenge Cymru* aims to empower and equip 40 '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 strategy is targeted at secondary schools in Wales 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. It provides a more intensive package of support than that provided by the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Pathfinder

While there was some evidence to suggest that supporting more than one school could generate capacity issues, this was not the overwhelming message coming from the small number of schools concerned. However, it was clear that the intensity of the involvement which they needed to have with *Schools Challenge Cymru* was something that schools needed to have planned for before engaging in simultaneous partnership work.

At the same time, while the Pathfinder and *Schools Challenge Cymru* are designed to enable schools to support each other on their journey of improvement, there are important differences around:

- the receiving school's level of need
- the funding and resources that are available
- the stakeholders that are involved, given, for instance, the role of Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers and the Accelerated Improvement Boards.

It was suggested that because of its scale and the level of support which it provided, *Schools Challenge Cymru* had tended to be the 'principal' improvement method for the small number of schools involved in both programmes. Moreover, there was a suggestion that the two programmes did not dovetail effectively, illustrated by an interviewee in a secondary Emerging Practitioner School: 'Schools Challenge Cymru has pulled us in different directions [to the Pathfinder]'.

There appeared to be challenges in coordinating the work undertaken through the two programmes, with one interviewee in a Lead Practitioner School suggesting it would have been helpful to have worked with their partner school's Challenge Advisor.

*If we had the opportunity to work with the Challenge Adviser it would have worked better as we could have coordinated our work to ensure that everyone got the most out of the partnership and there was no duplication.*

**Assistant Headteacher (Secondary Lead Practitioner School)**

The comments, while from individual respondents and relevant to only a small number of schools emphasise the importance of a coordinated, unified approach, that ensures that different elements of support complement each other.

## **2.5 Self-evaluation and reflection**

There was evidence that staff from Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools had engaged in a range of self-evaluation and reflection activities. Interviewees from around half of the participating schools reported they had collected and analysed some form of quantitative data which they used to track the progress of the partnership activities they had engaged in. These schools typically used targets/feedback from lesson observations and book scrutiny (examining learners' written work) along with pupil outcome data to measure the impact of partnership activities which had focused on specific areas, subjects or pupil groups.

Pupil outcome data came from internal and external assessments such as the national literacy and numeracy tests. Some schools which used this approach emphasised the importance of tracking outcomes over time to identify the trajectory of pupils' progress, as this interviewee highlighted: 'because we measure progress, not just attainment, we have

been able to strengthen the diagnosis, such as grouping weaker pupils into 'red' groups and identifying MAT (more able and talented) pupils'.

All schools routinely reflected on the success of their partnership activities through informally discussing them with colleagues: 'We have evaluated informally through asking colleagues how things are going'. Some schools used staff meetings as a forum to provide updates on the partnership's progress, sharing anecdotal feedback and data from partnership activities.

A small proportion of schools had incorporated targets relating to aspects of their partnership activities into their School Development Plans (SDPs). These schools planned to report back on the progress achieved towards meeting those targets in subsequent versions of SDPs. Most schools did not use the NFER self-evaluation tool<sup>8</sup>, stating that they found their own techniques to evaluate the progress of their partnership activities more effective. However, it is not clear to what extent the tool was actively promoted to schools, nor whether schools possessed the capacity or expertise to systematically evaluate their school improvement work. For example, there was some feeling, perhaps understandably, that the impacts of certain partnership activities were hard to measure, such as changes in staff attitude, leadership development, and increased expectations of pupils' achievement. As one interviewee reflected, 'We saw a change in attitudes and leadership. One new leader grew tremendously. It was the impact of those things that you can't measure by data'.

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<sup>8</sup> As part of the earlier Tranche 1 evaluation, NFER developed a standardised evaluation toolkit to support participating schools in evaluating the impact and progress of the Pathfinder. The tool was designed to help raise standards by encouraging schools to monitor progress and, when needed, respond to school improvement challenges in a way informed by the evidence.

## 3 Emerging impacts

This chapter considers the perceived impact of the work described in Chapter 2 and how both Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools believed they had benefited from taking part. Some interviewees referred to quantitative improvements in learners' attainment, as measured by the percentage of those achieving the highest outcomes or levels in primary schools and positive results at GCSE and other assessments in secondary schools. However, it was not possible for the evaluation to assess to what extent such progress was related to the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Pathfinder, if at all. Other influences, beyond the Pathfinder project, affect attainment at learner level, including factors such as broader school improvement strategies, expectations of success, the influence of different practitioners or leadership styles and as cohort differences.

Even so, notwithstanding the difficulty of attributing impact to the Pathfinder, every person we spoke to was able to identify at least one positive outcome that they believed was due to their participation in the Pathfinder. Impacts were reported in areas such as teaching and learning (including pedagogy, the way the curriculum was organised and delivered, the quality of lessons that schools expected, and the way they support learners to fulfil their potential), school leadership (including the way individual leaders work, the structure and working practices of leadership teams, and the use of distributed leadership (where the task of leading a particular aspect is undertaken by a range of members of staff across a school's workforce), and the way schools use data. These impacts are discussed in detail in the sections below.

### 3.1 Teaching practice

Refining approaches to teaching and learning was highlighted as one of the most important ways in which the Pathfinder had impacted on participating schools.

#### 3.1.1 Pedagogy

Teachers reported that the partnership work had increased their confidence to try different approaches and experiment with techniques that they had not used in the past. This led to changes that had made the structure of lessons more dynamic, so that they became more interactive, and required learners to be active participants. Some teachers had changed their question and answer techniques to a model whereby they sought to delve into learners' understanding of concepts and issues. The quality of the feedback they gave to learners had also improved, with more detail provided to further support learning.

At the same time, school leaders described how they had moved away from the notion of teachers as 'the font of all knowledge' to a more facilitative role, which helped to nurture more independent learners. They reported that this had an impact on teaching styles, especially in secondary schools and to a lesser extent in primary schools, were more likely to be in place already.



In some schools, reflecting on practice and seeing how other practitioners (including both teachers and support staff) worked had prompted teachers to revise their practices in ways such as:

- increasing the level of detail in the planning
- making lessons more varied by looking for opportunities to use different techniques
- looking at how staff in the classroom and teaching assistants (TAs) could be used more effectively
- ensuring that differentiation was addressed in all teaching and learning activities
- considering how learners could contribute more to a lesson
- looking at issues like the way classrooms were laid out
- revising expectations of classroom noise levels.

The work to review and reflect on pedagogy took place alongside a clear focus on assessment both for formative and summative purposes. As a result of this work, teachers developed a better understanding of how assessment data could be used to support teaching and learning (see Section 3.2.5) and its role in identifying targets and areas for development.

Both Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools said that the focus on pedagogy had encouraged staff to reflect on their practice much more robustly than they had done previously and this included examples where Lead Practitioner Schools had developed ideas that originated in Emerging Practitioner Schools. For instance, Lead Practitioner Schools had adopted Emerging Practitioner schools practices such as structured approaches for reviewing books and conducting lesson observations and specific practices to support the teaching and learning, such as collecting a learner's targets and recording them in one place where they could access them more easily.

It was noted by staff in Lead Practitioner Schools that they had sharpened their practice in those cases when practitioners from the Emerging School visited their school, a typical comment being 'the bar of self-assessment is very high when someone is coming into your school'. Staff also looked at whether they were sufficiently rigorous when monitoring the performance of their own colleagues in light of the experience of doing so with their partner school.

### **3.1.2 Curriculum**

Schools had used the opportunity offered by the Pathfinder to discuss ways in which the curriculum could be delivered more effectively. Most partnerships had focused on the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) (Welsh Government, 2013)<sup>9</sup> in some way, including those which had collaborated to embed its requirements across the whole curriculum, by looking for opportunities to make more explicit links between the content and the skills of literacy and numeracy. Others had focused on topic planning. Secondary school teachers were increasingly looking at how to approach aspects such as problem-solving skills.

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<sup>9</sup> The LNF is designed to help teachers embed literacy and numeracy into all subjects for learners aged 5 to 14.

In some examples this work led to changes in the amount of time allocated on the timetable for different elements of the curriculum, changes to course content and a focused on work specifically designed to develop learners' skills. In some cases it was felt that subject knowledge, for example in specific areas such as mathematical reasoning, had improved.

Specific examples of the work in primary schools included:

- teaching science in a way that was much more 'hands-on' and experimental
- introducing structured programmes to support numeracy such as embedding an assessment tool, developed by the regional consortium in which the school was situated, into the maths curriculum
- developing a school's work around numerical reasoning and problem solving
- increasing the amount of extended writing that was required when introducing structured phonics programmes
- introducing Rich Learning Tasks (RLTs)<sup>10</sup>.

The work around RLTs in particular was credited with having given opportunities for staff to develop their skills and in some cases there was a new eagerness around this aspect of the work. This was because the RLTs had given opportunities and freedom for staff to be creative and to develop their own tasks. In particular, RLTs were seen as having improved the quality of homework.

At the same time, primary schools implemented specific strategies such as Geiriau Gwych/Big Writing<sup>11</sup> and Rhifau Rhagorol/Big Maths<sup>12</sup>, which were credited with having contributed a great deal to the progress made by learners.

In secondary schools, specific changes included:

- making revision sessions more focused and relevant to the exams that learners were sitting
- reviewing the schemes of work for individual subjects to align them with the LNF
- re-assessing the time allocated for specific subjects on the timetable.

According to both primary and secondary schools the work developed around curriculum delivery had a demonstrable impact on the quality of learners' experiences. They referred to the way learners' confidence to do something practical had increased and to a positive impact on the vocabulary they used, their ability to express themselves in written work, and the way they had become more confident in terms of their writing. At the same time, schools judged that higher ability learners were being challenged more effectively.

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<sup>10</sup> Tasks that assess the range of skills set out in the LNF in the context of the breadth of subjects children are required to study.

<sup>11</sup> Structured reading programmes, available in Welsh or English.

<sup>12</sup> A structured maths programme, available to support work either through the medium of Welsh or English.

## **3.2 School-level changes**

### **3.2.1 Supporting learners**

The way learners were supported had changed in several schools, as practice in one school (both Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools) influenced what was happening elsewhere. Examples of the kind of approaches which had been developed included the introduction of programmes or resources that were designed to enable schools to respond more effectively to learners' emotional needs such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). Such work was seen to have fostered a mindset that enabled schools to identify potential problems much earlier than had been the case before and this fostered a preventative approach, which addressed issues before they escalated. Staff reported that learners were more engaged, enthused and involved, displaying greater self-esteem and confidence, and were more vocal about wanting to learn. They linked this to improvements in attendance and behaviour. At the same time, they said that they had reduced the number of interventions to support learners and that they were having to deal with fewer issues around behaviour.

### **3.2.2 Leadership**

As reported in Chapter 2, strengthening school leadership was an important element of the Partnership Plans and the activities undertaken across the schools involved in the Pathfinder. The impact of this work was seen across the different schools and included examples where headteachers' own leadership styles had changed. This included work to strengthen leadership capacity, and changes in the way leaders (broadly defined) worked, including, in many instances, a clear focus on developing the role of middle leaders.

Individual headteachers said that they had benefited from seeing the way their counterparts in their partner schools worked. In addition, they reported the benefits from taking part in coaching and mentoring activities with their partner school. They had looked at different styles of leadership and this gave them greater confidence to delegate responsibility and this fostered a more strategic approach in the way they worked. It was recognised that leadership styles vary according to an individual's own approach and in response to a school's needs, and that there was no 'correct' uniform approach. However, the work had helped to highlight effective management behaviours and developed headteachers' skills in managing change.

In a minority of Emerging Practitioner Schools, staff felt that a more positive leadership style had developed as a result of the work with the Lead Practitioner School and the increased confidence shown by some Emerging Practitioner School heads was highlighted by respondents.

Headteachers had drawn on the experience of colleagues to reappraise their schools' leadership structures. This involved:

- expanding the size of the leadership team and reallocating responsibilities to increase their capacity
- delegating work to others in the senior leadership team

- strengthening middle leadership
- changing the way Teaching and Learning Responsibilities were allocated
- distributing responsibilities more evenly across a school's staff
- developing staff's management skills, for example, how middle managers work and how teachers manage teaching assistants
- an emerging secondary school had created the role of Deputy Headteacher with specific responsibility for teaching and learning
- the funding had enabled schools to release staff to work with their partner schools, , giving other teachers opportunities to 'step up' to their roles for a period of time, which had created valuable professional development opportunities.

Senior leaders considered that staff's capacity to lead and take the initiative had increased, as one headteacher noted: 'You give people a bit of structure and you let them go and their confidence grows. That helps bring in quite a systematic approach'.

The changes in leadership structures had coincided with work to nurture different working practices across those teams. Schools described how the project had nurtured a common approach among senior leaders, who were felt to be working to a shared agenda. They reported this had not always been the case in the past, especially in schools where individual subdivisions (for example, phase, year group, department or faculty) had enjoyed considerable autonomy. This newly developed common approach was believed to be due to senior leadership teams developing an agreed understanding of the changes which they needed to make, and committing themselves to a set of common goals. This strengthened the effectiveness of the senior leadership teams and was reflected in the way whole-school systems were being implemented. Examples included:

- monitoring the targets for learners (mainly in terms of attainment, but also others such as behaviour and issues related to wellbeing and inclusion) set by teachers more closely
- examining to what extent learners were progressing as expected and understanding the reasons for any deviations
- heightening awareness of the needs of particular groups of learners (such as those eligible for free school meals (FSM), More Able and Talented (MAT) etc)
- showing greater awareness of what constituted an excellent lesson and creating opportunities to discuss those issues with middle leaders and individual practitioners.

The strengthening of the role of senior leadership teams had led to similar changes in the role of middle leaders. Several schools suggested informally that one of the most beneficial impacts of the Pathfinder was the way that it had led both schools to think about the role of the middle leaders and how they could contribute further to their school's success. Some Emerging Practitioner Schools had reorganised their structures to ensure that this tier of leaders focused much more on strengthening teaching and learning and other work that enabled learners to fulfil their potential. At the same time, they deliberately nurtured middle leaders' confidence to take more responsibility for work such as target setting, monitoring standards, and supporting professional standards. In a minority of Emerging Practitioner Schools the impact of this was becoming evident through more robust line management, the

way that the LNF was being embedded into schemes of work more effectively, and the way teachers addressed issues around pedagogy.

Some Lead Practitioner Schools had also changed their own leadership structures in light of discussions with the Emerging Practitioner School. At the same time, the secondment of a senior member of staff to work with an Emerging Practitioner School had given other staff the opportunity of stepping up to the mark and broadening their leadership experience.

### **3.2.3 School systems and processes**

The discussions with practitioners suggested that the partnership work had helped to refine and strengthen whole-school systems and processes. Staff described how the work in which they had been involved had promoted greater harmonisation across the different phases/year groups or departments. In particular, some secondary schools noted how individual departments had enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy that was being replaced by a more uniform way of working (a point related to issues relating to leadership discussed in 3.2.2). Practitioners at these schools referred to the way that the Pathfinder Project had brought them into contact with colleagues from the partner school who had instigated valuable discussions about working practices and the benefits of consistent practice across a whole school. As a result, those schools were more aware of the benefits of more integrated, whole-school approaches. These views were echoed by some practitioners in primary schools.

Schools referred to examples where self evaluation and performance management systems had been strengthened and where partnerships had refined School Development Plans to make them more focused, for example to align staff targets to those for the school as a whole and ensuring that literacy and numeracy featured prominently among the development work to be undertaken by all staff. This resulted in staff having a better grasp of how to monitor quality. This was exemplified by more rigorous lesson observations, as staff worked to clearer criteria about what to expect when assessing lessons. Monitoring activities were being undertaken more often and to a greater level of detail than in the past. In some cases this had been taken a step further because performance management reviews had been given greater structure and focus.

Practitioners in Lead Practitioner Schools suggested that they themselves had become more reflective and critical of their own practices because they had taken a step back and discussed these matters with colleagues in their partner Emerging Practitioner School. Examples of this included:

- the way they had appraised the rigour of their own systems in terms of quality and the way they promoted accountability
- considering what a 'Lead Practitioner School' lesson should look like when highlighting good practice

### 3.2.4 Developing capacity

The work done by schools as a result of the partnerships impacted on practitioners' professional capacity by encouraging them to reflect on existing practice and to explore different ways of working. Practitioners, including some from both the Lead and the Emerging Practitioner Schools, reported that they felt less isolated than in the past because they were given an opportunity to step outside their own schools and classrooms.

Some of the partnerships' work had harnessed video-streaming and recording technology which enabled practitioners to record their own practice and then reflect on it in private. They were then able to release the recordings to others as they chose to do so. As noted above, some partnerships had used funding from the Pathfinder to purchase such equipment and this was seen to have impacted positively on practice: teachers had been able to identify their own strengths and areas for development without anyone else being involved. This was one important element in a much broader range of activities designed to promote reflective practice.

School leaders commented that there was a greater readiness for change among staff and that they were more receptive to new ideas and ways of working. They referred to specific examples such as:

- it had helped to address specific priorities for individual practitioners, for example strengthening the way they approached mathematical reasoning
- it developed staff capacity to work with specific groups of learners
- staff had become more aware of the expectations that were the norm in other schools and had revised their own work in light of these
- it had helped to raise the level of staff professional dialogue through a culture of coaching and mentoring and discussion in triads, where three teachers discuss each other's work.

Staff had benefited from seeing good teaching and this was credited with helping to move forward, including examples where practice was found to have improved from good to excellent. For example, they were more aware of the attention they needed to give to items such as learners' targets and how to assess work more rigorously. This would not have been possible unless the staff had visited other schools. They also believed that staff in both the Emerging and Lead Practitioner Schools had benefited from reflecting on their own expectations and quality of work through professional dialogue across the partner schools.

A minority of schools regretted that the staff who would have benefited most from seeing practice in another school (and reflect on their own in light of what they had seen as part of the opportunities for teachers from the partner schools to observe each other's lessons) had not taken part in the activities and that this method of supporting them to develop professionally had not proved successful. This was an issue highlighted in primary and secondary schools.

### **3.2.5 Using data**

Strengthening schools' capacity to use data was one of the main targets set by the partnerships at the outset and this was reflected in the work to discuss the way they collected and managed information and, more importantly, how that data was used to support teaching and learning. Some schools had introduced, or were now more effectively using, online tools for teachers which helped record their pupils' learning. These tools were contributing to the improvements in the ways schools were using a range of data (especially learners' attainment data) and there was evidence that some schools were now using these packages much more effectively than had been the case in the past. For example, some interviewees reported using them to plan individual learners' progression routes, when before they were simply used as a means of recording and reporting data. This gave staff more confidence in using data for formative purposes and target setting. In addition, discussions between staff had looked in detail at issues such as the skills needed for learners who were on the borderline of two levels, enabling them to reach the higher level.

Interviewees referred to ways in which senior management team (SMT) meetings were now more focused on quantitative performance measures and expected progression milestones: these had sometimes been aligned to national indicators such as the all-Wales core data sets, National Literacy and Numeracy test data, Global Citizenship Audit, leadership audits and other similar activities. They were becoming more forensic in the way they used data, for example looking in detail at specific groups of learners such as those in receipt of free school meals, and looked after children. This approach had also impacted on the way middle leaders were working and there was evidence that they were more aware of the potential of data and were using that information more effectively. Staff were setting quantitative rather than qualitative targets, for example, that a learner should be achieving a specific level rather than a more general description of the expected progress. This was linked to the way schools had developed stronger processes to monitor the targets set by teachers for the learners.

At the same time, assessment practice itself had been changed. The changes included:

- introducing trajectories based on those used in the Lead Practitioner School to track what needed to be in place in Year 3 for a learner to flourish in Year 6
- reviewing the work at individual subject level and developing bespoke success criteria against which progress could be measured.

## **3.3 Pupils and learning**

### **3.1.1 Raising expectations**

In several partnerships it was noted that working with the Lead Practitioner School had led the Emerging Practitioner Schools to raise their expectations of what learners should be able to do. In some cases staff in Emerging Practitioner Schools reported they had changed the way they thought about learners: staff commented that the partnership work had removed notions of a 'glass ceiling' and that learners were now challenged more appropriately and that expectations had increased.

This was in part due to the impact of work to standardise the judgments that were made by practitioners when assessing and moderating work and by modelling the kind of work which should be expected of a learner judged to have reached a particular level. A typical comment was 'we looked at the way [Emerging Practitioner School] assessed learners' work and it opened our eyes to the standard of the work they expected before they would give it a particular level'. One of the strengths of this approach was that it initiated professional conversations among practitioners.

Some schools referred to a noticeable impact on staff's ability and confidence in target-setting and their willingness to set more aspirational targets for learners. As was noted by one school leader, the work was a 'wake-up call for certain staff having visited the partner school'. A teacher at another secondary school noted that schemes of work in one subject had been revised after the Head of Department had been 'blown away by the expectations' in the Lead Practitioner School.

### **3.1.2 Involving learners**

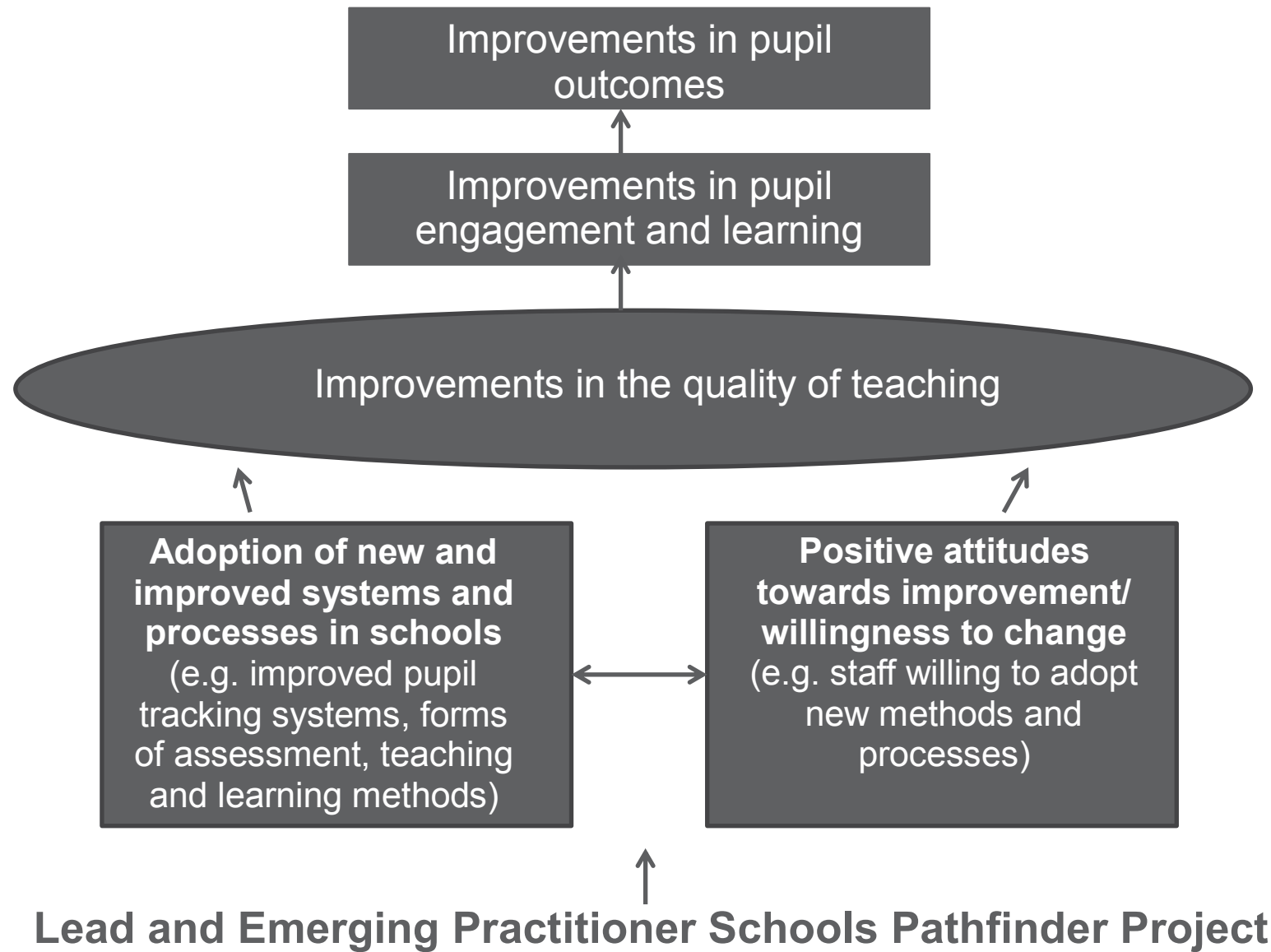
Staff reported that learners were more aware of their targets and the kind of work that they should be producing and consequently they were more likely to reflect on their own needs and challenges. For example, they were able to self- and peer-assess and set down their own success criteria. At the same time, the amount of hands-on experimental work being undertaken by learners had increased and they were more likely to be taking the lead in discussions. Schools indicated that, as a result, learners' motivation had improved and they were more engaged with teachers and the learning process.

These changes were related to work to strengthen learners' voice, through formal processes enabling them to make their views known about their own learning and other work to nurture their independence and their enjoyment of the tasks they were given.

In most cases, the impacts described in this chapter appear to be sequenced, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. The impact flow model we have developed shows that before impacts can be experienced by pupils, schools must first adopt new and improved systems and processes. Staff also need to adopt a positive attitude to improvement and a willingness to try new approaches to the way they work. This is followed by improvements in the quality of teaching and/or the culture of the school. It is then that we start to see improvements in pupils' engagement and learning followed by improvements in pupils' outcomes.



Figure 1: Impact flow model: drivers and dependencies for the achievement of improved learner outcomes



## 4 Legacy of the Pathfinder

### 4.1 Plans for the future

It was always the intention that at the end of the 18-month Pathfinder, Emerging Practitioner Schools would have made sufficient progress and built their capacity to improve in such a way that they could go on and take the lead in driving their own improvement. While it is too early to say whether Tranche 2 schools will be able to do this, most staff within Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools agreed that the kind of activities which the partnerships had supported were ones which could be embedded in practice and should not require ongoing support. These 'structural and procedural changes' included activities in areas such as teaching and learning, assessment, pupil tracking, school management and professional reflection.

However, many interviewees also articulated the belief that effective and lasting change required attitudinal and cultural change, and that this needed to coincide with the structural and procedural changes described above.

*Effective and lasting change is attitudinal and cultural as opposed to structural. It requires change by all within the system, but particularly by schools which need to realise fully the advantages of collaboration over competition.*

**Headteacher (Secondary Lead Practitioner School)**

While many interviewees were confident that the structural and procedural changes were becoming embedded in practice, there appeared to be more uncertainty as to the extent to which all staff in Emerging Practitioner Schools, or at least a sufficient number, had undergone the attitudinal and cultural changes required for their schools to make sustained improvement. It is worth noting that the move amongst some Emerging Practitioner Schools towards a more distributed leadership model could support further attitudinal and cultural change. While this did not come through strongly in the interviews with participating teachers, distributed leadership does offer the potential for mutual learning and knowledge creation, and there is evidence to suggest that more widely distributed patterns of leadership equate with greater potential for organisational change and development (for example Harris, 2005).

Staff in the Lead Practitioner Schools believed that the Pathfinder had nurtured a greater willingness on the part of staff in the Emerging Practitioner Schools to engage with other practitioners outside their own school. There were also indications that as a result of this outward facing work, some staff had become more willing to discuss practice and consider issues around standards with colleagues in their own schools. Thus it appears that, for some staff at least, by looking outward they have become more outward looking. These are attributes that current and future school improvement efforts and infrastructure can build on further.

## 4.2 Views on effectiveness

The overwhelming response from interviewees in Tranche 2 schools was that the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project had been successful in helping to accelerate their improvement. This was true of teachers in both Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools.

Key to this improvement, were the opportunities the Pathfinder afforded through the coming together of staff from both schools. These included peer-to-peer and group-to-group school-based activities (e.g. through INSET and intra-departmental networking opportunities). These appeared to be most successful where people were active participants, where activities took place on a continual rather than one-off basis, and where learning was prioritised and modelled by senior leaders.

Several interviewees commented on the benefits that had been gained because the Tranche 2 pilot had given an opportunity for 'two-way learning processes' in which staff from both schools were willing to learn from one another to help drive improvement. Indeed, the exchange of different ideas, tools and processes was highlighted by interviewees as one of the main benefits of the Pathfinder:

*The biggest benefit this has brought is the way it has encouraged discussion and joint teaching by teachers across the two schools. They have been able to tailor things to answer their own needs... [and]...to compare and learn from each other.*

**Deputy Headteacher (Primary Emerging Practitioner School)**

As noted in Chapter 3, the sharing of teaching and learning resources included templates for things like book reviews and peer reviews, and there was evidence that this had stimulated the sharing of good practice within as well as between schools. The result had been to reinvigorate leadership and teaching and learning approaches, and to bring about wider benefits, such as the consolidation of participating teachers' project management and communication skills.

There was also evidence to suggest that participating teachers would value the opportunity to engage in similar experiences in the future, and that the relatively short period of time which schools had to formerly work together (18 months) was sufficient to change the mindsets of at least some staff, as illustrated by the quote below.

*I would do it again...I have found that spending a bit of time in an outstanding school has changed my mindset and the standards and aspirations I have for my own school. For me, not accepting poor teaching is the single most important thing I have learned.*

**Headteacher (Primary Emerging Practitioner School)**

## 4.3 How the Pathfinder could have been improved

Against the backdrop of interviewees generally being very positive about the Pathfinder, a small number of interviewees made suggestions for how the Pathfinder, and in some cases school-to-school partnership working more widely, could be made even better.

### **4.3.1 Additional time and/or funding**

The first of these included suggestions for additional time and/or funding. For example, staff in two partnerships suggested that additional funding would have allowed them to have delivered their planned initiatives more rapidly and/or more deeply (by allowing them to commit more time and resources to their activities). The same interviewees suggested that greater funding would have enabled more staff to have been involved, although they planned to disseminate any learning to those not directly involved in Pathfinder-led activities.

It is also interesting to note that staff in at least one partnership reported ‘topping up’ the funding using money from school funds, though it was not clear how widespread this practice was.

Respondents in one school suggested that it would have been better if the Pathfinder had started in the summer term (rather than in February). This comment appeared to be based on the view that summer term would have offered a term of planning ready for changes to practise in the new academic year.

While some interviewees reported that the Pathfinder had led to changes in the mindsets and/or practices of some individuals (as reported in Section 4.2), interviewees in three schools suggested it would have been better for the Pathfinder to have run for 24 months rather than 18. This, they argued, would have allowed more time to help build relationships between individuals in the two schools. However, it is not clear whether it was thought the longer period of time was needed to build limited relationships more fully or to build additional relationships with a broader number of school staff.

Staff in two schools suggested that the timing of an Estyn inspection in one of their schools had been unhelpful, as it had diverted efforts away from the partnership work and had ‘prevented the schools from achieving more from the Pathfinder’. However, one interviewee said the inspection had been helpful, as it had helped to confirm that the improvement activities they had been pursuing as part of the Pathfinder were the right ones.

Several teachers commented on the challenges of finding time to work together due to their teaching commitments:

*It would be good to have more meeting time, more days to develop resources, e.g. if the insets coincided we could have that time.*

**Teacher (Secondary Lead Practitioner School)**

*The only negative is the time aspect, arranging meetings is hard as we are both working with Key Stage 3 and 4 it is hard to find the time. The joint INSET was great as we had dedicated time.*

**Subject Leader (Secondary Emerging Practitioner School)**

### **4.3.2 More opportunities to share practice**

Staff in one school suggested it would have been helpful to have had the opportunity to partner with more than one school, and thus to have benefitted from the skills and experience of staff working in different schools. Indeed, some staff had only ever

experienced teaching in one school, and so the opportunity to visit and work with staff in another school was illuminating, as this example indicates:

*It's a testament to our staff that they are willing to look forward. Some of our staff are just used to working in one school but by staff going to [the Lead Practitioner School] and seeing what they do actually opens their eyes and aspirations and the partnership has helped that.*

**Subject Leader (Secondary Emerging Practitioner School)**

Interviewees in two schools suggested it would have been helpful to have had some kind of central repository where schools from across the partnership could share their resources and experiences.

*It would be good to have a synopsis of what's worked for different schools and have a database or bank of all of the resources created across the partnerships. The consortia could lead on this. All schools could then draw down and upload resources and adapt what they have done and try out new ideas.*

**Teacher (Secondary Emerging Practitioner School)**

The good practice case studies, which are published separately, further illustrate some of the learning that has taken place from Tranche 2 of the Pathfinder.

### **4.3.3 More opportunities to widen participation**

As discussed in Chapter 2, most of the school partnerships understandably chose to focus their partnership work on a relatively narrow range of priorities, such as raising performance in maths or numeracy. This helped both give focus to their efforts, and ensure that the partnership's financial and staff resources were used effectively. In some cases, this also appears to have resulted in schools targeting certain staff for involvement, meaning others were less actively involved. However, there appeared to be a general view, at least amongst a minority of interviewees, that it would have been helpful if participation in Pathfinder activities had been widened to encompass other individuals. In most cases this related to teaching staff, but a small number of individuals also suggested it would have been helpful to have created more opportunities for pupils in the two schools to have worked together. One interviewee in a Lead Practitioner School, which was supporting a school that was also designated as a 'Pathways to Success' school<sup>13</sup>, suggested it would have been helpful to have worked with their partner school's Challenge Advisor. This, they argued, could have helped better coordinate the support the Emerging Practitioner School was receiving from both programmes.

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<sup>13</sup> These are secondary 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.

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents conclusions from the evaluation of Tranche 2 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project. The conclusions are referenced to the aims of the evaluation which were to provide an assessment, at the end of the Pathfinder, of the effectiveness of the programme and the extent to which the schools identified as underperforming had achieved intended improvements. In addition, the chapter provides an assessment of the progress made since Tranche 1 of the Pathfinder (NFER, 2014), together with evidence-based recommendations for organising and supporting school improvement in Wales in the future.

### 5.1 Overall conclusions

The main conclusion from the evaluation of Tranche 2 schools is that, overall, most interviewees reported that the Pathfinder model of organising and facilitating national school-to-school improvement had been effective in supporting and accelerating improvement in participating schools. This was true for both the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools which have taken part. The interviews with staff in Tranche 2 schools suggest to us that the consistency of the high-quality and effective nature of the relationships between staff in the two schools has improved since Tranche 1. For example, while the majority of Tranche 1 schools enjoyed relationships which could be categorised as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’, there were a number of partnerships where the relationships were characterised as ‘mixed’ and ‘poor/not so good’.

Our interviews revealed that while Tranche 2 partnerships were not without their challenges (described in Chapters 2 and 4), in our judgement, none of the Tranche 2 partnerships could be described as ‘poor/not so good’. We attribute this improvement to two main factors. The first, to improvements in the school matching, recruitment and briefing process, facilitated by the Welsh Government and the Project Champion. This appears to have resulted in staff in participating Tranche 2 schools more consistently exhibiting the characteristics which underpin effective partnership working than was perhaps the case in Tranche 1. These characteristics include a shared commitment to the success of the partnership, and a willingness to share practice and learn from each other, both on the part of the Lead Practitioner School and the Emerging Practitioner School (NFER, 2014)<sup>14</sup>.

The second factor which we attribute to the improvement seen between Tranche 1 and 2 is the ‘emotional intelligence’ shown by senior leaders who recognised their own and other people’s emotions and sensibilities, and used this information to guide their thinking and behaviour. This was particularly the case amongst those in the Lead Practitioner Schools and appears to have been a useful characteristic in helping to foster positive working

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<sup>14</sup> The report from NFER’s evaluation of Tranche 1 of the Pathfinder identified a range of characteristics which underpin effective school-to-school partnership working. Additional characteristics included: a willingness among staff to learn from other practitioners coupled with mutual respect for each other; a recognition of the challenges that each school faces; a willingness to be challenged by a ‘critical friend’ and to be prepared to engage in sometimes difficult and challenging discussions; a whole-school commitment that starts at the headteacher level and which operates among senior leadership teams and convinces the staff as a whole.

relationships. This is not to say that such behaviours were not evident amongst senior leaders during Tranche 1 of the Pathfinder, but this was particularly evident in Tranche 2.

Although it is too early to identify the medium- to longer-term impacts on pupils' attainment and achievement, the findings from both the Tranche 1 evaluation and this study suggest the Pathfinder has yielded early and emerging outcomes for Emerging Practitioner Schools and Lead Practitioner Schools that one would expect to see as an intermediate step towards such improvement. For example, the evidence collected indicates that Pathfinder activities have helped to refine schools' approaches to teaching and learning, increased practitioners' confidence to try different approaches and experiment with techniques that they had not used in the past, and improved the way teachers used questioning techniques to delve into learners' understanding of concepts and issues.

In several partnerships it was noted that working with the Lead Practitioner School had led the Emerging Practitioner School to raise their expectations of what learners should be able to do, that learners were becoming more aware of their targets and the kind of work that they should be producing, and that as a result, learners' motivation had improved. All of these changes were related to work to strengthen learners' voices, through formal processes for them to make their views known about their own learning, and other work to nurture their independence and their enjoyment of their work.

The messages from the Pathfinder suggest that school partnerships offer a means by which schools in Wales can be supported to raise standards through:

- i. a focus on teaching and learning; and
- ii. creating an environment in which children and young people can fulfil their potential.

There is evidence from both this report and the evaluation of Tranche 1 to suggest that activities that had resulted in 'structural and procedural changes', such as improvements in teaching and learning, assessment, pupil tracking, school management and professional reflection, are being embedded into practice and should not require ongoing support.

However, this evaluation has found that many teachers believe that effective and lasting change can also require attitudinal and cultural change, and there was more uncertainty amongst interviewees about whether this had taken place to the extent required. As discussed in Chapter 4, other research suggests that more widely distributed patterns of leadership equate with greater potential for organisational change and development, and thus the move amongst some Emerging Practitioner Schools towards a more distributed leadership model could, in time, support further attitudinal and cultural change.

## **5.2 Implications for policy**

### **5.2.1 The Pathfinder has established processes for effective school-to-school working that can and should be built upon**

It is important to remember that as a Pathfinder, the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Project has charted new ground and has trialled and established processes for effective school-to-school working that can and should be built upon as part of future approaches to partnership working in Wales.

It is vital that practitioners, policy-makers and researchers continue to collect evidence of 'what works' in school improvement if we are to better understand and implement effective approaches. In the case of the Tranche 1 and 2 Pathfinder evaluations, a great deal of evidence has been collected and the outcomes presented in various forms, including case studies of where schools have successfully overcome specific challenges. It is important that this body of evidence supports schools on their improvement journeys in at least two ways. First, it should be updated to ensure that it keeps abreast with the latest developments and can signpost practitioners to recent practice. Second, the key task of dissemination needs to be addressed. Information and guidance which is made available needs to be signposted effectively and its relevance made explicit to schools, especially school leaders. Future approaches to school improvement will need to ensure that school leaders not only know what approaches they could take but are supported to understand how published practice examples can be tailored to address their own specific needs.

### **5.2.2 With a growing number of initiatives, care is required that these are coordinated to best support school improvement**

The burgeoning number of new initiatives in Wales<sup>15</sup> should, when taken together, help create the foundations on which to build a world class, self-improving system, but it also presents a challenge for delivering a coordinated strategy for moving the education system forward. School-to-school collaboration is at the heart of these new developments, and schools will have to work in close partnership with their wider clusters and networks, and beyond, to ensure that as many schools as possible are:

- a) part of the design and development process; and
- b) able to benefit from the partnerships and new networks that are created.

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<sup>15</sup> This includes the changes that are likely to come from Successful Futures Professor Graham Donaldson's (2015) independent review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales, and Qualified for Life, the Welsh Government's long-term vision for education for 3-19 year old learners in Wales and particularly strategic objective 4, which promotes leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools (Welsh Government, 2014a). It also includes the New Deal for the Education Workforce (Welsh Government, 2015a) and the recommendations in Professor Furlong's (2015) review of Initial Teacher Training. At the same time, Wales has developed a number of approaches designed to change the ways schools work together, of which the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Pathfinder Project is one, along with Schools Challenge Cymru (Welsh Government, 2014b), and now Pioneer Schools (Welsh Government, 2015b).



### 5.2.3 Schools need to continue to be involved in the design and development of future school improvement strategies

The work which is described in Chapter 2 and analysed in Chapter 3 clearly resonates with much of the current thinking in Wales about the future of the curriculum and professional development arrangements. The decision to give schools the responsibility of creating a new curriculum framework and of driving the professional development that will enable it to be realised, represents an important and exciting opportunity. The lessons learnt and positive outcomes from the Pathfinder should be built upon and further developed to ensure better learning and higher standards for all the children and young people of Wales.

This evaluation has highlighted the benefits of an approach where practitioners were given the opportunity to engage with professional issues. It highlights the impact of doing so on their practice and the way their schools work. As the Curriculum *Pioneer Schools* (Welsh Government, 2015b) take the lead in developing 'A Curriculum for Wales – a Curriculum for Life' (Lewis, 2015), they will be able to build on the experience of those schools. Much can be learned from the work that was undertaken in Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools around pedagogy, especially as it related to areas like the need to tailor provision to meet the needs of learners and to foster independent learners, as well as the related work around the purpose and potential of assessment as a means of supporting teaching and learning.

Even more explicitly, the evaluation offers valuable lessons for the New Deal Pioneer Schools as they place practitioners at the heart of professional learning. One of the key messages for the future is that there is a need to create a systemic means of harnessing the knowledge, expertise and professional capacity of practitioners as 'A Curriculum for Wales – a Curriculum for Life' becomes the basis for schools' work.

## 5.3 Recommendations

The report concludes by presenting six evidence-informed recommendations for the future development of school-to-school partnership working in Wales more widely. These are designed to assist the immediate task facing policy-makers in Wales of responding to the changes that will be required as Wales implements 'A Curriculum for Wales – a Curriculum for Life'. Others are aimed at schools and are designed to support a more joined-up approach to school improvement.

We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- 1. Ensures that there is a coordinated strategy for school improvement based on a tiered approach that responds to the different level of need shown by schools in Wales.** The potential of collaborative partnerships between schools to contribute to such work is already recognised in strategic objective 4 of Qualified for Life and in the National Model for Regional Working. At the same time, it is important that initiatives designed to support school improvement complement and support each other and do not cause initiative overload or duplication. The approach should recognise that every school is on an individual improvement journey.

- 2. Builds on the positive gains made by staff who participated in the Pathfinder by embedding effective professional development activities into continuing professional development opportunities across Wales. In particular, there is a need to ensure that school leaders develop the skills of working with other schools, by looking at leadership requirements and the content of leaders' professional qualifications.** More broadly, this approach could also involve the development of training materials and activities that draw on the experiences of those involved in the Pathfinder, for example in areas such as managing change, teaching and learning, leadership and using data and assessment.
- 3. Facilitates the sharing of the good practice identified in the Pathfinder to ensure that it has maximum impact on schools across Wales.** This could be done by supporting dissemination events in each of the four consortia. These events could include workshops where **senior leaders and teachers from Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools share practice and lessons learned from participating in the Pathfinder.**
- 4. Encourages further school-to-school collaboration as the Pioneer Schools begin the work of reforming the curriculum and professional development arrangements in Wales.** The method of working which developed during the Pathfinder project could be used by Pioneer Schools as they address the task of developing the new curriculum, strengthening professional development, and embedding digital literacy. While the Pioneer Schools need to develop their own approaches, the evaluation shows that there is great scope for school-to-school collaboration as a way of stimulating professional discussion and sharing ideas.

We recommend that schools:

- 5. Ensure their improvement work results in a 'joined-up' approach to school improvement.** Schools should consider the support being received from different sources and draw this together to avoid duplication of effort. Systems for coordinating this activity should be introduced as part of the four-stage 'annual cycle of school improvement', which the Welsh Government believes should be adopted by all schools in order to inform their school development plans.
- 6. Continue to evidence and share the findings from their own research and evaluation activities relating to their school improvement work with other schools.** These findings could be shared through their own school networks as well as through the existing national resource sharing tools such as the 'Hwb' and the Learning Wales websites.

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## Appendix 1: Template for Partnership Plans

### Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Partnership Plan 2013-2014 (PART ONE)

Schools in partnership	HT contact numbers	Plan agreed by

#### 1. LEAD SCHOOL

##### 1.1 Lead School and Emerging School costs against Partnership Grant

LS & ES or other personnel	Time in ES for project	Time in LS for project	Cost up to checkpoint1	Cost up to checkpoint2	Cost up to checkpoint3	Cost up to checkpoint4	TOTAL
<b>TOTAL</b>							

##### 1.2 Existing Lead School Targets

<b>2013</b> 5A*-C inc E/W & M (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2013</b> 5A*-G (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2013</b> E/W A*-C	
<b>2013</b> M A*-C	
<b>Project specific target:</b>	

<b>2014</b> - 5A*-C inc E/W & M (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2014</b> - 5A*-G (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2014</b> - E/W A*-C	
<b>2014</b> - M A*-C	

## EMERGING SCHOOL

### 2.1 ES Partnership Project specific targets (in addition to 2.2.):

<b>ES Partnership Project specific objectives</b>	

### 2.2 Existing Emerging School Targets

<b>2013 5A*-C inc E/W &amp; M</b> (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2013 5A*-G</b> (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2013 E/W A*-C</b>	
<b>2013 M A*-C</b>	

<b>2014 5A*-C inc E/W &amp; M</b> (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2014 5A*-G</b> (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2014 E/W A*-C</b>	
<b>2014 M A*-C</b>	

## 2. CHECKPOINTS

	Date	Date Funding for next period agreed
Plan submitted		
Plan agreed		
Checkpoint Report 1 (by 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2013)		
Checkpoint Report 2 (by 31 December 2013)		
Checkpoint Report 3 (by 31 March 2014)		
Checkpoint Report 4 (by 31 July 2014)		
Checkpoint Report 5 (by 31 December 2014)		

## Lead and Emerging Practitioner Partnership Plan 2013-2014 (PART TWO)

<b>School name(s)</b>	<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>
<b>Consortium</b>		LS = Lead School    ES = Emerging School School
<b>Start date</b>		
<b>End date</b>		

Action	Interim Success Criteria	Led +M in LS/ES	Assisted by? LS/ES	Related external support in ES	When? Complete?	Funding (PP or other) source	Evaluation at Checkpoints (1= <span style="color: red;">red</span> ; 2= <span style="color: green;">green</span> ; 3= <span style="color: blue;">blue</span> ; 4= <span style="color: purple;">purple</span> )
Action	Interim Success Criteria	Led +M in LS/ES	Assisted by? LS/ES	Related external support in ES	When? Complete?	Funding (PP or other) source	Evaluation at Checkpoints (1= <span style="color: red;">red</span> ; 2= <span style="color: green;">green</span> ; 3= <span style="color: blue;">blue</span> ; 4= <span style="color: purple;">purple</span> )

## Appendix 2: Self-evaluation toolkit – illustrative example

	ES Partnership Project specific targets	IMPACTS ON SCHOOL STAFF (INDIVIDUALS OR SMALL GROUPS)					IMPACTS ON WHOLE SCHOOL				
		a) Achieved	b) Evidence collected of impacts on school staff			c) Rating of impacts on school staff	d) Evidence collected of school-wide impacts			e) Rating of school-wide impacts	
		Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box	Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box in column 1. If you have collected more than one type of evidence, please also select from columns 2 and 3.			0 = no impact and 3 = high impact. Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box	Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box in column 1. If you have collected more than one type of evidence, please also select from columns 2 and 3.			0 = no impact and 3 = high impact. Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box	
		1	2	3	Description	1	2	3	Description		
1	0										
2	0										
3	0										
4	0										
5	0										
6	0										
7	0										
8	0										
9	0										
10	0										

Drop down options from:

- Your perceptions/ reflections
- Feedback from colleagues/ line manager
- Changes to resource use/ deployment
- Grading and/ or feedback from lesson observation/ video

Drop down options from:

- Feedback from colleagues
- Changes to school plans/ policies
- Grading and/or feedback from lesson observation/ video
- Other primary evidence (e.g. from action research, surveys, interviews, videos)
- Increased uptake of target subjects pre/post 16
- Improved pupil progress/ achievement
- Changes to resource use/ deployment



IMPACTS ON PUPILS				Evaluation and reflection	
f) Evidence collected of impacts on pupils			g) Rating of impacts on pupils	h) What is working well?	i) What could be improved and how will this be achieved?
<p>Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box in column 1.</p> <p>If you have collected more than one type of evidence, please also select from columns 2 and 3.</p>			<p>0 = no impact and 3 = high impact. Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box</p>		
1	2	3	Description		

Drop down options from:

- Teacher reflection/ observations
- Progress data
- Attainment data
- Other primary evidence (e.g. from action research, Pupil Voice)
- External observation (e.g. SMT, Estyn)
- External inspection feedback (Estyn)
- Changes to resource use/ deployment

## Appendix 3: Case study instruments



Evidence for  
Excellence in  
Education

### Impact evaluation of Tranche II of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project

#### Interview schedule: Headteacher

Interviewee:	
School:	Partner school:
Researcher:	Date:

#### Introduction

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- NFER researchers are hoping to visit all Tranche II schools to ascertain schools' experiences of participating in the Pathfinder project and what they think the impact and outcomes have been to date.
- We are aiming to interview headteachers, other senior leaders and a range of teachers.
- Please note, this is not an audit or assessment of schools. No individuals will be identified in our reports to the Welsh Government, although we will identify partnerships. To ensure the accuracy of our notes, we would like to record the interview. Is this OK?
- The interview should take about 1 hour to complete.
- *Note to interviewer:* please read the Partnership Plan and self-evaluation framework (if available) before the school visit and refer to it in the interview.

<b>BACKGROUND, INCLUDING REASONS FOR TAKING PART</b>	
	<b>1. What were the issues, or needs, underlying the decision to take part in Tranche II of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of support</li> <li>• Types of improvement</li> <li>• Impact on practice</li> </ul> Impact on educational outcomes	<b>2. What did you expect to get out of the Pathfinder project?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N.B. Researcher to check whether priorities have changed from the plan. If they have, explore how and why.</li> </ul>	<b>3. Could you briefly summarise what has been the main focus of your partnership work?</b> <i>Probes: Partnership Plan as a delivery framework – fixed/evolving</i> <i>Practical links – communication, time invested</i> <i>Allocation and use of project funding</i> <i>Extent to which Partnership Plan will help to create new activities or help deliver more of existing provision</i>
<b>PROCESSES</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitability of partner school</li> <li>• Location and proximity</li> <li>• Relevant experience and expertise</li> <li>• Overall effectiveness</li> <li>• What has worked well and why</li> <li>• Challenges</li> <li>• Views on bringing in external support and (where used) how this has been identified?</li> </ul>	<b>4. How effective is your working relationship with your partner school? (Please provide examples)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to ascertain role/ contribution played by different staff</li> </ul>	<b>5. What role have you personally played in your partnership work with the other school? (Please provide examples)</b>
<b>INVOLVEMENT WITH OTHER PROGRAMMES</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinguish between whether schools are giving or receiving support</li> <li>• Other programmes could include 'Schools Challenge Cymru/ Pathways to Success'</li> </ul>	<b>6. Are you receiving support from or delivering support to another school by means of another school improvement programme/initiative? (If yes, please name the programme(s) and provide details)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If yes, what are those additional benefits and how do they come about?</li> <li>• If no, why not?</li> </ul>	<b>7. If yes, does being involved in more than one programme result in additional benefits to you and the school(s) you are working with?</b>

<b>EARLY AND EMERGING IMPACTS OF THE TRANCHE II PATHFINDER</b>	
<p><b>On staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogy/ teaching</li> <li>• Subject knowledge</li> <li>• Leadership expertise</li> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Pupil support</li> <li>• Staff development</li> <li>• New practices</li> <li>• Practice transfer</li> </ul>	<p><b>8. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on staff</u> in your school, including on you personally?</b>  <i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, improvement and impact)</i>  <i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>
<p><b>On the whole school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress in Partnership Plan work</li> <li>• Culture/ethos</li> <li>• Leadership (senior/middle)</li> <li>• Quality of teaching</li> <li>• Quality of learning</li> <li>• Using data to monitor and track pupils' performance</li> <li>• Activities to improve achievement</li> <li>• Study support</li> <li>• Assessment – new types</li> </ul>	<p><b>9. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on the whole school</u>?</b>  <i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, improvement and impact)</i>  <i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>
<p><b>On pupils</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Behaviour</li> <li>• Achievement and attainment</li> <li>• Enthusiasm and engagement</li> <li>• Motivation</li> </ul>	<p><b>10. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on pupils</u>?</b>  <i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, achievement and attainment)</i>  <i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has this been achieved?</li> <li>• Use of NFER self-evaluation tool? Reasons for using/not using.</li> <li>• Barriers/ challenges?</li> </ul>	<p><b>11. [If not already discussed] To what extent have you been able to evaluate the impacts of your school improvement work?</b></p>
<b>OVERALL REFLECTIONS</b>	
<p><b>Overall reflections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other funding or in-kind resources</li> <li>• Internal or external relationships</li> <li>• Other agendas</li> </ul>	<p><b>12. Is there anything that you feel either has enhanced or constrained the impact of your involvement in Tranche II of the Pathfinder project?</b>  <i>Probe: how, if at all, could the Pathfinder project be improved?</i></p>
	<p><b>13. Is there anything else you would like to say about your involvement in Tranche II of the Pathfinder?</b></p>

# Impact evaluation of Tranche II of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project

## Interview schedule: Senior Leadership Team

Number of teachers and roles:	
School:	Partner school:
Researcher:	Date:

### Introduction

- The Welsh Government has commissioned NFER to undertake an independent evaluation of Tranche II of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project. The overarching aim of the evaluation is to provide a mid- and end-point assessment of the effectiveness of the project, and the success with which participating schools have made the intended improvements.
- NFER researchers are hoping to visit all Tranche II schools to ascertain schools' experiences of participating in the Pathfinder project and what they think the impact and outcomes have been to date.
- We are aiming to interview headteachers, other senior leaders and a range of teachers.
- Please note, this is not an audit or assessment of schools. No individuals will be identified in our reports to the Welsh Government, although we will identify partnerships. To ensure the accuracy of our notes, we would like to record the interview. Is this OK?
- The interview should take about 30 minutes to complete.
- *Note to interviewer:* please read the Partnership Plan and self-evaluation framework (if available) before the school visit and refer to it in the interview.

## BACKGROUND, INCLUDING REASONS FOR TAKING PART

	<b>1. What did you expect to get out of the Pathfinder project?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of support</li> <li>• Types of improvement</li> <li>• Impact on practice</li> <li>• Impact on educational outcomes</li> </ul>	

## PROCESSES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitability of partner school</li> <li>• Location and proximity</li> <li>• Relevant experience and expertise</li> <li>• Overall effectiveness</li> <li>• What has worked well and why</li> <li>• Challenges</li> </ul>	<b>2. How effective is your working relationship with your partner school?</b> <i>(Please provide examples)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to ascertain role/ contribution played by different staff</li> </ul>	<b>3. What role have you personally played in your partnership work with the other school?</b> <i>(Please provide examples)</i>

## EARLY AND EMERGING IMPACTS OF THE TRANCHE II PATHFINDER

<p><b>On staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogy/ teaching</li> <li>• Subject knowledge</li> <li>• Leadership expertise</li> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Pupil support</li> <li>• Staff development</li> <li>• New practices</li> <li>• Practice transfer</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on staff</u> in your school, including on you personally?</b></p> <p><i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, improvement and impact)</i></p> <p><i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>
<p><b>On the whole school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress in Partnership Plan work</li> <li>• Culture/ethos</li> <li>• Leadership (senior/middle)</li> <li>• Quality of teaching</li> <li>• Quality of learning</li> <li>• Using data to monitor and track pupils' performance</li> <li>• Activities to improve achievement</li> <li>• Study support</li> <li>• Assessment – new types</li> </ul>	<p><b>5. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on the whole school</u>?</b></p> <p><i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, improvement and impact)</i></p> <p><i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>

<p><b>On pupils</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Behaviour</li> <li>• Achievement and attainment</li> <li>• Enthusiasm and engagement</li> <li>• Motivation</li> </ul>	<p><b>6. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project on pupils?</b>  <i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, achievement and attainment)</i>  <i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>
<p><b>OVERALL REFLECTIONS</b></p>	
<p><b>Overall reflections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other funding or in-kind resources</li> <li>• Internal or external relationships</li> <li>• Other agendas</li> </ul>	<p><b>7. Is there anything that you feel either has enhanced or constrained the impact of your involvement in Tranche II of the Pathfinder project?</b>  <i>Probe: how, if at all, could the Pathfinder project be improved?</i></p>
	<p><b>8. Is there anything else you would like to say about your involvement in Tranche II of the Pathfinder?</b></p>

# Impact evaluation of Tranche II of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project

## Teacher focus group

### Topic guide

Number of teachers and roles/subjects:	
School:	Partner school:
Researcher:	Date:

#### Introduction

- The Welsh Government has commissioned NFER to undertake an independent evaluation of Tranche II of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project. The overarching aim of the evaluation is to provide a mid- and end-point assessment of the effectiveness of the project, and the success with which participating schools have made the intended improvements.
- NFER researchers are hoping to visit all Tranche II schools to ascertain schools' experiences of participating in the Pathfinder project and what they think the impact and outcomes have been to date.
- We are aiming to interview headteachers, other senior leaders and a range of teachers.
- Please note, this is not an audit or assessment of schools. No individuals will be identified in our reports to the Welsh Government, although we will identify partnerships. To ensure the accuracy of our notes, we would like to record the interview. Is this OK?
- The focus group should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.
- *Note to interviewer:* please read the Partnership Plan and self-evaluation framework (if available) before the school visit and refer to it in the interview if relevant.



## Awareness of the Pathfinder

**1. How much do you know about Tranche II of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project your school is participating in which involves a link with a partner school?**  
(Probe: aims of the Pathfinder project why do you think your school decided to be involved?)

## Resources used

**2. What resources have you had access to through the project, and how have they been used?**  
(Probe: staff worked with in the partner school, purpose and usefulness, training received)

**3. What role have you played in the partnership work?**  
(Probe: how well has this worked?)

**4. How, if at all, could the Pathfinder be improved?**  
(Probe: better or different types of support?)

## Early and emerging impacts

**5. How, if at all, has the Pathfinder project impacted on you and your practice as a teacher?**  
(Probe: changes in practice, enhancement of existing knowledge/skills, development of new knowledge/skills)

**6. Have there been any school-wide changes that have been introduced as a result of the Pathfinder?**  
(Probe: changes to policies and processes, ethos and culture, training received)

**7. What impact, if any, do you think the Pathfinder project is having or will have on pupils?**  
(Probe: pupil enthusiasm and engagement, attainment and progression, behaviour)

**8. To what extent do you expect these impacts to be sustained?**  
(Probe: What, if anything, has been put in place to support this?)

## Other comments

**9. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience of being involved in Tranche II of the Pathfinder?**