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Good practice in the humanities

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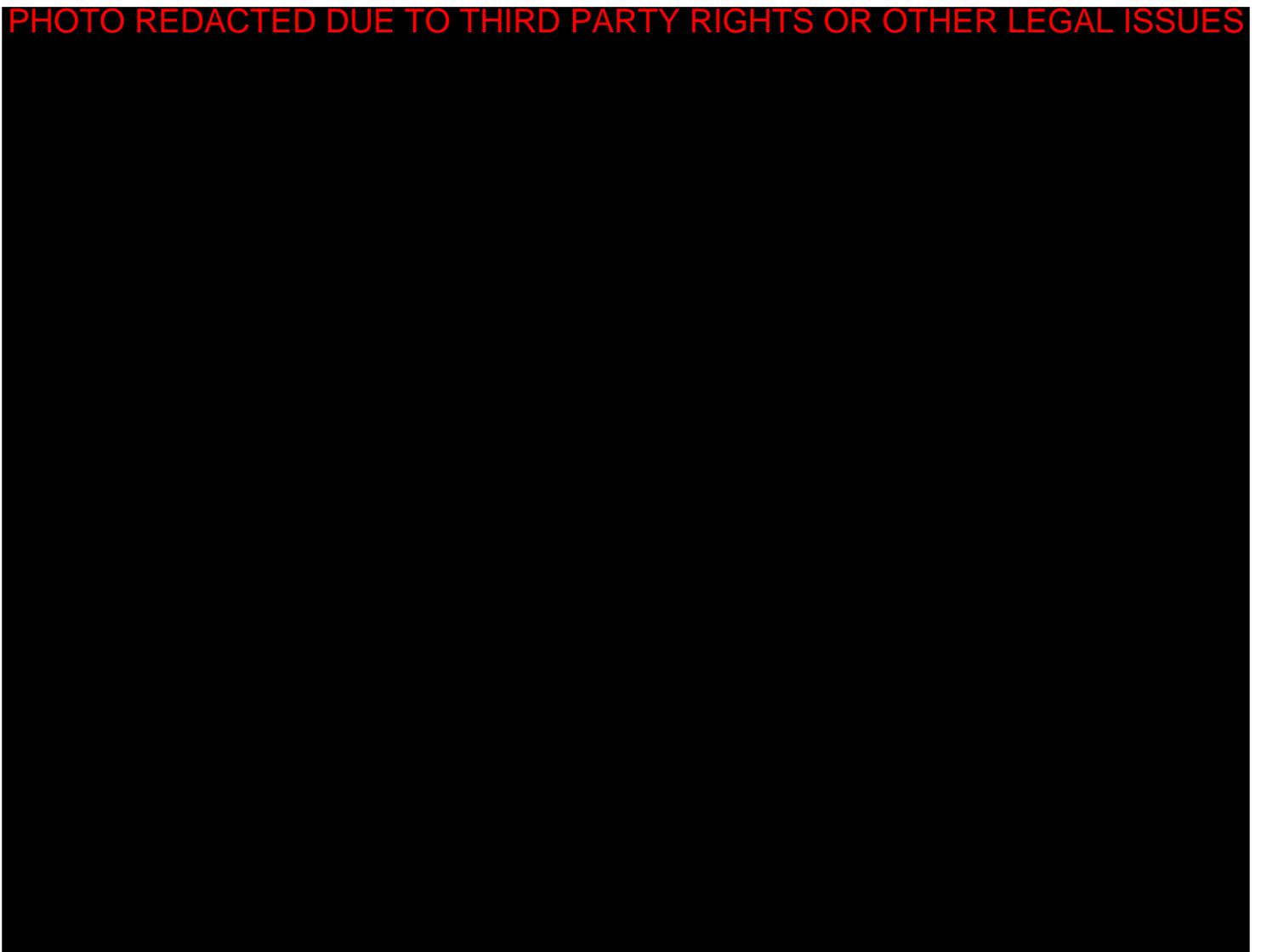
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⚲ independent schools
⚲ further education
⚲ independent specialist colleges
⚲ adult community learning
⚲ local authority education services for children and young people
⚲ teacher education and training
⚲ Welsh for adults
⚲ work-based learning
⚲ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

⚲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
⚲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2016-2017. The report examines standards, provision and leadership of the humanities at key stages 2, 3 and 4 in schools where good practice has been identified.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia. It may be of interest to schools looking to innovate in light of the recommendations made in Successful Futures. The report includes case studies of interesting or innovative practice for schools to consider. These case studies are intended to encourage schools to reflect on their current practice.

The findings of the report are based on an analysis of findings from visits to 19 schools. During the visits, inspectors observed lessons, scrutinised curriculum plans, held discussions with senior and middle leaders, interviewed pupils and scrutinised pupils' work.

For the purpose of this report, the term humanities refers to history and geography.

Background

History and geography are taught in the Foundation Phase in the 'knowledge and understanding of the world' area of learning, are compulsory subjects in the National Curriculum at key stage 2 and key stage 3, and are optional subjects at key stage 4 (Great Britain, 2002). The decision to make the humanities compulsory until the end of key stage 3 shows the importance that is placed on the contribution that these subjects make to a broad and balanced education.

The requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government curriculum guidance documents (2008a, 2008b, 2008c) are that:

'Schools should develop in every learner a sense of personal and cultural identity that is receptive and respectful towards others. Schools should plan across the curriculum to develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, values and attitudes that will enable learners to participate in our multi-ethnic society in Wales. Schools should develop approaches that support the ethnic and cultural identities of all learners and reflect a range of perspectives, to engage learners and prepare them for life as global citizens.' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008b, p. 4)

Since the establishment of the national curriculum, there has been little evaluation of the role of humanities within education. In 2013, a task and finish group chaired by Dr Elin Jones produced a report for the Welsh Government on The Cwricwlwm

Cymreig, history and the story of Wales. The main recommendations about history from the report include:

- A committee of history specialists should be established, to include representatives from every sector of education and relevant organisations such as museums. This committee would be responsible for:
    o promoting co-operation between schools and the sharing of good practice
    o developing benchmarks of good practice in history
    o quality-assuring the resources published on Hwb
    o recommending new resources to be developed
- In the revision of the national curriculum, the programme of study should be structured so as to provide clear guidance on the relationship between local, Welsh, British, European and world history. The aim should be to provide a sound foundation for learners' historical understanding while expanding their horizons.
- Numerous, specific and diverse examples of schemes of work with a focus on local and Welsh history in its wider context should be developed for key stages 2 and 3. Once these have been quality-assured, they should be stored on Hwb and updated regularly.
- A proportion of Welsh history should be an integrated and compulsory part of every history GCSE specification offered in Wales.
- In reviewing the qualifications, consideration should be given to strengthening the element of history in the Welsh Baccalaureate.
- Government-funded heritage organisations should be strongly encouraged to provide easy access for schools to the materials they develop, in both Welsh and English, so they can be used in the classroom setting.
- All such resources should emphasise the provisional nature of history and the diversity of experience in all periods. Where appropriate, it should help learners to contrast and compare the experiences of different groups of people in all periods. (Welsh Government, 2013, page 21)

In March 2014, The Welsh Government asked Professor Graham Donaldson to conduct an Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales. In February 2015, 'Successful Futures' was published. The report states that 'the humanities provides fascinating contexts for children and young people to learn about people, place, time and belief' and 'provides rich opportunities for learning beyond the school walls, for example through exploring the local environment and learning from the experience of people and organisations and businesses in the community.' (Donaldson, 2015, p. 46)

Main findings

Standards

1   In the schools visited, most pupils have a positive attitude towards the humanities and are highly motivated. Pupils enjoy the variety of tasks, the study of current issues, and the opportunity to engage in learning beyond the classroom.

2   At key stage 2, most pupils are independent learners and show resilience when they find tasks difficult. They identify similarities and differences between places and use a range of interesting resources to draw conclusions about places or events.

3   At key stage 3, many pupils are confident in making links between and within humanities topics, for example linking tectonic activity and agriculture. In many lessons, nearly all pupils skim a range of text to extract relevant information. Most pupils share their ideas clearly and justify their opinions.

4   At key stage 4, most pupils demonstrate strong prior learning and can apply this knowledge to a new context. In history, pupils analyse sources perceptively and produce well-structured extended writing. In geography, they develop their understanding of the natural world and our relationship with it.

Provision

5   Across schools, curriculum planning models vary. Primary schools mainly adopt a thematic approach to curriculum planning, while in secondary schools there are a variety of approaches including the thematic approach and traditional teaching of the separate humanities subjects.

6   Planning for progression in humanities from the Foundation Phase to key stage 2 is well developed. However, planning for progression from key stage 2 to key stage 3 is weak. This is because curriculum transition arrangements most frequently focus on the core subjects. At all key stages, humanities teachers plan to ensure the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The planning for the development of pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills is more variable, particularly at key stage 3 and key stage 4.

7   Pupils value the enrichment experiences provided by the humanities, such as fieldwork and educational visits. In the best examples, teachers ensure that pupils have a secure knowledge of their local history and an appreciation of their locality. Pupils make a clear link between these activities and their learning. Most leaders make effective use of the pupil development grant (PDG) to ensure equal access to these opportunities.

8   In highly-effective lessons, teachers plan well to build on prior knowledge and maximise progress. These lessons include a skilful blend of subject knowledge and the development of pupils' skills. Particularly at key stage 2, pupils are frequently involved in the planning for their learning, within and beyond the classroom. Pupils discuss with their teachers the topics they wish to study and teachers plan interesting

lessons that match the interests and respond to the questions pupils raise. Using pupils' enquiries, teachers offer a broad range of enrichment experiences to pupils and parents and pupils choose to complete those activities that interest them. At key stage 4, the strong emphasis on examination technique and outcomes limits the range of learning experiences provided to pupils.

9   Many secondary schools have comprehensive and effective systems in place to track the progress of pupils across the humanities. However, at key stage 2, the tracking of pupil progress across the humanities is underdeveloped. At both key stage 2 and key stage 3, there is very little standardisation and moderation of pupils' humanities work.

Leadership and management

10   In a minority of the schools visited, leaders clearly articulate the guiding principles of their curriculum design. These principles may include links to real-life learning, first-hand experiences and opportunities for investigation and problem solving to create independent, resilient learners. However, the majority of leaders have not articulated, or in some cases considered, the 'core purposes' or 'guiding principles' that are at the heart of their curriculum planning.

11   In the most effective schools, senior leaders understand the importance of the humanities subjects in a broad and balanced curriculum. These senior leaders understand the strong role that the humanities can play in developing pupils' skills within a relevant context.

12   In most primary schools visited, the humanities have not had a high enough priority in whole-school planning. This is mainly due to the strong focus given to improving standards in literacy and numeracy. In the last year, most of the primary schools visited have begun to adapt their curriculum to respond to the recommendations from Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015). In the most recent development plans, the humanities are being reviewed and planned for as one of the six areas of learning.

13   In all primary schools visited, the quality of teaching is monitored closely. However, in only a minority of cases are the strengths and areas for development in humanities teaching well understood. In these schools, information from monitoring activities is used well to share good practice and provide support as necessary. The level of subject expertise in the humanities varies greatly between staff. However, all the schools make strong use of internal staff expertise to ensure that all pupils receive an effective learning experience in their humanities lessons.

14   In many of the secondary schools visited, self-evaluation and improvement planning in the humanities subjects is strong. In these schools, self-evaluation processes have identified clearly the impact of curriculum changes on the quality of provision and outcomes. However, in a minority of schools, the evaluation of changes to the curriculum is underdeveloped.

15   In nearly all the secondary schools visited, leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the teaching of humanities. In a few departments there is a lack of sharing of good practice and in a very few there is inconsistency in the quality of teaching. In a few of the secondary schools visited,

non-subject specialists teach the humanities, especially at key stage 3. In the best practice, there are appropriate support systems in place to ensure that all staff teaching outside their have specialist area receive appropriate support.

16   During initial teacher training, primary teachers receive limited guidance in the teaching of humanities. In secondary schools, opportunities for extending teachers' professional development in the humanities, other than courses related to examinations, are limited. There is a lack of subject-specific support from many local authorities and regional consortia.

Summary of the characteristics of good practice in the humanities

- Leaders understand and support the place of humanities in a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Teachers skilfully blend the development of subject knowledge and pupil skills. They develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills within a relevant context.
- Teachers use a wide variety of stimulating, relevant and current resources in their lessons.
- Teachers make effective use of the school locality.
- Pupils enjoy the wide variety of activities teachers provide and the opportunity to learn outside the classroom.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1 Ensure a balance between the development of pupils' skills and of their knowledge and understanding of subject content

R2 Ensure that pupils' learning experiences in the humanities are wide-ranging, interesting, progressive and challenging, particularly at key stage 4

R3 Monitor the progress that pupils make in the humanities more closely

R4 Evaluate the curriculum for the humanities to prepare for the development and implementation of the new area of learning and experience

R5 Establish local networks of good practice to share resources and expertise, including making greater use of the schools' locality

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R6 Provide better professional learning opportunities for teachers of the humanities

R7 Provide more support for schools to evaluate their curriculum and to plan for the development of the humanities area of learning and experience

The Welsh Government should:

R8 Ensure that initial teacher education courses provide new teachers including primary teachers with the necessary skills to teach the humanities successfully and to respond to the new Curriculum for Wales

Standards

17   At all key stages, most pupils in the schools visited have a very positive attitude towards their studies in humanities. Pupils enjoy the variety of tasks, the study of current issues and the opportunity to engage in learning beyond the classroom. A very few pupils are not fully engaged with their learning, remaining passive, particularly during question and answer sessions.

Key stage 2

18   At key stage 2, the standards in history and geography are very similar. In the lessons observed, a majority of pupils make strong progress and a minority make exceptional progress. In the schools visited, nearly all pupils, show strong levels of engagement, with many being highly motivated. Most pupils show resilience when they find tasks difficult and are highly independent learners.

19   When studying historical topics most pupils use a range of sources effectively to draw conclusions, for example about life during Tudor times. Many pupils have a clear understanding of bias and can distinguish between primary and secondary sources of evidence accurately and understand why their validity may differ.

20   When studying geographical topics pupils often compare a contrasting locality with Wales. Nearly all pupils identify similarities and differences between places accurately. Many pupils can skim and scan text well to extract information, for example when explaining why people chose to live near volcanoes.

21   Nearly all pupils write to the same standard in humanities lessons as they do in discrete language lessons. They are able to use their knowledge of appropriate genres to present their work successfully. Most pupils write accurately showing a good grasp of spelling and grammar. They use a sophisticated range of vocabulary well, including subject specific language. Most pupils show good listening skills and make strong oral contributions to class discussions. Most pupils use subject specific terminology accurately, for example when explaining the water cycle.

22   Most pupils can successfully apply their numeracy skills in the context of humanities topics. This is most frequently seen in geographical topics, for example using a scale to calculate the distance from Cardiff to other European cities or calculating the most cost-efficient type of renewable energy. Many pupils have well-developed ICT skills, working collaboratively on documents, recording presentations and independently compiling databases and spreadsheets.

23   Most pupils use their thinking skills creatively when faced with a new challenge or rationally when asked to interpret pictorial evidence. Many pupils co-operate very well with their peers to solve problems effectively.

24   At key stage 2, there is no nationally held data for the outcomes of pupils in history and geography. This lack of parity in accountability between core and non-core subjects may impact on the importance leaders place on the provision for and monitoring of the humanities.

Key stage 3

25   At key stage 3, in the schools visited, there are many common features in the standards achieved by pupils in both history and geography. Around half of pupils make strong progress, while a minority make exceptional progress. In many lessons, nearly all pupils show high levels of motivation and a positive attitude towards their work. These pupils work well independently and are resilient when faced with challenging tasks. Most pupils show pride in their work, which is well presented and well organised.

26   In many lessons, nearly all pupils show strong reading skills, for example skimming text to evaluate different methods of protecting communities from earthquakes. Most pupils participate effectively in discussions. They share clearly their ideas and justify their opinions, using subject-specific terminology, for example when discussing political conflict in Russia.

27   In many lessons, nearly all pupils select, combine and summarise information from a range of sources. Many pupils are confident when writing at length. These pupils independently structure their writing well, for example when explaining how and why World War 1 ended. Many pupils write well-balanced pieces of work expressing and justifying their views clearly and show a good understanding of other viewpoints. These pupils write strong pieces of evaluative writing, for example when making judgements about General Haig's leadership of the Battle of the Somme. Many pupils demonstrate strong numeracy skills in their humanities lessons. The analysis and interpretation of graphical data in geography are a particular strength.

28   Many pupils in both history and geography are confident in making links between and within topics, such as understanding the link between tectonic activity and the use of areas for agriculture and tourism, and making links between Nazi beliefs on both education and role of women in society during that period of history.

29   A few pupils make limited progress as they spend too long on low-level tasks such as cutting out statements and sticking in sheets. A very few pupils do not structure their work well enough and make more spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors than would be expected for their age and ability. These pupils do not maintain the same standards of presentation and organisation in their humanities books as seen in their other subjects.

30   At key stage 3, in teacher assessments in 2016 most pupils achieve the expected level 5 or above. There is little difference in the outcomes between history and geography. Appendix 1 provides more detail about teacher assessments in geography and history.

Key stage 4

31   In the schools visited, around half of pupils make excellent progress, while a minority made strong progress. In many lessons, most pupils demonstrate strong prior learning and are able to apply this knowledge successfully to a new context. Many pupils make strong oral contributions that are perceptive and thoughtful. These pupils make effective, articulate contributions to class discussions and make strong use of subject specific vocabulary. Many pupils work effectively in groups to support each other's learning

32   In many lessons, nearly all pupils show strong reading skills, for example when using inference to understand the purpose of Nazi propaganda. Most pupils produce well-structured pieces of high-quality extended writing. They write clearly using a broad range of subject vocabulary and their technical accuracy is good.

33   In history, many pupils confidently undertake sophisticated analyses of a range of sources. A majority of pupils analyse sources perceptively, including considering the reliability and usefulness of information. However, a few pupils copy evidence from sources rather than summarising the information provided. As seen at key stage 3 the analysis of data in geography is a strength. For example, pupils are able to plot, describe and explain the movement of pebbles along a beach to illustrate the concept of longshore drift. However, in a very few lessons, a minority of pupils are not confident in handling data.

34   As seen at key stage 3, pupils continue to develop their understanding of links between topics and start to make these connections independently.

Examination outcomes at key stage 4

35   At key stage 4, history and geography are optional subjects. A very few pupils take a combined humanities GCSE, around 0.4% of the cohort. A few schools report reduced contact time at key stage 4 of around 20%. History is the most popular of the humanities, accounting for around 4% of total GCSE entries in 2016. In the last three years, geography has seen a 13% fall in entries and history an 11% fall. However, the percentage of the cohort taking these subjects has remained broadly similar over the last three years, with around 29% taking geography and 34% taking history.

Figure 1: The number of entries for GCSE geography, history and humanities in Wales, 2014-2016 [1]

Year	Number of entries			Percentage of cohort[1]		
	Geography	History	Humanities	Geography	History	Humanities
2014	10,677	12,221	119	30.4%	34.8%	0.3%
2015	9,857	11,667	146	29.0%	34.3%	0.4%
2016	9,289	10,820	150	28.8%	33.6%	0.5%

[1] **In 2016, this is all pupils in Year 11, excluding those from independent schools. In previous years, this is all 15-year-olds.**

Source: Welsh Government, 2016a

36   There is little difference in the overall performance of pupils at GCSE in history or geography. However, the proportion of pupils gaining the A*-A grade is highest in history at around 29% and lowest in humanities at around 12%. The percentage of pupils achieving the highest grade has remained at a similar level in the three subjects for the last three years.

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[1] Welsh Government GCSE entry figures for 2017 were not available at the time of publication. However, initial data on entries for 2017 from JCQ indicates that there has been a further drop in GCSE entries for history, geography and humanities (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2017).

Figure 2: The percentages of pupils achieving different grades at GCSE geography, history and humanities, in Wales, 2014-2016

Entries:	10,677	9,857	9,289	12,221	11,667	10,820	119	146	150
Subject:		Geography			History			Humanities	
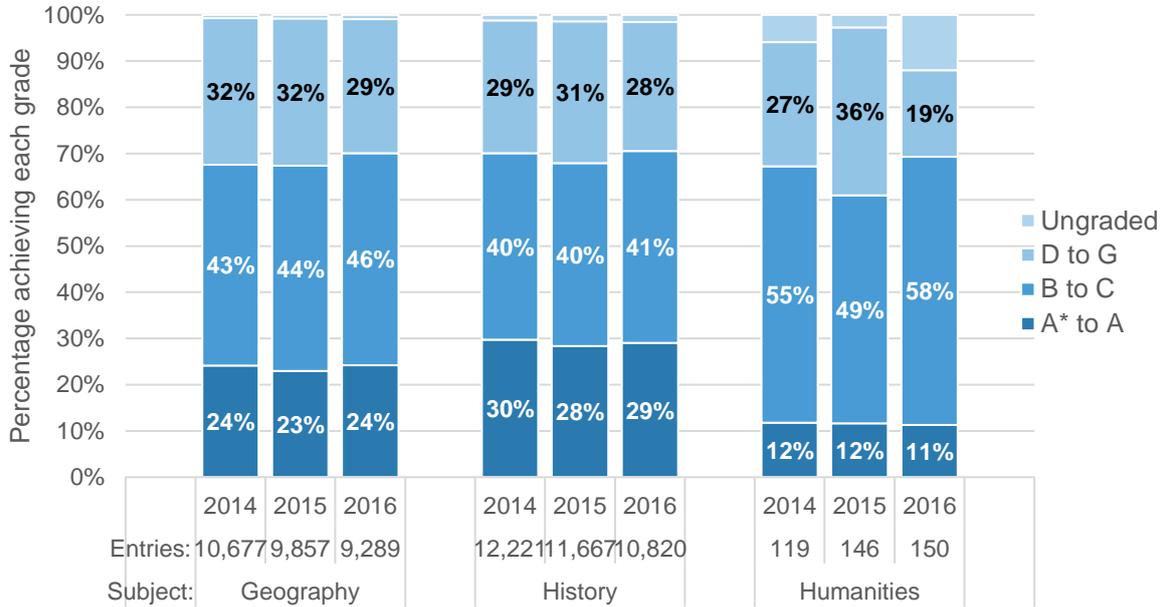
Source Welsh Government, 2016a

37   In geography GCSE, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C has increased slightly from 67.6% in 2014 to 69.4% in 2016.

Figure 3: The number of geography GCSE entries and the percentage of those entries achieving an A*-C grade by gender in Wales, 2014-2016
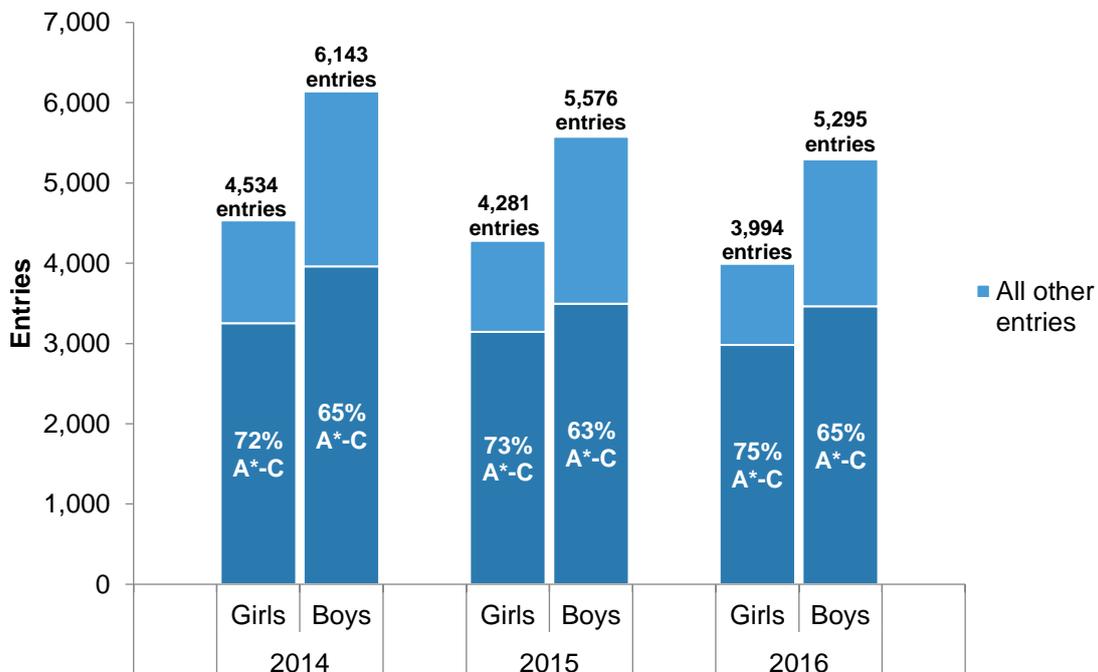
Source: Welsh Government, 2016b

38   In history GCSE, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C has remained steady at 70.1% in 2014 to 70.0% in 2016.

10

Figure 4: The number of history GCSE entries and the percentage of those entries achieving an A*-C grade by gender in Wales, 2014-2016
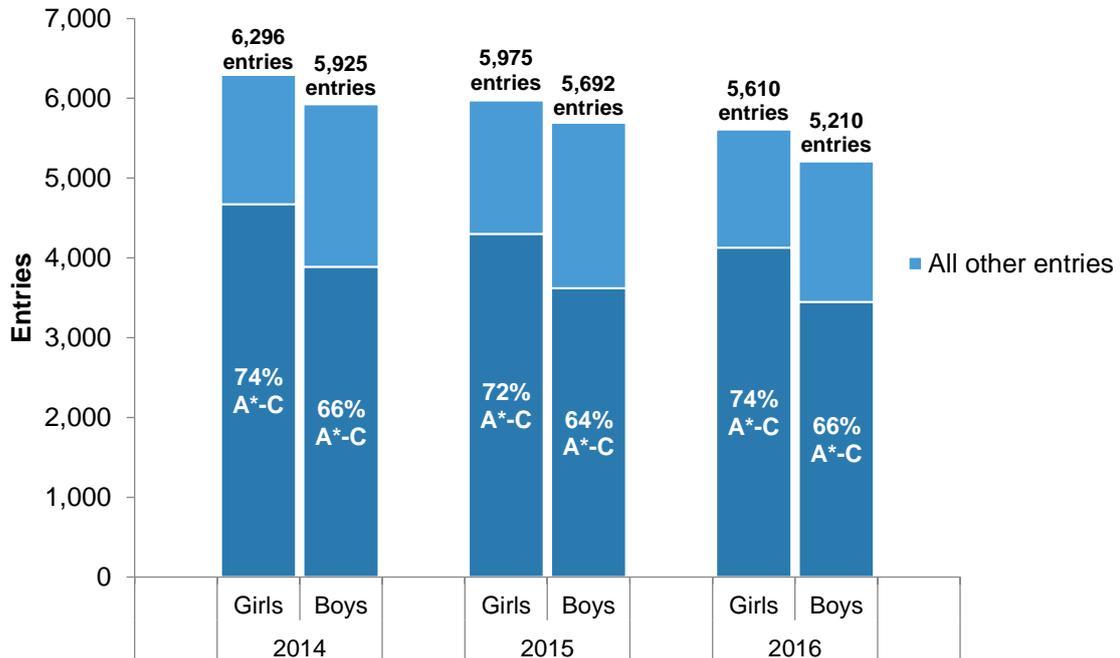
Source: Welsh Government, 2016b

39   At key stage 4, humanities GCSE has a very low number of entries, ranging from 119 in 2014 to 150 in 2016. In 2016, 69.3% of pupils achieved A*-C.

Figure 5: The number of humanities GCSE entries and the percentage of those entries achieving an A*-C grade by gender in Wales, 2014-2016
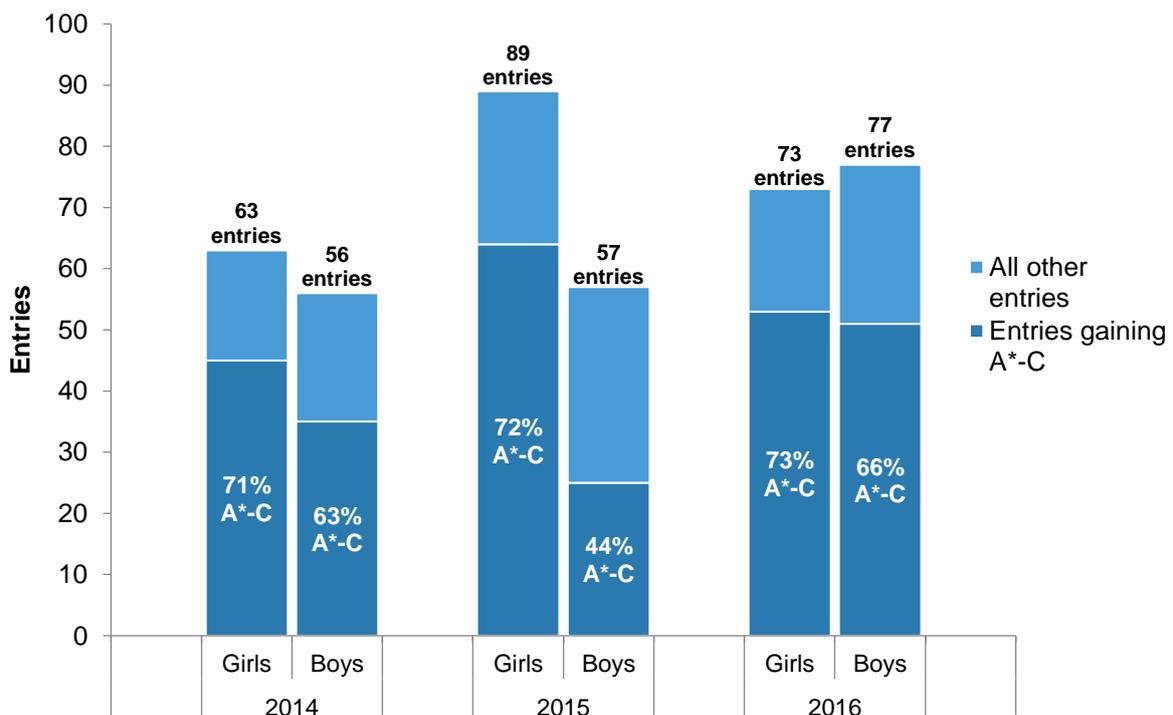

Source: Welsh Government, 2016b

40	In general, more girls than boys enter GCSE history and humanities, but geography has a greater number of entries from boys.

41	Girls' performance is better than that of boys in all humanities subjects at GCSE. Boys' levels of achievement are very similar across the three subjects.

Figure 6: The percentage of humanities GCSE entries that achieve an A*-C grade in comparison with the percentage of entries in the core subjects in Wales, 2014-2016

	Number of entries			Percentage achieving A*-C		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
History	12,221	11,667	10,820	70%	68%	70%
Geography	10,677	9,857	9,289	68%	67%	69%
Humanities	119	146	150	67%	61%	69%
English Language	33,460	32,342	31,116	64%	66%	65%
Mathematics	36,151	34,871	33,301	65%	67%	69%
Welsh	5,548	5,452	5,285	73%	74%	74%

Source: Welsh Government, 2016a

42	In 2016, the percentage of girls achieving A*-C in history or geography is above the percentage achieving these grades in English language and mathematics, and below the percentage achieving Welsh language. Boys' performance in history and geography at A*-C in the same year is above that in English language, similar to that in Welsh, but below that in mathematics.

43	Pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as other pupils. The gap in performance in history and geography has remained similar at around 26%, for the last three years. The gap in performance between those pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and non-eFSM pupils in history and geography is smaller than in English, Welsh and mathematics.

Figure 7: The percentage of GCSE entries that achieve an A*-C grade, by the entrants' free-school-meal eligibility, 2014-2016

Year	Subject	Pupils eligible for FSM		Pupils not eligible for FSM		Gap (percentage points)
		Entries[1]	Percentage achieving A*-C	Entries[1]	Percentage achieving A*-C	
	History	1,112	46%	10,781	72%	-26
	Geography	887	43%	9,344	69%	-26
	Humanities	11	55%	108	69%	-14
	English Language	4,877	38%	27,741	69%	-30
	Mathematics	4,895	38%	27,792	69%	-31
	Welsh	428	48%	5,109	75%	-27
	History	1,038	47%	10,309	69%	-23
	Geography	825	43%	8,653	69%	-26
	Humanities	18	28%	128	66%	-38
	English Language	4,737	42%	26,867	70%	-28
	Mathematics	4,763	42%	26,938	71%	-29
	Welsh	431	51%	5,012	76%	-25
	History	1,085	47%	9,715	73%	-26
	Geography	883	47%	8,398	72%	-25
	Humanities	28	39%	122	76%	-37
	English Language	4,584	43%	26,155	70%	-27
	Mathematics	4,617	46%	26,217	74%	-28
	Welsh	413	50%	4,839	77%	-26

[1]Entries based on 15-year-olds in 2014 and 2015 and on Year 11 pupils on 2016.

Source: Welsh Government 2016a

Provision

Curriculum planning and planning for progression

Key stage 2

44　In many primary schools visited, leaders adopt a thematic approach to the delivery of humanities. Across these schools, there is variation in the breadth and depth to which themes are covered. This ranges from the in-depth study of two to three themes a year or looking at six themes across a year. In a few schools, geography and history are taught as discrete subjects. Each of these approaches to curriculum planning has the potential to achieve strong pupil outcomes when well supported by leaders and implemented well with high-quality teaching.

> **Examples of curriculum planning in primary schools:**
>
> School A chose to cover the same topics, at different levels from early years through to Year 6. The topics included: time travellers; faraway island; fighting fit; icicles and igloos; and jungle life.
>
> School B chose to vary the topics by year group. Year 3 in this school study: going berserkers, crafty Celts, in the freezer, disappearing footprints, growing up and looking for clues.
>
> In school C, pupils study the Celts, Romans, Tudors and Stuarts and the Victorians in history and rivers, coasts, sustainability, contrasting localities and local issues in geography.

45　In the best examples at key stage 2, curriculum planning ensures a balance between both subject content and the development of pupils' skills. This is especially successful where the approach to curriculum planning is a whole-school philosophy that has been embedded over a period of time and is well understood by all staff.

> **Rhiwbeina Primary has a well-embedded thematic approach to curriculum planning, making highly effective use of the locality**
>
> **Information about the school**
>
> Rhiwbeina Primary School is in the north of Cardiff. There are 710 pupils on roll. The school has 22 classes. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals and 10.3% have additional learning needs. Around 14% of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds and 6% speak English as an additional language.
>
> **Context and background to the practice**
>
> Over an extended period, staff have developed and continually refined a whole-school thematic approach to their delivery of the curriculum.

This approach is based on the philosophy that pupils should receive a broad and creative curriculum that develops skills (subject and cross-curricular), knowledge and understanding, and a passion in pupils to become lifelong learners.

The curriculum is structured around themes and pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are developed within the context of these themes. Planning for the development of thinking skills is very effective through carefully thought out activities and opportunities. For example, Year 4 pupils work out how to defend and attack a castle and then design a castle that will keep 'even the meanest enemies' out. This strategy has helped to promote the importance of thinking skills and developed pupils' high-level thinking across a range of curriculum areas.

Description of activity/strategy

Teachers plan together six topics a year. Examples include themes such as, For King and Country, Coast, Tomb Raiders and The Coal House. This approach to planning provides variety to the learning experience of pupils.

Leaders ensure that all staff engage in professional learning. Staff are given time to work collaboratively to discuss research and develop bespoke resources to support the curriculum. For example, in creating the 'Coal House' topic, co-ordinators visited a Welsh mining community, accessed parish and census data, interviewed residents and visited graveyards and a local museum to gather interesting and relevant resources to ensure that the topic continues to be real and relevant to pupils.

Pupils are heavily involved in planning and developing what they 'want to know'. Pupils and parents/carers are aware of how activities undertaken outside of school contribute to their knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils explore with their family places of relevance to the class topic, for example Table Mountain iron age fort at Crickhowell, Bryn Glas battlefield, Laugharne Castle and Pembrokeshire National Park. This enables pupils to make stronger connections between activities and often ensures that pupils are well-motivated learners.

As part of curriculum planning, strong use is made of learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Examples include experiencing the plight of evacuees through sustained role-play and taking a train journey to a local church hall to be billeted. In character as billeting parents, members of the local community who have personally experienced evacuation replicate their experiences by choosing pupils as their evacuee. These interesting opportunities create authentic experiences and pupils become more engaged with their learning.

Impact on provision and standards

The school's consistent, well-understood and personalised approach to curriculum planning engages pupils and creates highly motivated, independent learners. The pace of learning and the breadth of planned experiences ensure that learners are highly literate and numerate and have

very good standards of digital competence while at the same time having an understanding of key concepts in history and geography. Pupils and staff have high expectations, take pride in their work and enjoy their learning experiences.

46   Where high-quality curriculum planning is seen, pupils are fully involved in planning their learning. The planning for open-ended tasks allows all pupils, especially the more able, to extend their knowledge and understanding well. This is often seen when the activities form part of pupils learning beyond the school day. Homework activities may be voluntary or pupils may choose an activity from a wide range of options, developing them as independent learners.

47   In a minority of schools, the approach to curriculum planning has led to an imbalance between the development of pupils' skills and subject knowledge. A strong focus on the development of literacy and numeracy is at the expense of the development of humanities subject knowledge. This approach can lead to a few pupils, particularly the more able, becoming disengaged as the activities may be repetitive or are not based in a context to make the activity relevant to the pupil.

Key stage 3

48   At key stage 3, leaders are taking a range of approaches to the delivery of the humanities curriculum. These include development blocks (these allow pupils to apply their subject-based skills to a cross-curricular thematic project), integrated humanities, teaching through themes, and discrete history and geography lessons. As in key stage 2, each of these approaches to curriculum planning has the potential to achieve strong pupil outcomes when well supported by leaders and implemented well by teachers.

Examples of curriculum planning in secondary schools:

School A delivers 'development blocks' five times a year, focusing on the development of skills alongside the teaching of discreet history and geography lessons.

School B delivers integrated humanities in Year 7, with the starting point of 'big questions'. They plan to extend this approach to Year 8 next year.

A few schools have introduced humanities into Year 7 and are considering whether to extend the approach to Year 8 after evaluation. These schools feel that in Year 9 the humanities subjects should be taught discreetly in preparation for GCSE.

Bishop Gore School has taken a personalised approach to learning, by completely redesigning the key stage 3 curriculum model

The case study below was published following the school inspection.

Development blocks allow pupils to apply subject-based skills to cross-curricular thematic projects, enabling them to develop wider problem-solving skills and work with others. As a result of this approach, end of key stage levels and feedback from tests have shown significant improvement.

Information about the school

Bishop Gore School is an English medium 11 to 18 comprehensive school situated in the Sketty area of Swansea. There are 1,002 pupils on roll, including 112 in the sixth form, with around 26% of pupils eligible for free school meals, and 38% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Around 23% of pupils have a special educational need, including 4% with a statement of special educational needs. Twelve per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language.

Context and background to the practice

The school's comprehensive intake requires a highly personalised approach to learning at all levels and, while the option choice system allows pupils to tailor their learning packages at key stages 4 and 5, the need to be able to do this at key stage 3 was identified as an important area for development. More importantly, it was felt that learning, which was being undertaken through the 'traditional' subject structure, was not portable, often remaining within the subject in which it was taught. Two main reasons were identified for this. Firstly, in many cases, pupils were not having the opportunity to apply their acquired skills knowledge and understanding. Secondly, there were a great number of pupils who, despite being given the opportunity to synthesise their learning, did not have the skills to be able to so.

In order to accommodate the learning needs of pupils and to provide appropriate and challenging opportunities for skills development and application, it was decided to redesign the key stage 3 curriculum model completely.

Description of activity/strategy

The new curriculum structure was divided into 'Learning Blocks' and 'Development Blocks'. Learning blocks focus on subject specific-based skills delivered through curriculum areas. Development blocks allow pupils to apply their subject-based skills to a cross-curricular, thematic project.

Learning clusters are responsible for designing, delivering and assessing each development block, with the skills from the lead cluster providing the focus for the theme of the activities. One such learning block involves the

pupils in planning an Antarctic expedition and is led by STEM cluster of subjects. Each pupil is provided with a 'challenge menu' comprising a series of tasks that they can choose to complete, with each task being given a points value, reflecting the complexity of the activity.

Tasks all have a literacy, numeracy and ICT focus as well as reflecting the subject specific skills relevant to the lead cluster. Activities are designed to allow pupils to develop the wider key skills of problem solving, improving own learning and performance and working with others.

During the development block, teachers and support staff act as facilitators for the learning that is undertaken, supporting pupils as they progress through their action plan. In addition, pupils can choose to attend workshops that target literacy, numeracy, ICT or subject specific skills. Pupils who attend the workshops are expected to cascade their learning to others within their group.

All pupil work is assessed and feedback given to pupils and parents and carers in the form of a report. This provides pupils with an accurate statement of the skills covered and achieved and areas for further development. The report also allows both formative and summative reporting on the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

Impact on provision and standards

The impact on provision and standards has been marked. In terms of subject-specific skills, pupils have been able to access higher levels as the design of the development block units encourages autonomous learning where pupils are placed at the centre of decision-making, allowing a highly differentiated approach.

End of key stage levels and feedback from literacy and numeracy tests have all shown a significant improvement, with a large number of pupils moving on to key stage 4 study early.

Pupil attendance during development blocks has improved by between one and three percentage points.

Estyn judged that the key stage 3 curriculum is an effective and imaginative vehicle for the delivery of key stage 3 subjects and skills development. All elements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework are well embedded into lesson planning and in the development blocks. These provide pupils with interesting and engaging opportunities to develop their learning and skills within real life situations.

49   In the best examples of curriculum planning, schemes of work set out progression in knowledge and skills. For example, there is effective integration of skills from the Literacy and Numeracy Framework within the context of humanities topics. In these plans, learning outcomes and assessment opportunities are clearly identified and teachers review plans regularly.

50   In most schools visited, pupils are taught in mixed-ability groups in key stage 3. Where planning is highly effective, pupil voice has a strong influence on what is taught, and how lessons are delivered, ensuring that the needs of all pupils are met and avoiding the repetition of topics.

Key stage 4

51   In all schools visited, the humanities subjects are taught as discrete history or geography lessons. The requirements of the examination board strongly influence the rationale for curriculum planning and lesson delivery at key stage 4. Teachers focus on the skills required for pupils to achieve good outcomes at GCSE. This limits the range of learning opportunities provided to pupils. These skills and the knowledge required do not always build progressively on the knowledge and skills taught at key stage 3.

52   The largest impact on pupil outcomes is the quality of teaching and leadership within the school and not the method of curriculum delivery. Pupil outcomes are strongest where leaders have a clear vision for the place of humanities in the curriculum and have communicated this aim clearly and consistently to their staff. Teachers then support this vision by planning engaging lessons and experiences that develop both pupils' skills and knowledge within rich, relevant contexts.

Planning for progression

53   In the primary schools visited, there is clear planning for progression from Foundation Phase to key stage 2. In around half of schools, this planning has improved recently as groups of staff collaborate across all phases of the school to plan humanities teaching and learning together.

54   There is variation across the primary schools visited in the depth of planning for the progression in skills and subject knowledge. A minority of primary schools give greater prominence to the development of literacy and numeracy skills than to specific subject knowledge and skills.

55   In most schools visited, there is little planning for progression from key stage 2 to key stage 3. There is limited knowledge of the work that pupils have completed in humanities during key stage 2 and therefore planning for progression is weak. This results in pupils repeating work at a similar level in topics such as map skills, rivers and the Victorians.

56   In all secondary school visited, there is limited planning for progression or continuity from key stage 3 to key stage 4. Planning at key stage 4 is solely in response to the requirements of GCSE examinations and the skills and knowledge required do not usually build upon that taught at key stage 3.

Development of literacy, numeracy and digital competency

57   In most schools visited, the humanities play a significant role in developing both pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The development of pupils' ICT skills is more variable. This is because the planning for the development of ICT across the curriculum has generally lagged behind the planning for literacy and numeracy.

58   In the schools where pupils achieve well in the humanities, teachers plan skilfully for the development of literacy, numeracy and ICT within the context of humanities topics.

Elfed High School: the effective integration of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework into the humanities curriculum area

Information about the school

Elfed High School is an English-medium 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive school serving the town of Buckley. There are currently 665 pupils on roll. 15.9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Thirty-three per cent of pupils are on the school's special educational needs register and 3.1% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

Context and background to the practice

The school recognised the need for a coherent approach to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy that is genuinely cross-curricular. A structured programme of training and support for teachers in literacy and numeracy began in the September of 2013 and subject teams identified areas of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) that they could best deliver.

For literacy, all subjects created carefully differentiated subject-specific writing frames for a range of extended writing tasks, quality assured by the literacy co-ordinator. The literacy co-ordinator and head of English delivered whole-school training on the writing elements of the LNF, including a cross-curricular assessment of pupils' work against the skills identified in the 'Writing Accurately' aspect. The 'writing progress sheet' used to support the planning and reflection on writing skills rolled-out successfully across the curriculum in January 2014. The sheet shows the logical progression in writing skills that pupils need to deploy to improve. This also develops pupils' understanding of the LNF, which more consistently supports meaningful and productive self-assessment of technical accuracy.

Staff received continuous training on the procedural aspects of the LNF. Initial sessions kept to basic number skills, with staff evaluating their own learning and asking the mathematics department to provide specific training. Following the successful implementation of procedural aspects of the LNF, staff were then given training on reasoning tasks and developing thinking skills.

Description of activity/strategy

Action – literacy in humanities

In humanities, staff identified a writing task for each year group and a clear and logical process of planning was undertaken. Pupils have a cover sheet, which highlights appropriate writing targets for the type of writing being completed. They are given a writing frame appropriate to their working level and, when completed, their work is self-assessed and peer assessed against the targets set. Teachers provide both subject-specific feedback and feedback on literacy.

Action – numeracy in humanities

There has been an eclectic approach to numeracy in humanities with a variety of different tasks and lesson plans around developing numeracy skills. Teachers began by producing starter sheets for each topic, which tested pupils' procedural understanding. Learning has been enhanced by the use of numeracy in a range of interesting ways. For example, when studying the Battle of the Somme, pupils weigh water bottles to replicate the weight of a soldier's backpack.

Impact on provision and standards

Pupils of all abilities make very good progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and thinking skills as they move through the school. In lessons, many pupils make strong progress, recall prior knowledge well and apply this knowledge skilfully to develop their understanding of new situations. Many pupils show resilience, set themselves appropriate targets and understand the next steps needed to improve their work.

59   In the best examples, the humanities make a strong contribution to the development of pupils' reading skills and in developing the quality and range of pupils' extended writing.

Cefn Hengoed uses the humanities to develop pupils' extended writing

Information about the school

Cefn Hengoed Community School is an 11-16 school in Swansea with 720 pupils on roll. Sixty per cent of its pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales and over three years the school has averaged 41% of its pupils eligible for free school meals. Thirty-seven per cent of its pupils have special education needs and 5% have a statement. The school has a local authority Specialist Teaching Facility for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and these pupils are included on the school roll.

Context and background to the practice

The need to 'improve pupils' writing skills to match the high standards they achieve in reading' was identified in the school's 2015 Estyn inspection. As a result, the school conducted an initial audit of provision that led to the implementation of a strategic approach to improving extended writing across the school. A pilot group of staff and pupils was formed. They focused on improving extended writing in English, science, humanities and creative studies using the eight 'writing behaviours'. The use of the writing behaviours to improve extended writing followed the successful implementation of the eight reading behaviours, which saw the percentage of pupils with reading ages six months or more below their chronological age on entry decrease from 72% in 2011 to 53% in 2015. Meetings of the pilot group ensured a more collaborative and cohesive approach to improving the standard of extended writing.

Description of activity/strategy

- Staff adapted schemes of learning to reflect the identification of extended writing tasks (EWTs). Training and support was provided to each of the subjects in the pilot group to aid the adaptation of existing tasks or development of new tasks.
- Regular, relevant subject-specific opportunities in each of the subjects in the pilot groups give learners opportunity to develop the quality of their extended writing. Each EWT is labelled in pupils' exercise books and taught through the writing behaviours.
- Findings from a work scrutiny by ERW were reviewed and shared with staff during INSET and further training was provided to the whole-school on the use of the writing behaviours. Good practice in the teaching of extended writing from across the pilot group was shared with all staff.
- A further work scrutiny allowed the progress made in extended writing to be monitored and findings were shared with the pilot group.
- Calendared lesson and book monitoring by senior and middle leaders, with the themed focus of developing extended writing, a rigorous focus on consistent whole school lesson planning and highly developed systems for monitoring pupils' progress, has underpinned the development of extended writing.
- Work to improve extended writing is ongoing and training and support provided to key staff. The consistent approach by staff is building pupils' confidence in writing extended responses. Greater autonomy for staff has been given in the planning, executing and revision of pupils' extended writing.

Impact on provision and standards

- The teaching of extended writing through the writing behaviours has ensured a consistent approach across the pilot group.
- Consistently high-quality teaching of extended writing enables pupils to make very good progress based on their attainment prior to entry to the school.
- Pupils are better equipped to use the skills required in the key stage 3 curriculum and the demands of new GCSE specifications at key stage 4, especially in English and humanities subjects.

60   Overall, the development of literacy is seen more strongly in history and the development of numeracy is stronger in geography. This is because teachers are preparing their pupils for the main skill that will be required if they continue to study these discreet subjects at A level and in higher education. At these levels, pupils studying history require strong literacy skills and those studying geography need both well-developed numeracy and literacy skills.

61   In primary schools, many pupils show well-developed ICT skills. There are clearly identified opportunities to develop these skills throughout teachers' planning. However, in around half of secondary schools visited, the planning for ICT development within the humanities is at an early stage.

Development of the Welsh dimension and the international perspective

62   The development of pupils' appreciation and understanding of the Welsh dimension and the place of Wales in the world is a strong feature in most schools visited.

63   In the primary schools visited, teachers ensure that, where appropriate within humanities topics, direct links are made for pupils with their local area, for example producing a performance about the history of the local slate industry, assuming the roles of residents of Llandaff in 1605 or visiting local historical sites.

Ysgol Gynradd Llanllechid: developing pupils' understanding of their local Welsh history

Information about the school

Ysgol Gynradd Llanllechid is located on the outskirts of the village of Rachub near the town of Bethesda, in Gwynedd. There are 273 pupils aged between three and eleven years on roll, including 31 part time nursery age pupils. Welsh is the main medium of the school's life and work.

Many pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Approximately 11% are eligible for free school meals. The school has identified 17% of pupils as having additional learning needs, including a very few who have a statement of special educational needs.

Context and background to the practice

Central to the school vision is that fact that teachers take every opportunity to ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to meet and work with members of the local community, both in the school grounds and beyond.

By working this way, pupils access a range of enrichment experiences and benefit from the knowledge, understanding, skills and expertise of community members. In addition, pupils develop subject specific skills, including interpreting historical events, locating places, organising investigations, interviewing and recording in real-life contexts. Pupils are given various opportunities to scrutinise different sources of evidence, for example from local historians and in the records office.

Pupils create scripts based on what they have discovered and present plays, which are based on their research. By doing so, pupils cascade information and teach each other about their history and heritage. Projects include Robat Jôs Gwich, William Ellis Williams and Tyddyn Canol.

Description of activity/strategy

As part of pupils' research, a 'Quarry Stuff and Stories night' was held at the school in co-operation with Côr Meibion Penrhyn. Members of the community were invited to the school to discuss the following:

- life at home and in the quarry
- place names and their significance
- sayings and nicknames

- traditions and customs
- socialising and leisure

Pupils organised the evening diligently and recorded the local residents recounting their tales. Some of the stories that were collected were used to create a telephone app that will be used by walkers who ramble along the public footpaths in the area.

Impact on provision and standards

- Pupils develop a strong understanding of their local history.
- Pupils respond very creatively to humanities tasks, including the use of poetry and art.
- Older pupils' oral skills are of a very high standard and this is well supported by these humanities activities.
- Pupils' use of investigative, literacy, numeracy and digital competency skills is particularly well developed.
- This approach to learning creates inquisitive, creative and enthusiastic pupils who take responsibility for their learning.

64   In most secondary schools where good practice is seen, the humanities subjects make appropriate links with Welsh history or geography. In history, this may include a study of the local area, learning about significant national events such as the Aberfan disaster or local issues such as the World War 1 soldiers of Buckley. In geography, pupils are encouraged to explore local issues, for example flooding in Towyn and Rhyl.

65   In a few schools, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of their local area. This is either due to a lack of awareness of the opportunities that the local area can offer, or because teachers use examples found in textbooks that are often not relevant to pupils, rather than developing their own examples using the local context.

66   The development of the international perspective is strong in most schools visited. Excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their understanding of different cultures and develop their knowledge of different parts of the world. Both history and geography provide pupils with valuable opportunities to develop an international perspective on global issues. Schools value the international links facilitated by organisations such as Erasmus and the British Council.

67   At key stage 4, the development of both the Welsh dimension and the international perspective is not exploited fully. Teachers focus solely on the specific requirements of the examinations. As a result, teachers do not always relate pupils' learning to a local context where possible or try to broaden pupils' understanding and experience by relating issues to a more global context.

Enrichment and experiences

68   In most primary schools visited, the use of the local area, local community and enrichment experiences beyond the school is extremely effective. This is a particularly strong feature of the thematic approach seen in many schools.

> **Using your locality**
>
> After realising that they were not making enough use of the school locality and local community staff in one school identified over 20 possible enrichment opportunities for pupils in the local area.

69   In around half of secondary schools, opportunities for enrichment are widely used to good effect. This has a highly positive impact on pupil engagement as seen by improvements in attendance during these activities. In these schools, teachers make good use of external visitors or links with the local area and community, for example linking with the botanical gardens or visiting a local wind farm when studying about sustainability.

> **Garnteg Primary School benefits from working with the local history society**
>
> **Information about the school**
>
> Garnteg Primary School is in the village of Garndiffaith near the town of Pontypool. The area has an industrial heritage and is rich in local history, being in close proximity to a world heritage site in the nearby town of Blaenavon. Around 40% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is higher than the average for Wales (21%).
>
> **Context and background to the practice**
>
> The school identified the need to provide pupils with first-hand experiences of history within the local area, using both primary and secondary sources. This included the school developing effective links and projects with the local history society.
>
> **Description of activity/strategy**
>
> Initially the links started with members of the local history society visiting the school and talking to Year 6 pupils about World War 2 and the impact it had within the locality. The school and history society then secured community funding for a joint project, which involved members delivering a World War 2 day at the local community centre. The day involved pupils participating in first hand activities such as dressing up in fashion from the time, examining artefacts, talking to members of the community and having a 'World War 2 lunch' – an event that has carried on to this day. As a result, links with the history society have continued to extend over the years, with other projects taking place, such as writing competitions.

Impact on provision and standards

The benefits to pupils of these first-hand experiences have been significant. Pupils feel that history has been 'brought alive' and can identify how the locality has affected by historical events. Pupils have a purpose for their writing and have pride in taking part in community projects.

70   In schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, leaders make effective use of the pupil development grant to ensure equal access to enrichment opportunities for all pupils. Learning experiences in the humanities frequently help to develop pupils' social and emotional skills and develop their confidence and resilience as independent learners. These attributes help pupils eligible for free school meals to achieve well.

71   Nearly all pupils highly value enrichment experiences and make a link between these activities and their learning in the humanities. These experiences also contribute towards developing stronger links between schools and their local community.

School Community Links: a view from the history society

Community links with Garnteg School began around 1999. A teacher approached one of the governors, who was a member of the local history society, to see if there was anyone in the group who could come to the school and tell the pupils what it was like to live in the area during World War 2. This has been an annual event at Garnteg Primary School every year since.

The pupils learn about bombing raids, the prone position and how to be an air raid warden, and wear helmets and gas masks, and the local history group fund an annual writing competition on the subject, 'World War 2 – The Home Front', with prizes for the most successful entries.

In 2000, the local history group researched a World War 2 Blenheim Bomber crash on a local mountain and laid a monument to the three crew members killed there. The monument was dedicated at a ceremony attended by military organisations, the relatives of the crew, local dignitaries, religious representatives, and pupils from Garnteg primary. Every year the pupils from Garnteg School conduct a remembrance ceremony and lay a wreath at the monument, showing both respect and understanding of an aspect of their local history. The relatives of the crew finance a writing competition for the pupils about the crash similar to the World War 2 Home Front example. Afterwards they walk down to the mountain gate, where the local history group have chips and curry sauce sent up for them to eat with their packed lunches. Although this might not accord with the school's Healthy Eating policy, the walk of over six miles up steep climbs ameliorates any negative affects!

More recently, these links with the community have grown with, for example, strong links with the local older persons lunch club, where intergenerational projects take place, and links with the local Baptist Church.

The school's local community is proud of these links and benefit in many ways. Garnteg School's willingness to interact with the community has shown there are mutual benefits for any school that has the initiative to interact with its community, particularly for schools described as being in deprived areas.

Teaching and assessment

72   In the lessons with highly effective teaching, teachers plan activities that build well upon prior learning and are sequenced to maximise individual pupil progress. The approach to teaching is often one of facilitator, encouraging learners to think for themselves in order to develop their confidence, independence and resilience. In a very few lessons there is too much direct teaching and, as a result, pupils do not develop independent learning skills.

73   Effective humanities teaching is characterised by high expectations and challenging activities. Teachers use engaging resources that can be accessed by pupils of all abilities. There is frequently a brisk pace to lessons and teachers set objectives that are well understood by all. In a very few lessons, pupils are given low-level tasks to complete such as cutting out phrases and sticking them into their books, and progression is not planned for well enough.

74   The most successful lessons include learning a skilful blend of both subject knowledge and skills. These teachers understand the importance of the development of pupils' skills within the rich context of humanities subject content. This gives pupils a relevant context in which to develop their skills and also develops pupils' ability to see connections between themes.

Ysgol Gynradd Cae Top uses a consistent and well-understood pedagogy for planning lessons

Information about the school

Ysgol Gynradd Cae Top, is situated in Bangor, Gwynedd. It provides education for pupils between three and eleven years old. There are 234 pupils on roll, including 28 nursery-age children. Approximately 10% of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Around 25% of pupils are from ethnic minority or mixed backgrounds and speak 16 different languages. Twenty-four per cent of pupils are learning English as an additional language. Welsh is the school's everyday language and the main medium of teaching and learning. Ten per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 24% are on the school's additional learning needs register. A very few have a statement of special educational needs.

Context and background to the practice

A consistent pedagogy is used to deliver each theme taught at the school:

1 **Stimulus:** provide practical experience and undertake work such as going on educational visits, questioning and receiving presentations from visitors or parents, reading information books and using ICT. There is an emphasis on developing thinking skills.

2 **Formal lessons:** to ensure that pupils have sound subject knowledge and skills, in addition to literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

3 **Offer a challenge to pupils:** where they need to use knowledge and understanding from initial experiences and apply subject and cross-curricular skills from more formal lessons.

4 **Pupils present their work:** with an emphasis on applying ICT skills.

Description of activity/strategy – how this approach is applied to a geography theme

In a series of lessons on natural disasters, pupils are engaged firstly by watching a variety of video clips, reading newspaper reports, and listening to a presentation from a flood expert and stories from parents about disasters that they have faced around the world.

Following the initial stimulus, there is a series of lessons on locating disasters by using map skills and gathering information about specific disasters. Pupils' understanding of the cause and effect of disasters on the local and wider population is developed by using thinking strategies such as a 'fishbone diagram'. The de Bono hats approach to thinking is used to consider the effect of the disaster on different groups of people and how the effect could be reduced in the future. There are specific lessons on developing literacy skills so that pupils develop a rich vocabulary that enables them to write a report, a newspaper article, a diary and a scientific explanation.

A challenge is set for pupils to apply their subject knowledge and understanding, in addition to their cross-curricular skills, by creating a news programme about a disaster of their choice in mixed-ability groups. After writing their scripts, a green screen is used to change the background and place them in the middle of the disaster. Pupils create websites in their groups and share them with the rest of the class to receive feedback.

Impact on provision and standards

There has been a very positive effect on pupils' standards of attainment, participation and engagement. Pupils exhibit strong subject knowledge, in addition to developing good cross-curricular skills.

75 Many teachers use their strong subject knowledge to challenge and develop pupils' thinking through probing questioning, allowing them time to develop their responses. However, in a few lessons, questioning is not probing enough. Teachers rely on closed questions and finish or develop pupil responses, rather than allowing pupils time to do this for themselves.

76 Humanities teachers frequently make effective use of contemporary issues, and make highly effective use of the local area and promote valuable experiential learning, including visitors to the school or school trips. For example, in geography lessons, teachers respond to natural disasters and, in history, teachers develop pupils' understanding of recent political events.

77   In highly effective lessons, pupils are involved in the planning of their learning, including the range of activities planned in lessons and in learning beyond the classroom. A few schools make good use of pupil voice or learning logs, where pupils decide which activities to complete outside of the classroom, developing them as independent learners.

78   Teachers that ensure good progress have an extremely detailed understanding of pupils' strengths and areas for improvement. They closely monitor their pupils, enabling them to address misconceptions swiftly. Effective, constructive and diagnostic feedback given to pupils enables them to improve their work, and suitable time is provided for this improvement to take place, supporting strong progress. Feedback is most effective when it relates to both subject knowledge and skills development as appropriate. In a few examples, teachers focus on the skill development of pupils, while failing to correct inaccurate subject knowledge.

Feedback to pupils

A primary school supported staff in giving feedback that requires a response from pupils.

Examples include:

If you were ……. what would you have done in his/her situation?

How would you have felt if you were in this situation?

If you met …, what would you ask him/ her?

How do you think people feel living in …

What country would you chose to live in and why?

Find out how much it would cost to travel to …

79   In primary schools, only a few teachers track the progress of pupils in the humanities. In these schools, teachers are aware of the strengths and areas for development for individual pupils. In secondary schools, the tracking of pupil progress at individual subject level is more developed and teachers have a better understanding of pupils' ability in individual subjects and what they need to do to improve.

80   In a very few lessons at key stage 4, the strong emphasis on examination technique and outcomes limits the range of learning experiences provided to pupils. The narrow focus on specific knowledge or skills to answer examination questions means that a minority of pupils are then unable to apply their knowledge or skills to a different context.

Successful Futures – A Curriculum For Wales

81 While nearly all schools are aware of the recommendations made in Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015), the response at school level is variable, with the most impact seen in the primary schools visited and in Year 7 and Year 8 in a few secondary schools. Many secondary school leaders are reluctant to make significant changes to the curriculum until they understand the relationship between the recommendations in Successful Futures and qualifications at the end of key stage 4. However, in nearly all schools visited the focus of any change is upon subject content and method of delivery. There is limited consideration of the four core purposes of the curriculum and how they should influence curriculum planning and provision.

82 Most leaders in the primary schools visited have responded to Successful Futures in their improvement planning. Plans include either adapting an existing thematic approach or moving towards a more integrated curriculum where the school had traditionally taught humanities as discrete subjects. In the secondary schools visited, a few leaders are trialling a thematic or integrated approach to the teaching of humanities in Year 7 and Year 8. However, all schools retain the traditional teaching of separate subjects in Year 9 in preparation for GCSE examinations.

Leadership and management

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83   In a minority of the schools visited, leaders clearly articulate the guiding principles of their curriculum design. These principles may include links to real-life learning, first-hand experiences and opportunities for investigation and problem solving to create independent, resilient learners. However, the majority of leaders have not considered the 'core purposes' or 'guiding principles' that are at the heart of their curriculum planning. Instead, curriculum planning is dominated by examinations and influenced by current performance measures, especially at key stage 4.

84   Where leaders give high status to the humanities, they understand the importance of these subjects in a broad and balanced curriculum. These senior leaders understand the strong role that the humanities can play in developing pupils' skills within a relevant context.

85   In schools where leaders understand and value the contribution of the humanities to pupil experiences and enrichment, they provide useful support to staff and pupils to enhance the curriculum with opportunities beyond the classroom. The most effective leaders make very good use of the pupil development grant to ensure equal access to activities such as fieldwork and educational visits for all pupils.

Primary schools

86   In most primary schools visited, the humanities have not been a focus in whole-school development planning for at least the last three years. All schools visited, both pioneer and partnership schools, have recently started to adapt their curriculum to respond to the recommendations from Successful Futures. In the most recent development plans, the humanities are being reviewed and planned for as one of the six areas of learning.

87   In the primary schools visited, the quality of teaching is monitored effectively. However, the quality of humanities teaching is explicitly evaluated in only a minority of schools. In these schools, leaders analyse the strengths and areas for development in humanities teaching, including reviewing the quality of lessons and pupil feedback. Information from monitoring activities is used well to share good practice and provide support as necessary.

88   In a majority of schools visited, teachers monitor the progress of pupils within the humanities subjects. However, there is variability in the use made of this information. A few schools only use the data for reporting purposes at the end of the year. In the best examples, teachers have a strong understanding of the progress made by individual pupils and groups of learners in the humanities and alter their planning to reflect the needs of pupils.

A headteacher's perspective – St Thomas Community School: enrichment and experiences

St Thomas Community School is a primary school in Swansea. There are 353 pupils aged three to eleven years on roll. Around 35% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is higher than the average for Wales.

'My primary school is at the museum'

"As a primary headteacher, many people come to you with wide ranging opportunities which may or may not be of benefit to the school and its pupils. I was intrigued but not quite prepared when my visitor suggested 'We would like to move some of the school to Swansea Waterfront Museum'.

"As the meeting developed, I listened to the clear vision and well-thought out arguments for the action research project being undertaken with Kings College, London, and the concept seemed to make sense. After all, when you think back to the distant memories of your days in school, what do you remember? Is it the day-to-day lessons or does a particular class visit or experience invoke memories of your younger self?

"By the end of that initial meeting, we had agreed that our two reception classes would spend five weeks each at Swansea Waterfront Museum and the enormity of what I had actually signed up to dawned on me!

"However, part of my philosophy as a leader is that you have to occasionally take calculated risks, otherwise how will you ever grow playing it safe all the time? If it did not work, then we would not do it again. It was as simple as that.

"It is fair to say that some staff had reservations but I knew they would all do their best to make it work. Parents were also incredibly supportive. We held a parents' meeting, aiming to convince them that this potentially would be a great opportunity for their child and the result was that three of them signed up as volunteers! Safeguarding and risk assessments had to be carefully considered, as the children would be mixing with the public.

"So was the outcome worth the effort? Quite simply, yes it was. To see the children so enthused when I visited them, telling me about the many things they had learnt. They clearly gained confidence over the five weeks and developed their ability to interact with others appropriately. We also observed increased levels of enjoyment in learning, improved oracy skills and, in some cases, higher attendance.

"I truly believe the potential for learning in such an environment is huge. Who wouldn't want to be able to easily access historical artefacts to make local history come alive? I am pleased to say we continue to work closely with Swansea Waterfront Museum and our two new reception classes this year will be visiting the museum for a sustained period."

89   In primary schools, the level of subject expertise in the humanities varies greatly between staff. However, all schools make strong use of internal expertise to ensure all pupils receive an effective learning experience in their humanities lessons. Primary teachers new to the profession have received limited guidance during their initial training in the teaching of humanities subjects, when compared to lessons focusing on strategies to develop literacy and numeracy. In all primary schools visited, staff report a lack of specific subject support provided by their local authority or regional consortia and a lack of availability of humanities-related training opportunities.

Secondary schools

90   In many secondary schools visited, the humanities have played a role in curriculum developments at key stage 3 in the past three years. This includes having a central role in the establishment of development blocks or having a key role in the development of pupils' extended writing. In most examples, the focus for these developments is the contribution that humanities make to the development of pupils' skills, rather than a focus on the rich content of these subjects. In a minority of secondary schools, humanities have only featured in more recent planning as leaders respond to the current curriculum review.

91   In many secondary schools visited, self-evaluation and improvement planning at departmental level is strong. This includes regular lesson observations, responding to the views of pupils and work scrutiny focusing closely on standards and progress and the impact of teaching. This comprehensive approach to departmental reviews has a clear impact on the quality of provision. However, in a minority of secondary schools where there is a lack of detailed planning, leaders do not evaluate the impact of changes they are making well enough. Plans have no clear milestones and success criteria, which makes monitoring progress difficult.

Evaluating curriculum changes

In one school, senior leaders allocated staff specific responsibilities in line with the areas of learning and experiences in Successful Futures. Staff worked across phases to plan new themes to be taught across the school.

After teaching a new theme, book scrutiny revealed that specific subject skills had not been covered in enough depth or detail.

Staff INSET was provided to give time to adapt planning to identify subject specific skills and ensure continuity and progression.

92   In many secondary schools visited, leaders have comprehensive and effective systems to track the progress of pupils across the humanities. In these schools, there are robust systems to moderate and standardise pupils' work at both key stage 3 and key stage 4 to ensure consistency. In a minority of schools, plans to moderate and track pupil progress in newly developed humanities courses are underdeveloped.

93   In nearly all schools visited, leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching across the humanities and most have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. In many of the schools visited, the humanities departments are fully staffed by subject specialists. In these schools, teachers have a wide range of opportunities to share best practice within their schools and have strong links with other schools. In a majority of schools, non-subject specialists teach pupils humanities, especially at key stage 3. In the few schools that develop best practice, there are appropriate support systems in place to ensure that this does not affect pupil standards. In a few departments there is a lack of sharing of good practice within humanities, and in a very few there is inconsistency in the quality of teaching.

94   As in the primary phase, there is a lack of subject-specific support for secondary teachers and schools from many local authorities or regional consortia. Professional development opportunities for humanities teachers are focused mainly on training provided by the examination board.

Appendix 1: Teacher assessments at key stage 3

95   At key stage 3, in teacher assessments in 2017, most pupils achieve the expected level 5 or above. There is little difference in the outcomes between history and geography.

96   In both geography and history at key stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above in teacher assessments has increased slightly over the last three years from 90% in 2015 to 92% in 2017. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in both subjects have shown increases since 2015, with just under a quarter of pupils achieving level 7 or above in 2017.

97   In both geography and history over the last three years, a higher percentage of girls than boys achieved at least the expected level 5. In 2017, the outcomes at key stage 3 in history and geography at the expected level 5 are slightly below those in Welsh and slightly above those in English and mathematics.

Figure 8: The percentage of pupils achieving levels 5, 6 and 7+ in Wales, in geography and history, based on teacher assessments at the end of key stage 3, 2015-2017
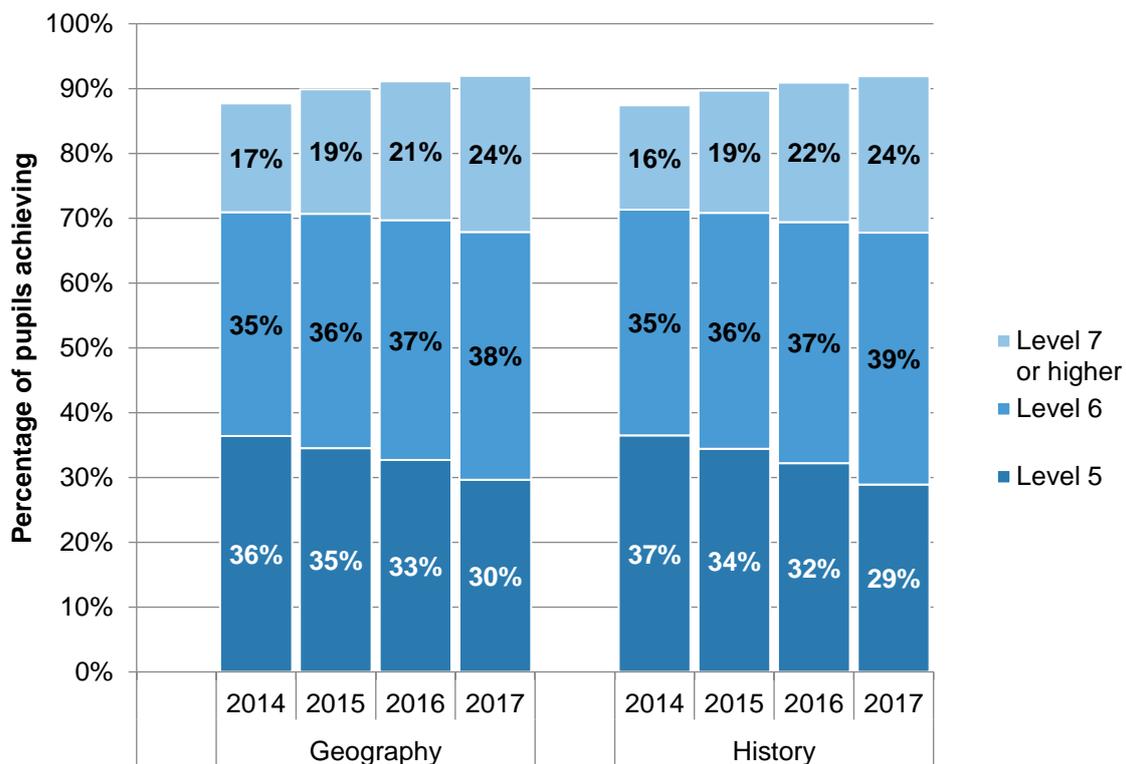
Source: Welsh Government (2017a)

Figure 9: The percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected level in key stage 3 assessments in the humanities in comparison with the core subject indicator (CSI), English, Welsh and mathematics in Wales, 2015-2017

	Percentage of pupils achieving expected level		
	2015	2016	2017
Geography	90%	91%	92%
History	90%	91%	92%
CSI	84%	86%	87%
English	88%	89%	90%
Welsh	91%	92%	94%
Mathematics	89%	90%	91%

Source: Welsh Government (2017a, 2017b)

Appendix 2: Questions for schools to consider as part of their self-evaluation

As a starting point for reviewing current practice in the humanities, schools can use the following questions as part of their self-evaluation:

Standards

1   Do leaders and teachers know the standards that pupils are achieving in the humanities at all stages across the school?

2   Have we analysed the performance of different groups of learners carefully and over time? What messages does this analysis give and are we acting on findings robustly?

3   Do we have high expectations of all learners, including the more able?

4   Do we have an understanding of what pupils enjoy or dislike about humanities lessons? Are pupils involved in what and how they learn? Do pupils lead their learning?

Provision

5   Do we ensure continuity and progression from one key stage to the next and ensure that there is no repetition?

6   Do we have detailed plans to develop pupils' subject knowledge, understanding and skills in the humanities?

7   Do we use the humanities as an effective context to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy, ICT and thinking skills?

8   Are teachers encouraged to be innovative in their planning? For example:

   - do teachers relate pupils' learning to their local context whenever possible?
   - are the topics taught and examples used relevant to pupils and current?
   - is teaching responsive and flexible? Do teachers respond to local, national or global issues, for example a new housing development or the building of a new by-pass, national elections or a natural disaster?
   - do pupils have opportunities to develop their work or ideas for a real-life context, developing the value of their work?
   - do teachers use technology creatively to support learning, for example virtual fieldtrips?

9   Do teachers broaden pupils' understanding and experience by widening their experiences to include an international dimension where relevant?

10 Do we offer our pupils engaging and relevant enrichment experiences related to the humanities, making effective use of the local community? For example:

- links with local societies, art galleries and museums
- visits from local residents to share experiences of the locality across the generations

Leadership

11 Do we have a clear rationale for the way we plan and deliver our humanities curriculum?

12 Have we evaluated our current curriculum to plan for developing the new area of learning and experience?

13 Are we aware of the quality of teaching in the humanities and do we provide suitable professional learning opportunities to staff or opportunities for staff to collaborate with others?

14 Do we use our pupil development grant funding effectively to ensure equality of access to educational visits and fieldtrips?

Appendix 3: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on visits to 19 schools. The schools selected for visits had been identified as having innovative practice in curriculum design and/or strong outcomes in the humanities. When visiting these schools inspectors:

- observed humanities lessons at key stages 2, 3 or 4
- held discussions with middle and senior leaders
- met groups of pupils with their work
- reviewed curriculum plans and school documentation

List of schools visited

Bishop Gore School, Swansea
Cefn Hengoed Community School, Swansea
Crickhowell High School, Powys
Dolau County Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Eirias High School, Conwy
Elfed High School, Flintshire
Garnteg Primary School, Torfaen
Llangatwg Community School, Neath Port Talbot
Pencoed Comprehensive School, Bridgend
Pontarddulais Comprehensive School, Swansea
Rhiwbeina Primary School, Cardiff
St Thomas Community Primary School, Swansea
Ynystawe Primary School, Swansea
Ysgol Cae Top, Gwynedd
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin, Camarthenshire
Ysgol Gymraeg Ifor Hael, Newport
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Lon Las, Swansea
Ysgol Gynradd Llanllechid, Gwynedd
Ysgol Iolo Morganwg, Vale of Glamorgan

Glossary

Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF)	This is a skills framework developed by the Welsh Government. It became statutory in schools from September 2013. It is designed to help teachers embed literacy and numeracy into all subject areas.
Partnership schools	Those schools working alongside pioneer schools to respond to the recommendations from Successful Futures
Pioneer schools	Schools that are currently working with the Welsh Government and other schools to develop and pilot a new curriculum for Wales
Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig	This is a part of the curriculum that is unique to Wales. It is intended to develop pupils' sense of cultural identity, place and heritage.

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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