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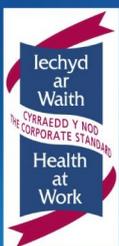
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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Transition plans and grant

An evaluation of the impact of
transition plans and grant on primary
and secondary school partnerships
at key stage 2 and key stage 3



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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Introduction

- 1 This report for the Welsh Assembly Government evaluates how well local authorities and school clusters work together to improve continuity and progression in learning for pupils moving from key stage 2 in primary schools to key stage 3 in secondary schools. A school cluster consists of the primary schools and the secondary school to which their pupils transfer at age 11 to continue their education. This report follows from the report produced by Estyn in 2008 ([The Impact of Transition Plans](#)), which evaluated the initial impact of transition plans and their use by schools.

Transition plans

- 2 In 2006, the Assembly Government issued statutory regulations and requirements for transition plans in the National Assembly for Wales [Circular 30/2006: 'Guidance on the Preparation of Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 Transition Plans'](#). This Circular provides detailed guidance to schools and local authorities on the statutory requirements for transition plans and good practice in improving transition for learners when they transfer to secondary school.
- 3 Transition plans are the means by which secondary schools and their partner primary schools formalise their arrangements to work together more closely on curriculum, learning and assessment in order to improve transition for learners. The plans have been in place since September 2007 and applied to the first cohort moving from Year 6 to Year 7 in September 2008.
- 4 To support the development of transition plans, the Welsh Assembly Government has made resources available through the Better Schools Fund to improve continuity and progression between key stage 2 and key stage 3.
- 5 Estyn, in its 2008 report on the impact of transition plans, judged that, overall, the first set of three-year plans met the requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government, but the quality of the plans varied significantly. The best plans were an integral part of the school improvement agenda and included measurable outcomes for learners. Other plans focused too much on processes and not enough on measurable outcomes.

Transition grant

- 6 The transition grant was introduced by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2006 to complement and support the development of transition plans. The grant was provided under Section 14 of the Education Act 2002, and made available to local authorities in 2006-2007, and the following two financial years, to develop innovative and sustainable models of good practice for all schools to adopt in the transition of pupils from key stage 2 to key stage 3.
- 7 Estyn's 2008 report states that there is a *'lack of clarity and transparency about the funding available to schools for transition activities'*. Some local authorities have asked schools to bid for transition grant money for innovative projects. Others have

distributed the grant to clusters of schools to implement transition plans. Only a few local authorities have well-developed policies and practices for improving transition.

- 8 [Guidance on Welsh Assembly Government Key Stages 2-3 Transition Grant: Circular 31/2006](#), provides guidance on the criteria for the use of the grant. The terms of the grant require local authorities to evaluate the outcomes of each project, and their evaluations have informed this report.
- 9 This report considers the extent to which local authorities have used the grant effectively to work with schools on the transition process.

The report evidence base

- 10 The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:
 - Estyn school inspection reports from September 2008 to July 2009;
 - analysis of pupil attainment on progress from key stage 2 to key stage 3;
 - interviews with officers responsible for school improvement in five local authorities;
 - responses offered by local authorities via a questionnaire;
 - interviews with transition co-ordinators in seven primary-secondary school clusters; and
 - scrutiny of relevant documentation provided by the Welsh Assembly Government, schools and local authorities.

Main findings

- 11 School inspections in 2008–2009 show that transition planning is now a strong feature of the life and work of most secondary schools and their partner primary schools. In many school clusters, there has been good progress in helping pupils make the transition from primary to secondary schools. A key factor in this improvement has been visits by teachers to other schools to observe teaching and learning, and to deliver lessons. This is having a positive impact on aligning classroom practice more closely across Year 6 and Year 7.
- 12 National Curriculum teacher assessment results at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 3 show that a higher proportion of pupils in 2009 are achieving the expected level in the core subjects compared to 2006. Transition arrangements, including more regular joint meetings of key stage 2 and key stage 3 teachers to moderate National Curriculum assessments, help secondary teachers to have a clearer understanding of pupils' abilities on entry to secondary school and to build on pupils' prior attainment more effectively. However, these arrangements are too variable in quality across school cluster groups to assure consistency in teacher assessment in the core subjects at key stage 2 and 3. The proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above at the end of key stage 2 and level 6 or above at the end of key stage 3 has declined since 2006 in the core subjects. Transition plans generally do not include enough strategies to enable more-able pupils to achieve these higher levels.
- 13 Planning for transition in literacy and numeracy has improved over recent years. However, only a minority of schools plan common schemes of work in Welsh and English for pupils aged 7 – 14. Transition activities do not focus enough on numeracy, and only a few primary schools transfer information about pupils' achievements in numeracy, including for pupils on intervention programmes.
- 14 Most school clusters, particularly in English-speaking areas, identify the need to address the lack of progression in pupils' Welsh language skills when moving from primary to secondary school. Most transition plans refer specifically to the need to provide more and better training for teachers on how to assess standards in Welsh and, in particular, Welsh as a second language. Statutory assessment of Welsh as a second language in Year 6 will take place for the first time in the summer term 2010. Currently, only about half of primary schools have made arrangements to include this subject in school-based standardisation and moderation meetings, and most schools have no plans to include it in cluster-based arrangements.
- 15 Many secondary schools are modifying their Year 7 curriculum so that pupils' learning experiences resembles more closely those of primary schools, where a thematic or project-based curriculum involves combining several subjects into the same lesson. Primary and secondary teachers within their school clusters are now working much closer together to design schemes of work and observe each other teaching. The use of 'bridging units', where themes or projects started in Year 6 are completed in Year 7, are now more frequently used to develop consistency in teaching and learning across phases.

- 16 Overall, school clusters have responded positively to a recommendation made in Estyn's previous report on transition for schools to take fuller account of the views of pupils and governors in reviewing transition plans. However, there is still not enough involvement of parents or carers in these reviews of transition plans.
- 17 Most of the arrangements introduced through the transition plan and supported by the transition grant are capable of being sustained once the grant has been withdrawn. Many clusters have agreed to pool resources, such as money from the Better Schools Fund, to ensure that transition planning can become a permanent feature of partnership arrangements. However, some schools believe that the implementation of 'rarely cover' arrangements from September 2009 will mean that teachers will find it more difficult to attend school cluster meetings.
- 18 Local authorities are key facilitators in sharing best practice across school clusters. Local authorities are clear about how they support schools and appropriate strategies are in place to improve further the effectiveness of transition arrangements. The proposals of local authorities focus on the key development areas as set out in [Guidance On Welsh Assembly Government Key Stages 2-3 Transition Grant: Circular 31/2006](#). Support from local authorities is well regarded by schools as an important element in helping primary and secondary teachers to improve transition arrangements.
- 19 Most local authorities have set up suitable focus groups, led by an officer, to monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of transition plans, and to ensure that best practice is shared across the local authority. A few local authorities also use external consultants to feed into the evaluation process and this adds to the objectivity of the evaluation. Staff training days and cross-phase conferences have also been effectively used to focus on the experiences of the clusters and to spread best practice.
- 20 Local authorities are responding positively to the recommendations made in Estyn's previous report on transition. In all local authorities, transition arrangements remain a high priority in school improvement plans for when grant funding is due to be withdrawn. Local authorities monitor the quality and impact of transition plans more rigorously than before and provide support to clusters through relevant training and, where possible, the allocation of additional funding.

Recommendations

To improve transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3:

Schools should:

- R1 build on partnership and cluster work planning to help all learners to achieve better standards in core subjects and in Welsh as a second language;
- R2 raise standards in literacy and numeracy by making better use of information about pupils' achievements when they transfer to secondary school, particularly for pupils on intervention programmes;
- R3 secure better consistency in teacher assessment and in particular in the standardisation and moderation of pupils' work at the end of Key Stage 2; and
- R4 evaluate transition arrangements better by canvassing the views of parents or carers and use the results to inform self-evaluation and development plans.

Local authorities should:

- R5 ensure that transition arrangements raise the standards achieved by all pupils, including the more able;
- R6 provide better training for teachers on improving continuity and progression in pupils' Welsh language development; and
- R7 use transition arrangements to improve the consistency of teacher assessment.

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R8 continue to support school clusters in reviewing their initial transition plans and in strengthening key areas of transition.

Evaluation of the impact of transition plans on schools

Managing and co-ordinating transition

- 21 The Estyn remit report on 'The Impact of Transition Plans' (2008) states that:

"...in the last five years, many primary and secondary schools have worked on joint initiatives to improve aspects of curriculum, learning and assessment across key stages 2 and 3. As a result, many schools had already met some of the requirements of transition plans before transition plans became a statutory requirement in September 2007."

The management and co-ordination of transition arrangements are becoming increasingly embedded within clusters. The 35 Section 28 inspections of secondary schools conducted during the academic year 2008 – 2009 judged all school transition arrangements to be, at least effective, with six secondary schools judged to have outstanding transitional links with partner primary schools. The following quotations exemplify what was judged to be particularly noteworthy:

- "In order to help pupils to adjust to the secondary school learning environment and address the new skills based NC, an innovative approach to the Y7 curriculum has been developed. This enables pupils to be taught by the same teacher for a number of subjects." (*Ynysawdre Comprehensive – paragraph 112*)
 - "In addition to residential courses Y6 pupils visit for one day per term before transfer. Year 7 pupils have three days' induction and a week at the Urdd camp at Llangrannog after the autumn half-term. Year 7 pupils evaluate transition arrangements." (*Ysgol Gyfun Bro Morgannwg – paragraph 136*)
 - "As a result of planned cluster working arrangements a Y5 – Y8 curriculum has been mapped involving every department within the school. The programme of work has been built into every departmental SoW." (*Cyfarthfa High School – paragraph 134*)
- 22 Transition plans clearly set out lead responsibilities and roles for leaders from schools within the cluster. The headteacher or senior leader from the secondary school usually undertakes the lead role. The plans also set out how the schools will work together to achieve agreed aims and provide detailed action plans with appropriate time scales, success criteria, targets, and monitoring arrangements.
- 23 In the schools visited, pupils and governors are being involved in the review and evaluation of transition plans. The transition plan is ratified annually by governors and recommendations from the review are considered and agreed by the governing bodies of the partner schools. Pupils are consulted through the school council and plans are often amended to include creative ideas suggested by them. In one local authority, a 'pupil voice' conference is being planned. This will enable school councils from across clusters to work closer together on issues relating to transition.
- 24 Few schools take enough account of the views of parents or carers through questionnaires when evaluating the effectiveness of pupils' transition from primary to secondary school.

Assessment, monitoring and tracking

- 25 The recommendation made in Estyn's report, published in 2008, for clusters to ensure that plans should be evaluated with reference to improvements in pupils' standards of achievement, is beginning to be addressed by local authorities and schools. The transition plans and common arrangements for standardising and moderating pupil assessments ensure that secondary schools now have a clearer understanding of pupils' abilities and prior knowledge on entry. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done to enhance teacher skills in assessment. Estyn's report on the 'Evaluation of the arrangements to assure the consistency of teacher assessment in the core subjects at key stage 2 and key stage 3' (March 2010) states that: http://estyn.co.uk/ThematicReports/Remit_4_Core_subject_KS2_and_KS3_March_2010.pdf
- "Teachers are concerned that current arrangements for teacher assessment are not working as well as they should because teachers at both key stage 2 and key stage 3 continue to have a different interpretation of 'levels'. Many school clusters have identified further work that needs to be undertaken before they have sufficient confidence in the accuracy of the teacher assessment in National Curriculum core subjects."*
- 26 The report also states that the more robust systems that are in place at key stage 3 are resulting in greater accuracy and reliability of teacher assessment than at key stage 2.
- 27 Between key stages 2 and 3, there are now many well-established transition arrangements which have been developed in recent years to improve pupils' learning experiences. For example, in several schools, Year 6 pupils experience a taster day or week where they are introduced to the way in which secondary schools operate. Less effective are the transition arrangements for moderating pupil assessments to enable primary and secondary schools to have a common agreement about the levels attained by pupils in the teacher assessments at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 3.
- 28 Most cluster groups, particularly in English-speaking regions, identified the need to address the lack of progression in pupils' Welsh language skill development. Most transition plans include actions to improve the assessment of pupils' standards in Welsh and, in particular, Welsh second language. Statutory assessment of Welsh as a second language in key stage 2 will take place for the first time in the summer of 2010. Only about a half of primary schools have made arrangements to include this subject in school-based standardisation and moderation meetings and most schools have no plans to include it in cluster-based arrangements.
- 29 In several cluster groups, the head of the secondary school Welsh department works closely on the transition plan with primary school colleagues to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' Welsh language development. In one cluster, an 'immersion group' of Year 6 pupils attends the local Welsh-medium secondary school during the summer term for specialist Welsh-language teaching. In other schools, Welsh language issues are the focus of induction days for Year 6 pupils and include a variety of Welsh-based or themed activities. These activities allow the secondary school to identify the language levels and needs of the future Year 7 pupils.

- 30 Most schools have procedures in place to target support at pupils with additional learning needs, in particular pupils with SEN. Pupils with statements are given the opportunity to meet their support teacher or teaching assistant prior to starting at the secondary school. Most secondary headteachers visit the primary schools in the cluster, often with the Head of Year 7. The SENCO, and occasionally, the attendance officer also make visits to discuss relevant issues about school life with pupils in order to help allay any fears or concerns and to address individual needs. One school addresses the specific needs of pupils through a two-week literacy and numeracy course delivered towards the end of the summer term. Also, more schools are using appropriate IT programmes to transfer information from primary to secondary school regarding the additional learning needs of pupils.
- 31 Planning for transition in literacy and numeracy between secondary schools and their partner primary schools has improved over recent years. The majority of clusters organise joint activities designed to improve progression in English, Welsh and mathematics from key stage 2 to key stage 3. However, only a minority of schools plan common schemes of work in Welsh and English for pupils from the age of 7 – 14, to make sure teaching is always pitched at the right level and work is progressive and challenging. In mathematics, transition activities do not focus enough on numeracy and only a few primary schools transfer information about pupils' achievements in numeracy.
- 32 In an increasing number of school clusters, pupils' attainment levels are monitored on a termly basis and the assessment practice is becoming more consistent across Year 6 and 7. Transition plans often indicate that attendance, behaviour and self esteem are accorded value as well as academic attainment. Most schools demonstrate progress in pupil attainment, particularly in the core subjects, since the introduction of the transition plans. National Curriculum teacher assessment results from 2006 to 2009 show a small but steady rise in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in teacher assessments at key stage 2 and key stage 3. Nevertheless, it is still too early to judge whether this performance evidence is definitive because it will be at the end of the current academic year, 2009–2010, when clusters will be undertaking a full review and evaluation of the three year plan. This evaluation will involve an analysis of attainment data as well as pupil and parent perceptions. The first cohort of pupils that were supported by the transition plan (Year 6 in 2007-2008) will be assessed by their teachers at the end of key stage 3 in 2011.

Curriculum planning

- 33 Many secondary schools have altered their Year 7 curriculum by combining several subjects to reflect the thematic or project-based approach used in most primary schools. In this way, several themes are studied during the year through which pupils develop personal, learning and key skills. Many of the schools that have adopted such a thematic curriculum for Year 7 have organised the learning around English or humanities subjects. Often, the curriculum is based on approaches such as developing critical skills, specific thinking skills and assessment for learning strategies.
- 34 In a majority of schools, there are closer working relationships between primary and secondary teachers. This includes sharing schemes of work to avoid duplication and repetition of work for pupils in Year 7. Secondary school teachers observe primary colleagues and, in a few schools, teach in the primary phase. For example, one

school invites Year 6 teachers to scrutinise Year 7 work at the end of the autumn term to identify good progress and any underachievement. Another school has employed two primary teachers to support two Year 7 classes.

- 35 'Bridging units' are used extensively by many schools to develop consistency in teaching and learning across phases. In some cases, this involves secondary teachers visiting primary schools to teach new subjects, such as a modern foreign language, or to develop particular skills or to use assessment for learning strategies. In several secondary schools, modern foreign language teachers have taught some lessons in the partner primary schools.
- 36 In many schools, the Year 7 form tutor role has widened as a result of transition practices. The Year 7 tutor often teaches their mixed-ability form group for an increasing number of lessons, either through a thematic or skills-focused curriculum. These secondary schools have used the primary model of having fewer teachers who get to know their Year 7 pupils very well. In one school the Year 7 form groups are made up from combining pupils from two primary schools. The Year 7 tutors team teach in the primary schools and meet parents to build relationships before the pupils transfer to the secondary school.

Sustaining best practice

- 37 Transition planning has made the work of primary and secondary schools more effective because of the:
- better understanding of each other's work within school clusters;
 - joint development of standardisation and moderation procedures to improve the consistency and reliability of teacher assessment at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 3;
 - use of bridging units and joint curriculum planning to ease pupils' transition from primary to secondary school;
 - use of IT to track pupil progress from key stage 2 to key stage 3; and
 - improved communication with governors, parents or carers within clusters.
- 38 Schools appreciate these benefits and many clusters have also agreed to pool future Better School Funding in order to sustain the delivery of the transition plans. Financial constraints and workload pressures have been expressed as a concern in a few schools. They claim that the implementation of 'rarely cover' arrangements from September 2009 will mean that teachers will find it more difficult to attend school cluster meetings and assessment training sessions. However, there is also an acknowledgement that much transition work is done on joint closure days, and this provides good value for money.

Evaluation of the impact of the transition grant

Local authority strategies

- 39 The majority of local authorities have appropriate strategies for developing and disseminating good practice. The best practice includes:
- appointing an officer with responsibility for transition;
 - setting up a transition steering group of primary and secondary headteachers;
 - facilitating cluster group meetings;
 - organising cross-phase transition conferences; and
 - providing training for standardisation and moderation of subjects at key stages 2 and 3
- 40 The proposals of local authorities focus clearly on one or more of the key development areas set out in the National Assembly of Wales document 'Guidance on Welsh Assembly Government Key Stages 2-3 Transition Grant (Circular 31/2006)'. The examples that follow show the range of projects that are being supported by the grant.

Joint curriculum planning

- 41 Many local authorities encourage schools to use the opportunities provided through transition arrangements to develop joint schemes of work from key stage 2 to key stage 3 to help pupils progress quicker in their knowledge, skills and understanding once they are in Year 7.
- 42 For example, Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig is used as the focus for transition work by a number of local authorities. Raising Welsh-language awareness amongst pupils, parents and teachers, both within and across school clusters, is helping to ensure that pupils can follow the most suitable pathway in their transition to secondary school. One local authority has produced a guidance document and a DVD providing exemplification materials on Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig to ensure that pupils in key stage 3 continue to make progress in their learning on this aspect.
- 43 The performing arts are often used by local authorities as the focus for curriculum planning. Key stage 2 and 3 pupils from across the clusters are brought together to engage in music and theatre performances to experience common ways of working. This helps to develop pupils' specific subject skills and also their wider key skill of working with others.
- 44 Continuity in the teaching and learning of ICT and developing consistency across the cluster through joint curriculum planning is also the focus for work in a number of local authorities.

Continuity in teaching and learning

- 45 Transition arrangements have developed well in recent years and have led to much closer working practices between teachers in key stage 2 and key stage 3. For example, pupils in Year 7 in some secondary schools remain in the same classroom, similar to the practice in primary schools, rather than change classrooms for every subject. There are also examples of local authorities using the grant to improve the continuity of learning for pupils by arranging for teachers in Year 6 and Year 7 within a cluster to plan lessons and to deliver these together. The teachers will focus on agreed strategies and have dedicated time afterwards to discuss the relevant pedagogic issues. In-service training based on clusters of schools is also being used to share effective teaching strategies and good practice across key stage 2 and key stage 3.
- 46 In one local authority, a peer-coaching programme for teachers of Year 6 and Year 7 pupils in the school cluster is helping to promote the adoption of more effective teaching styles, and to enhance assessment for learning skills. The designated teachers meet to discuss strategies and conduct peer lesson observations.

Teacher assessment

- 47 Many local authorities use the grant to focus on strengthening moderation systems to ensure greater consistency in National Curriculum teacher assessments. Meetings within clusters of schools for key stage 2 and key stage 3 teachers are, in the best practice, held at regular intervals during the year to discuss, moderate and agree appropriate levels based upon portfolios of pupils' work. This practice helps to develop consistency of expectations of pupils' standards across the cluster schools. These meetings are key to addressing the different perceptions that exist between teachers in key stage 2 and 3 as to what constitutes appropriate standards at different levels.
- 48 In one local authority, a seconded headteacher has the responsibility for organising, monitoring and evaluating the moderation and transition activities. In other local authorities, relevant 'transition booklets' have been produced to ensure the consistency in assessment and monitoring of pupil progress.

Sharing information about pupils' attendance and behaviour

- 49 One local authority has worked closely with external consultants to improve the tracking and targeting support for pupils with behaviour or attendance problems. Training learning support assistants in behaviour support and making use of Year 9 mentors or buddies is resulting in a reduction in the number of pupils being referred as a result of behaviour or attendance issues.

Meeting the personal and social needs of pupils

- 50 In some schools, Year 12 students are introduced as 'buddies' or 'mentors' to Year 6 pupils during the summer term. The students are trained as mentors and provide valuable support to vulnerable Year 7 pupils. The training enables these mentors to develop the personal and social skills necessary to be able to support younger pupils and help them to build friendships that ensure they settle quicker into their new learning environments. The training has resulted in OCN accreditation for a number of students.

- 51 One local authority is using the grant to focus on developing the personal and social needs of pupils through a three-day event which includes activities such as sport, drama, problem solving and art. These experiences enable Year 6 and Year 7 pupils to work together and develop their key skills. Year 7 pupils are used as ambassadors and role models for Year 6 pupils and pupils record their experiences in their school transition booklet.

Meeting the learning needs of individual pupils

- 52 One local authority is using the Pupil Attitude towards Self and School (PASS) scheme to gather information about individual pupils so that relevant resources can be targeted to support them through transition.
- 53 Narrowing the gap in achievement between groups of pupils, especially between boys and girls is the focus for one local authority. Grant funding is used to buy in external consultants to advise on successful strategies for combating disaffection in the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. The best practice is subsequently disseminated across the local authority to ensure that the expertise within each cluster impacts on the practice of all teachers.
- 54 Another local authority is enhancing support for out-of-school hours activities. In conjunction with its community-focussed schools, activities are linked to projects that actively promote the achievement of boys during the transition from primary to secondary school.

Local authority evaluation arrangements

- 55 Initially, completed evaluation forms, required from local authorities as a part of evaluating their transition grant projects, lacked detail and provided only a summary of arrangements for evaluating projects. The forms have now been supplemented by a requirement for more detailed information through the completion of a questionnaire, the submission of relevant evaluation reports, and information provided during visits to a sample of local authorities and school clusters.
- 56 The vast majority of local authorities have set up transition focus groups or steering groups, usually led by an officer from the school improvement team. These groups are generally effective in monitoring the implementation of cluster plans and ensuring that best practice is shared across all the school clusters within the local authority. Recommendations for further development are also offered by these groups.
- 57 The evaluation arrangement also involves meetings of cluster co-ordinators and headteachers every half term to share best practice and evaluate progress within the cluster. These meetings are often chaired by the local authority link officer and a cluster self-evaluation report is produced. The cluster self-evaluation report is passed to the local authority so that all clusters can benefit from the findings.
- 58 The local authority arrangements for evaluating the impact of transition projects are closely linked to systems already in place for monitoring schools' performance across the authority. Link officers play a key role in monitoring relevant clusters as part of their link role for schools in their area. Primary and secondary school clusters have documented plans which set out the actions to be taken and the expected outcomes. These are used by link officers to measure whether the cluster activities are leading to better alignment of Year 6 and Year 7 classroom practice

- 59 Some local authorities use external consultants in the evaluation process. This adds to the objectivity of the evaluation and encourages other clusters across the authority to adopt best practice. A consultant from each of the six local authorities working together in the South West and Mid Wales Consortium (SWAMWAC), meet regularly to share examples of best practice and also to monitor the use of local authority websites. SWAMWAC has also produced a transition plan review sheet modelled on the School Effectiveness Framework. This is used by schools and local authorities to review the progress of transition plans.
- 60 Other evaluations across a number of local authorities involve training days. These focus on reviewing progress and identifying and disseminating best practice. Consistency in teaching methodology is the main focus of the training days because it is perceived as an important aspect of ongoing work on transition. The views of Year 6 and Year 7 pupils and their parents or carers feed into these sessions.

Disseminating innovative project outcomes

- 61 Cross-phase conferences, arranged by local authorities, have been an effective vehicle to ensure that effective and innovative practice is shared across the clusters. Regular meetings, usually once a term, provide opportunities for cluster representatives to share successful practice. Some examples include:
- Design and Technology - Year 6 pupils and their teacher working in the secondary school with the subject specialist, resulting in a consortium joint skills booklet being produced for Years 5 and Year 6 pupils.
 - A two-day residential visit for all Year 6 pupils in the cluster with key stage 2 and key stage 3 staff, focussing on relevant skill-based activities. This experience is followed with a presentation, and a performance, for parents at the secondary school.
 - The DCELLS Developing Thinking Programme is used across a number of clusters to develop innovative teaching strategies across a range of subjects at key stage 2 and key stage 3. There is already evidence from performance measures, as well as feedback from pupils, that they now experience greater consistency in teaching and learning through the transition phase.
- 62 Most local authorities have effectively co-ordinated in-service training days to ensure that transition grant funding is used efficiently by schools and enable best practice to be shared across the local authority. A common use of in-service training days has been to release teachers for moderation activities. The input from local authority subject advisers has helped in improving the accuracy of teacher assessment. These sessions have enabled clusters to focus on the standardisation and moderation of teacher assessment, particularly in the core subjects of Welsh, English, Mathematics and Science. The production of portfolios of evidence and pupil profiles, to exemplify consistent standards across key stages 2 and 3, has featured as outcomes of the sessions.
- 63 Subject officers also benefit from regional arrangements. Meetings, such as those organised by Cynnal, SWAMWAC and ESIS are being used to disseminate innovative project outcomes. For example, during the final year of the grant, £2,700 was allocated to develop a SWAMWAC good practice in transition website. This is a

bilingual website which contains a number of case studies sharing good practice in relation to the development of skills across key stage 2 and key stage 3.

Impact on teaching, learning and standards

- 64 Good progress is being made in easing the transition of pupils from primary to secondary schools. Pupil questionnaires show that pupils are settling in quicker to their new school's routines and they feel more secure. Better familiarity with the learning environment and curriculum, and higher teacher expectations, are having a positive impact on the pupils' wellbeing and increasing their levels of engagement.
- 65 Local authority evaluations confirm that transition activities are having a positive impact on learning and teaching. The greater focus on standardisation and moderation of teacher assessment is leading to increased confidence in the validity of assessment across key stage 2 and, more especially, in key stage 3. Some good progress has been made in developing a shared understanding of standards across primary and secondary phases. Teachers from key stage 2 in particular do not have full confidence in their understanding of the characteristics of pupils' work that demonstrate the National Curriculum level descriptors.
- 66 It is too early to evaluate securely the impact of the transition grant on the standards being attained by pupils at the end of key stage 3. The current Year 9 is the first cohort to have been targeted by the grant since it was introduced in 2006. Nevertheless, a number of local authorities report that the transition activities are having a positive impact upon the transition of pupils to secondary schools. This judgement is supported in the evidence from local authority officers' lesson observations. They also report that the accuracy of teacher assessment has improved over the last two years. The following chart does show that, in the core subjects, an increasing percentage of pupils across Wales are achieving the expected level at key stage 2 (level 4) and key stage 3 (level 5).

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Key Stage 2	Level 4+ (Level 5+)			
English	78.6 (30.4)	78.6 (28.9)	79.8 (28.5)	81.0 (28.0)
Welsh	75.5 (25.3)	72.8 (24.0)	77 (23.6)	79.9 (24.0)
Maths	81.0 (33.5)	80.4 (30.0)	81.3 (30.0)	82.5 (29.4)
Science	85.6 (33.8)	84.9 (32.4)	85.6 (31.7)	86.4 (30.7)
CSI	74.2	74.1	75.5	77.0
Key Stage 3	Level 5+ (Level 6+)			
English	67.8 (32.0)	68.6 (32.9)	69.5 (32.4)	70.6 (31.7)
Welsh	71.9 (35.3)	72.6 (35.6)	72.3 (35.1)	75.1 (35.2)
Maths	71.7 (46.6)	69.9 (42.3)	72.5 (43.5)	73.5 (43.7)
Science	73.3 (39.2)	70.5 (35.8)	73.7 (38.1)	75.6 (38.4)
CSI	58.2	56.7	59.6	61.3

- 67 However, the percentage of pupils achieving the higher level at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 3 has declined in core subjects since 2006. Transition plans have yet to impact on targeting and enabling more-able pupils to achieve the higher levels (level 5 at key stage 2 and level 6 at key stage 3).

Challenges, barriers and sustainability

- 68 Overall, local authorities are addressing the recommendations made in the report 'The impact of transition plans' published by Estyn in June 2008. Progress is being made in ensuring that transition has a high profile in local authorities work on school improvement. Focusing more on strengthening partnership work between clusters of schools to ensure that all learners reach their potential, including the more able, remains a target for schools and local authorities to address in revising their transition plans. Local authorities are monitoring the quality and impact of transition plans more rigorously than before and are providing support to clusters through relevant training and, where possible, the allocation of funding.
- 69 Ensuring that primary and secondary school teachers are fully aware of the standards expected at the respective key stages has been a challenge for schools and local authorities. Bringing teachers together for cluster moderation meetings to standardise and moderate pupil work has helped, but key stage 2 and key stage 3 teachers have only recently needed to work collaboratively to moderate and standardise their teacher assessments.
- 70 Another challenge for local authorities is to establish equality of relationships between participating schools so that all have a full sense of ownership of the transition plan. Some clusters are very large and include 20 schools. Also, complex arrangements have had to be made in some authorities to facilitate the transition needs for Welsh-medium schools, faith schools and schools whose intake is mainly from out-of-authority catchment areas.
- 71 Local authorities are committed to continuing transition arrangements when the grant money is no longer available. The links between cluster schools will continue to develop and regular in-service training, led by the local authority, will continue to focus on transition. Headteachers' perceptions of transition activities are good, but some express doubt about the ability of schools to continue with some aspects of the transition process such as the appointment of transition co-ordinators to manage cluster activities and the current system of standardisation and moderation meetings. The implementation of 'rarely cover' arrangements from September 2009 may mean that teachers will find it more difficult to attend school cluster meetings. However, a number of clusters across Wales are already committed to pooling resources to ensure that the core aspects of transition work will be a permanent feature of their work in the future.

Glossary/references

Better Schools Fund	Annual grant to schools and LEAs provided by the Welsh Assembly Government
Bridging Units	Units of pupil work that are started in primary schools (Year 6) and completed in secondary schools (Year 7)
Building Learning Power	Learning skills programme developed by Guy Claxton based on 'learning to learn' principles
Critical Skills	This programme develops lifelong learning skills and dispositions with problem-solving challenges built into its teaching method
Community focused school	A school that provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community
DEWi	Data Exchange Wales: A summary of school performance data, compared to local and national averages and also to the performance of similar schools
PASS	Pupil attitude towards self and school
School Clusters	Partnership between a secondary school and its feeder primary schools

Schools visited

Ysgol Bryn Eliau, Conwy
Bryntirion Comprehensive School, Bridgend
Castell Alun High School, Flintshire
King Henry VIII Comprehensive School, Monmouth
Lewis School Pengam, Caerphilly
Newtown High School, Powys
Olchfa Comprehensive School, Swansea

Local authorities visited

Caerphilly
Conwy
Flintshire
Monmouth
Powys

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