Estyn

Summary of findings from our national thematic reviews

2018

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- special schools
- pupil referral units
- all-age schools
- 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
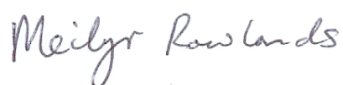
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Foreword

I hope that you will find this compendium, and the reports on which it is based, informative and relevant. Estyn's thematic reports published in 2018 cover a range of important aspects of education and training in Wales. They report on standards and provision across a range of education sectors and themes, including how best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils, communication between schools and parents, mentoring in initial teacher education, youth support services, the quality of education for young people engaged with youth offending teams, as well as a national review of higher apprenticeships in work-based learning.

Estyn's thematic reports address matters that are of central concern to policy-makers. The annual remit letter to HMCI from the Cabinet Secretary takes into account the key priorities of the Welsh Government and, this calendar year, includes curriculum-focused surveys with case studies of effective practice in preparing for the Digital Competence Framework, Welsh in key stage 2 and key stage 3, religious education in key stage 2 and key stage 3, new qualifications for GCSEs and the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, and a national review of A levels in schools and colleges. We also published surveys relating to improving teaching, managed moves, schools' readiness for the additional learning needs reform and the impact of the learning and skills measure on vulnerable learners.

Our reports are intended to encourage wider thinking and to contribute to current debates in policy areas such as planning for the new Curriculum for Wales, as well as sharing case studies of effective practice across all sectors. The forthcoming programme of thematic reports during 2019 promises to be equally relevant, with reviews underway focused on a wide range of areas such as health and wellbeing, professional learning, A level social studies in schools and colleges, provision for Gypsy Roma traveller learners, and support for young carers.

We hope that these thematic reports are being used widely by providers to improve their practice and enhance outcomes for learners in Wales. This compendium of all the thematic reports published this calendar year brings together the main findings and recommendations from each report for easy reference. The full reports, including case studies, are available on our website: https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports.

Meilyr Rowlands
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

How best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils: Key stages 2 to 4

Standards

1   Where outcomes for more able and talented pupils are very strong, pupils are highly engaged independent learners. They develop and apply advanced skills and knowledge confidently to new situations and across areas of learning. They use their literacy, numeracy and information and communication and technology (ICT) skills efficiently, and often creatively, in their work.

2   In nearly all schools where more able and talented pupils achieve well, pupils make well-considered choices about how and what they learn. They evaluate their own progress robustly. They know what to do to improve their work and develop a keen sense of responsibility for progressing their own learning. However, in around a third of schools, more able pupils do not achieve as well as they should or use their skills to a level that matches their ability.

3   In primary and secondary schools, more able girls perform better than boys at the higher levels and more able pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as other pupils who are more able. By the end of key stages 2 and 3, teacher assessments show that pupils' achievements at the higher than expected levels have improved year-on-year since 2012 (Welsh Government, 2017a & 2017b). At key stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving five A*-A GCSEs (or equivalent) has increased in 2017, after a period of decline in recent years (Welsh Government, 2017c). For further detail see appendix 2.

Provision

4   Most primary and secondary schools have an appropriate, shared understanding of how they define 'more able and talented' pupils within their individual schools.

5   In a very few schools, staff provide a valuable range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities to cater for the needs of pupils who have more advanced skills. However, in general, schools place more emphasis on provision for 'more able' pupils than they do for 'talented' pupils. The provision for 'talented pupils' remains limited in many schools across Wales. In a minority of schools, changes to the curriculum, for example the introduction of the literacy and numeracy framework (LNF: Welsh Government, 2013) and national tests in reading and numeracy, have led to a narrowing of opportunities for pupils to develop their creative, sporting and technological skills.

6   In schools that are most successful in challenging more able and talented pupils, teachers have very high expectations of all pupils. They plan and match work to individual pupils' abilities exceptionally well and they use the outcomes of assessment skilfully to plan next steps in pupils' learning. However, too many teachers do not ensure that there is sufficient challenge in tasks to stretch more able and talented pupils.

7   Early entry for GCSE examinations can help more able pupils who have mastered subject content before the end of their course of study. Many of these pupils achieve very high grades and then progress to additional qualifications or further study at an accelerated rate, for example in mathematics. However, not all schools consider the individual needs of pupils well enough when entering them early for examinations.

8   Many schools have clear and systematic procedures for identifying pupils' particular strengths using a wide range of information. Most schools track the progress of more able pupils well. However, even in schools where more able pupils attain high standards, very few monitor and track the achievements and progress of talented pupils.

9   Where schools place a strong emphasis on nurturing more able and talented pupils, staff provide regular opportunities and structured support for pupils to share any concerns, challenges or barriers that they face. They help pupils to overcome these sensitively, for example through targeted intervention such as mentoring or coaching. However, this happens only in a very few schools.

10   Access to additional provision and targeted support that is relevant to the needs of more able and talented pupils in key stages 2 to 4 is uneven across Wales. The quality and breadth of additional opportunities depend too much on the skills and resources in individual schools rather than being a systematic expectation across schools and within regions.

11   Overall, in many primary and secondary schools, partnership working is a strength. In the best examples, primary and secondary schools use a wide range of partners to enhance the learning experiences of more able and talented pupils. However, often schools do not develop processes to evaluate the impact of joint projects or partnership working on outcomes for these pupils well enough.

12   A few schools communicate effectively with parents, so that they know how they can support the education of their more able or talented child. However, many schools do not pay enough attention to engaging parents of more able and talented pupils from all backgrounds as partners in their children's learning.

13   Since Estyn's previous reports (Estyn 2011 & 2012), there has not been enough progress in around half of primary and secondary schools to build on transition arrangements to provide effective challenge for more able and talented pupils in key stage 3. Generally, too many secondary teachers do not provide sufficient continuity and progression in pupils' learning.

Leadership and management

14   The quality of schools' provision for more able and talented pupils depends upon effective leaders placing an appropriate emphasis on improving standards and provision for these pupils. Where this is the case, schools have developed highly successful whole-school approaches. For example, they use grant funding such as the pupil development grant (PDG) and lead creative schools scheme to support and nurture these pupils to achieve well. School staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences to support more able and talented pupils. They also engage well with external organisations such as NACE Cymru to develop aspects of their practice.

15   In a few schools, leaders and staff have reviewed their policies and practices to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils, as part of a wider consideration of their school values and aims in the context of curriculum reform in Wales.

16   Where there are shortcomings in provision for more able and talented pupils, leaders do not ensure that strategic planning pays good enough attention to supporting staff to meet the needs of these pupils. As a result, practices for challenging and nurturing their progress vary too much between classes in primary schools and by class and department in secondary schools. Across Wales, school-to-school collaboration, which focuses upon how best to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils, is at an early stage of development.

17   In around a third of primary schools and in a majority of secondary schools, processes for improving quality are weak. Too few schools monitor and evaluate how well their provision meets the needs of more able and talented pupils rigorously enough.

Support and challenge for schools

18   Support from local authorities and regional consortia to develop effective provision for more able and talented pupils has been inconsistent and, until very recently, received less attention than at the time of Estyn's previous thematic reports (Estyn, 2011 & 2012). This is because education consortia over-emphasised a focus on improving academic outcomes at 'expected' attainment thresholds in response to national performance measures. Consequently, access to appropriate learning experiences for more able and talented pupils is not good enough across regions and across Wales. Our recent monitoring of the consortia indicates that there is now greater emphasis on the whole range of performance indicators when considering outcomes of pupils.

19   Where schools have used training materials developed by the Welsh Government and NACE Cymru (Welsh Government & NACE Cymru, 2012), these have supported the development of provision for more able and talented pupils well. However, this guidance has had little impact on local authority and regional consortia's work with schools.

20   The Welsh Government's 'Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-21' (Welsh Government, 2017d) action plan places valuable emphasis on the need to improve the quality of teaching through professional learning to meet the needs of Wales' most able learners. The plan identifies 'strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being' as one of its key enabling objectives (Welsh Government, 2017d, p.31). However, schools are not always clear as to how they can be inclusive and equitable to all pupils while, at the same time, meeting the needs of their more able and talented pupils who may require additional opportunities.

Managed moves: Effective use of managed moves by local authorities and schools

Main findings

1   Managed moves, in most cases, offer pupils at risk of disengagement or exclusion a fresh start in a new school. In the best examples, the needs and best interests of the pupil are at the heart of all discussions around managed moves and the decisions made. However, a managed move does not provide pupils with the same legal protection as those permanently excluded from schools. For example, pupils who are undergoing managed moves are not automatically entitled to interim education provision, the right of appeal or support with practical arrangements such as transport.

2   A managed move is more likely to be successful when schools and local authorities work well with pupils and their families and use it as an early intervention strategy.

3   There is no nationally agreed protocol for managed moves that ensures that pupils, regardless of where they live, have similar experiences of a planned school move. As a result, there are notable differences in how local authorities and schools implement and monitor managed moves across Wales. In practice this means that current managed moves guidance to local authorities, schools and pupil referral units is subject to misinterpretation and very different practices.

4   Since the publication of the guidance on managed moves in 2011 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2011), most local authorities introduced appropriate protocols that help pupils to move successfully to a new school, rather than becoming excluded. Generally, protocols reflect the Welsh Government guidance and the local context of the authority well. However, over time, a majority of local authorities have since introduced new and additional practices that do not reflect the ethos or philosophy of a managed move well enough. The local processes of managed exits or managed transfers remove pupils' entitlement to return to their home school, although the school move is voluntary. These processes are generally informal and inconsistently applied across Wales.

5   While there is no reliable information available nationally about the numbers of pupils undergoing managed moves, data collected from local authorities for this report demonstrates that pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those on the special educational needs (SEN) register are more likely to be undergoing a managed move.

6   Pupils with additional learning needs often do not access the specialist assessments they need to identify underlying learning and communication needs quickly enough, even when these needs are identified in their pastoral support programme (PSP). In a few cases, they do not receive the specialist teaching and support they need to maintain their home school placement or to prepare them for transition to a new school through a managed move.

7   A minority of pupils at key stage 4 transfer onto placements in a PRU or educated other than at school (EOTAS) provision. In these cases, although a permanent exclusion is not imposed, moves are usually arranged by local authority placement panels. Nearly all these pupils complete their compulsory education outside of mainstream.

8   A minority of pupils undergoing a managed move are from Welsh-medium schools. There is little choice for these pupils and most transfer to the nearest suitable Welsh-medium school, which may be located outside their local authority. Very few pupils at key stage 4 who have previously been attending Welsh-medium education continue their studies through the medium of Welsh.

9   In most local authorities, inclusion services have a clear vision for supporting vulnerable pupils and provide schools and PRUs with useful guidance on a range of issues including managed moves. However, in a few local authorities, this vision is not shared or understood well enough by a few schools. In these authorities, home schools are unclear about their responsibilities around supporting and monitoring a managed move and often to not undertake this role effectively enough.

10   In a few local authorities, there are robust process in place to support the equitable transfer of pupils between schools, identify a key person to oversee the managed move and monitor pupils' progress effectively.

11   Many local authorities have introduced systems to collect data on managed moves and a few have robust systems to track pupil progress in this area. However, overall, local authority staff do not use this data well enough to review the success of initiatives or identify trends and patterns at school or local authority level. As a result, the timeliness and effectiveness of targeted support for schools are too inconsistent across Wales.

12   Most local authorities do not monitor the success or otherwise of managed moves robustly enough after the trial period. In a few cases, where managed moves fail after the trial period, the receiving school is responsible for the exclusion process or funding the EOTAS provision.

13   In most local authorities, officers and headteachers have a thorough understanding of the main barriers to a successful managed move. These include the negative impact on headline performance indicators, the perceived inequality of distribution of managed moves, and lack of information about the educational needs of pupils. In a few local authorities, officers work creatively with schools to ensure that recognised barriers are addressed. For example, one local authority retain pupils at key stage 4 on their home school roll after the end of the trial period for a managed move.

14   Nearly all secondary schools make use of PSPs for pupils who are at risk of disengagement or exclusion. While most schools use PSPs suitably to support pupils at risk, their use to authorise reduced hours of attendance at school is variable across Wales. In a few schools, the main purpose of a PSP is to remove a pupil from the school roll. Very few local authorities monitor the use of PSPs or challenge inappropriate use. This means that many local authorities do not have detailed information on how many pupils are at risk of exclusion, how many are accessing part-time education or on the timeliness of these arrangements.

15   Leaders seek to improve the experiences of pupils undergoing a managed move by developing a clear school-to-school managed move protocol, applying similar thresholds for managed moves and planning curriculum options jointly, especially at key stage 4.

16   In most cases, home schools do not monitor pupils' progress in the receiving school robustly enough. Information given to the receiving school prior and during a managed move is minimal and often incomplete. The information focuses on a pupil's history of behaviour and attendance and provides the receiving schools with little detail about the pupil's learning, communication or social needs.

17   All local authorities have well-established arrangements to ensure that parents and carers can access impartial advice on a range of issues relating to their child's special educational needs. However, only a very few local authorities and schools proactively promote this service when discussing a managed move with parents and carers. This means that, generally, parents are not aware of the service until it is too late or a dispute arises with the school.

18   In a similar manner to parents and carers, pupils do not routinely get access to independent advocates to represent their interests, help them to say what they want or secure their rights during managed moves. This means that a pupil's voice and needs are not always at the heart of the process

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

R1   Provide clear, up-to-date guidance to local authorities, schools and PRUs on the use of managed moves and of PSPs, especially around part-time timetables

R2   Strengthen legal protection and protective measures around managed moves to reflect those currently available for pupils that are permanently excluded

R3   Collect and publish managed move and exclusion data at local authority and national level

R4   Consider broadening performance measures, particularly at key stage 4, to promote inclusive practice at school and local authority level

Local authorities should:

R5   Provide pupils and their families with access to impartial information, advice and guidance prior and during the managed move process

R6   Monitor the use and appropriateness of PSPs at school level

R7   Collect data on managed moves and use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of PSPs

R8   Promote the development and use of school-to-school managed moves protocols wherever possible

R9   Ensure that pupils and their families have access to specialist advice and assessments in a timely manner to stabilise home school placements whenever possible

Schools should:

R10   Ensure that pupils and their families have access to impartial information, advice and guidance

R11   Review the use of PSPs in light of national and local guidance at an early stage in the process of managed moves

R12   Ensure that key information is shared with the receiving school during the initial meeting

The impact of the Learning and Skills Measure on vulnerable learners

Main findings

1   Nearly all schools plan a curriculum that meets the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 (National Assembly for Wales, 2009). However, the curriculum in secondary schools is more limited than it was two years ago. This is a result of many schools reducing the number of option subjects to allow for extra curriculum time for the new GCSE mathematics qualification and a more extensive skills challenge certificate (as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate), and to increase the emphasis on GCSE English/Welsh, mathematics and science due to changes to performance measures. In a few schools, the choice of vocational courses has also been reduced and this impacts on the appropriateness of the curriculum available for many vulnerable learners.

2   Although vulnerable learners have equal access to the curriculum, schools enter vulnerable learners on average for fewer qualifications than their peers. Learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and learners with special educational needs (SEN) are entered for two fewer GCSEs on average than learners who have no SEN or are not eFSM.

3   Since the introduction of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure, standards achieved by vulnerable learners at key stage 4 in schools and in further education colleges have generally improved. There has been an improvement in the proportion of vulnerable learners who achieve key qualification performance indicators. However, in 2017 the proportion of eFSM learners and SEN learners achieving the level 2 threshold declined. The decline is not as marked in the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics. The decline in level 2 threshold may be due to the change to performance measures where key skills qualifications no longer count as part of the level 2 threshold. The gap in achievement between vulnerable learners and their peers in schools and further education colleges has not narrowed significantly for these key indicators and remains too wide.

4   In nearly all colleges, leaders plan the curriculum well and offer a broad range of academic and vocational courses at levels that provide learners with flexibility and choice. However, the number of level 1 courses offered by colleges is reducing. This is due to an increased emphasis on delivering level 3 qualifications. This impacts on a few vulnerable learners who rely on level 1 courses for progression to further learning at level 2 and above. A few colleges are redirecting entry level and level 1 learners towards work-based learning provision to minimise this impact.

5   A few schools, where the curriculum is not able to meet the needs of individual vulnerable learners, collaborate well with further education colleges and other providers to create bespoke learning pathways and widen the subject choice available to learners. However, in general, schools do not promote the full range of available technical or vocational courses at further education colleges or other providers to all learners.

6   Personal support in schools and further education colleges is generally of a high quality and learners benefit from a wide range of intervention strategies that help them achieve successful outcomes. In general, learners are more engaged with their learning and their attendance rates have improved, although the attendance of vulnerable learners remains too low overall. Where additional support is less effective, this is often due to poor tracking and identification systems rather than to the quality of the support. In schools and further education colleges, the support provided by learning coaches is generally effective for learners with SEN and those from other vulnerable groups. However, there has been a steady decline in the availability of learning support provided by learning coaches due to funding reductions.

7   The effectiveness of careers advice and guidance varies too much between schools. In around half of schools, individual careers interviews by Careers Wales are only provided for learners with additional learning needs or for those identified as being at risk of not being engaged in education, employment or training. Only a minority of schools provide learners with an extensive range of advice, including, for example, information regarding apprenticeships. Often, this is because teachers do not know enough about this pathway. For a few learners, this has an adverse effect on their ability to select options that meet their future aspirations.

8   The majority of schools and all colleges evaluate performance data and monitor individual learners' progress. For example, colleges use the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) to identify learners from deprived areas and to measure their progress against their peers

9   Local authorities commission regional consortia to provide support and challenge to schools through the work of the challenge advisors. For example, challenge advisers monitor how schools use grants such as the pupil development grant and the education improvement grant. Recently, regional consortia have appointed officers with responsibility for improving outcomes for eFSM learners. However, regional consortia's processes for monitoring and tracking the progress of specific groups of vulnerable learners and reporting the findings to the local authority is less well established. Overall, the role of the regional consortia in supporting schools and local authorities with regard to vulnerable learners is variable and there is no established common or consistent practice.

10   Most local authorities track the progress of LAC learners centrally and have secure processes to monitor their progress through LAC co-ordinators or achievement leaders. However, the tracking of a few LAC learners who are placed out of county is less effective.

Recommendations

Schools, further education colleges, regional consortia and local authorities should raise the attainment of vulnerable learners so that it is more in line with their peers by:

R1   Tracking and monitoring the achievements of vulnerable learners more closely, and analysing data on groups of vulnerable learners better

R2   Improving their attendance and ensuring that they have access to targeted support

R3   Evaluating the curriculum to consider the extent to which it meets the needs of vulnerable learners and offers them opportunities to gain appropriate qualifications

Welsh in key stage 2 and key stage 3 in Welsh-medium or bilingual schools

Main findings

Standards

1   The standards of Welsh of most pupils in the primary schools and many pupils in the secondary schools that were visited as part of this review are good. On the whole, this is also true for the Welsh-medium or bilingual schools that have been inspected over the last two years. They talk, read and write well in Welsh, and many use their language skills confidently in different contexts across the curriculum.

2   Nearly all pupils listen attentively to their teachers. Most listen to their peers with understanding and with interest, and develop valuable discussion skills when working in pairs or groups. Many speak Welsh confidently and fluently, and their spoken language, on the whole, is accurate and natural. They express themselves clearly and usually adopt the appropriate language register. They express an opinion confidently and elaborate by giving valid reasons for their views.

3   Many pupils have the ability to use the Welsh language effectively in formal and informal situations. However, a few pupils do not develop their oracy skills to the best of their ability. They are reluctant to take part in discussion work and are not keen to contribute orally in public. A few primary school pupils and the majority of pupils in the secondary school visited choose not to use the language naturally in social situations.

4   Strong oracy skills usually enable pupils to make rapid progress in terms of their reading and writing skills. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils read confidently, fluently and with appropriate expression. They understand and recognise the features of a range of different texts in terms of language, structure, theme and presentation. Many pupils in key stage 3 respond enthusiastically to factual and literary texts, and develop a wide range of strong higher-order reading skills.

5   Many primary school pupils write meaningfully in a wide range of extended genres and adapt the style and content of their work for different purposes and audiences. Sentence structure is correct, on the whole, and most organise their work into paragraphs appropriately. By the end of key stage 3, many pupils develop strong, well-crafted writing skills. The majority of pupils use innate Welsh syntax purposefully and they have a secure grasp of spelling and punctuation as well as effective technical vocabulary.

6   A minority of pupils make basic language errors. These pupils' work is littered with common errors, for example spelling, lack of mutation and incorrect mutations following the definite article and misuse of noun gender and basic syntax. These common errors often occur in pupils' written work, as they do not succeed in recognising them in their spoken language.

Teaching and learning experiences

7   In most of the schools visited as part of this review, provision for Welsh-medium provision is good, and is excellent in a minority. This is also the case for many of the schools that have been inspected during the last two years. The standard of Welsh teaching is at least good in most schools. Teaching includes excellent features in a minority of lessons.

8   Successful schools plan in detail and effectively to develop their pupils' oracy, reading and writing skills and ensure an appropriate inter-relationship between them. Due attention is given to elements of literacy and language accuracy. This contributes well to developing most pupils' skills. In a few schools, not enough emphasis is placed on developing pupils' oracy skills, and this has a detrimental effect on the development of other language skills.

9   The language centres visited in Gwynedd have very effective arrangements for pupils who join Welsh-medium or bilingual schools without much previous competence in the Welsh language. They provide opportunities for a new cohort of pupils to develop their Welsh language skills and provide a firm linguistic foundation for them to be able to participate fully in their bilingual education and take advantage of the experiences that are provided. Arrangements are not as good in most other local authorities.

10   Most Welsh teachers display many strong features. Most are good language models and place an appropriate emphasis on modelling correct language that is relevant to their themes. A few teachers and a minority of teaching assistants model incorrect language patterns to pupils occasionally, for example noun gender, mutations and common syntax. This often has a detrimental effect on pupils' language development.

11   The revised GSCE Welsh language course has had a strong influence on teaching methods in key stage 3 over the last two years. Revised schemes of work place an appropriate emphasis on encouraging pupils' independence so that they develop their reasoning skills effectively. Many departments provide innovative activities that prepare pupils for the GCSE Welsh literature course earlier than in the past.

12   Most Welsh teachers and departments assess their pupils' work thoroughly and, in most cases, they analyse strengths and areas for improvement usefully. Feedback on pupils' work, both orally and in writing, usually refers appropriately to developing their language skills. In a few cases, teachers' comments are not specific enough. They do not help pupils to improve their own work and, therefore, they do not have a positive effect on raising standards.

Leadership and management

13   Most headteachers of the primary, secondary and all-age schools visited have a clear vision for Welsh. The core of this vision is that all pupils make the best progress possible while developing their Welsh language skills and foster a strong sense of their Welsh identity. Standards in Welsh and promoting their pupils' sense of Welsh identity are priorities in the majority of schools' improvement plans.

14 The best leaders have high expectations of themselves, their staff and pupils, and they maintain a continuous focus on ensuring effective learning and teaching. They challenge and support their colleagues and provide whole-school guidance on expectations in lessons.

15 Consistent and detailed assessment procedures have been established in many schools, which ensure that they have an accurate picture of standards in Welsh. These schools analyse their pupils' attainment and achievement rigorously.

16 Based on monitoring and self-evaluation procedures, many schools plan strategically and purposefully to raise standards in Welsh. These schools' improvement plans convey clearly leaders' aspirations to deliver as many varied and rich experiences as possible to their pupils through the medium of Welsh. In the best cases, whole-school improvement plans and those of the Welsh curriculum area reflect each other to a great extent.

17 The majority of schools benefit from beneficial professional learning arrangements to strengthen Welsh provision further. In these cases, arrangements that allow for collaboration and sharing expertise have a positive effect on standards of teaching and pupils' achievement.

18 Many leaders have established a culture of continuous professional development in their schools. They understand that the whole school is responsible for its pupils' progress and insist that all members of staff, including teaching assistants, contribute towards improvement planning.

19 Most secondary Welsh departments benefit from a range of beneficial regional and national partnerships to share the latest developments and best practice in terms of learning and teaching in Welsh.

20 The majority of schools have appropriate transition arrangements between key stage 2 and key stage 3. However, transition arrangements in a minority of schools are not effective enough. In these cases, there is little curricular collaboration between schools for it to influence practices constructively in either school.

21 Not enough local authorities plan strategically to ensure that pupils are given an opportunity to develop their Welsh language skills in the most effective way.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1 Focus on developing pupils' oracy skills as a basis for developing their other skills, particularly writing

R2 Introduce strategies to help pupils to eliminate the common language errors made by a minority of pupils both spoken and written

R3 Ensure that experiences provided for pupils in key stage 3 build systematically on provision in key stage 2

R4   Provide training to improve the language skills of teachers and teaching assistants

R5   Plan purposefully to increase secondary school pupils' desire and confidence to use the Welsh language in informal situations

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R6   Ensure specialist support and assistance for schools to develop pupils' language skills

R7   Ensure effective provision for pupils who wish to transfer from English-medium education to Welsh-medium education during key stages 2 and 3

R8   Ensure that pupils who have been assessed in Welsh at the end of key stage 2 continue to develop their skills in the most effective way in key stage 3

Curriculum innovation in primary schools

Main findings

What is working well?

Nearly all of the schools visited take a positive approach to revising their school's curriculum. Leaders in most of the schools visited talk enthusiastically about developing an integrated approach to learning that focuses on providing engaging opportunities for pupils to acquire and develop skills and knowledge.

In a majority of these schools, headteachers have created a culture where teachers are developing the confidence to change their current approach to the curriculum. In these schools, there is an emerging ethos of sharing, experimentation and support among staff who evaluate their own performance and learn from setbacks or initial challenges.

Most headteachers and senior leaders of the schools visited understand the need to develop strong leadership and vision so that schools adopt a long-term strategy to support curriculum development and improvement. Nearly all headteachers set high expectations and promote effective and challenging teaching that meets the needs of all learners.

Headteachers at many of the schools visited encourage their staff to plan activities that harness pupils' curiosity and creativity, and are interesting, enjoyable, relevant and challenging for pupils. Most leaders understand that excellent teaching and effective pedagogy improve and sustain pupil achievement. Most schools have introduced worthwhile cross-curricular activities that allow teachers to consider how they provide for developing the four purposes through well planned activities.

In most of the schools visited, leaders have a clear understanding of the importance of developing a shared awareness of what effective teaching looks like. They ensure that teachers reflect on their professional practice and evaluate its impact on pupils' progress. Leaders emphasise the need for teachers to develop the confidence and understanding to choose the most appropriate teaching approach to challenge, inspire and meet the needs of all pupils.

What are the barriers to change?

Many of the primary schools visited show evidence of useful preparatory work for curriculum development. A minority have re-organised staff into areas of learning and experiences (AoLE) teams, working together on developing subject areas or mapping out how current themes can be taught using an AoLE approach. Many schools have begun to develop their provision for wellbeing across the curriculum. However, many of these schools are not yet in a position to evaluate the extent to which these activities are having an impact on standards.

In a few of the schools visited, the curriculum lacks coherence and has become over-

crowded, disjointed or patchy. Although schools are moving towards more 'real-life' contexts and teachers' planning is linking up pupils' different learning experiences better, there is still too much emphasis on stand-alone projects or bolted-on elements to the curriculum rather than a fully integrated approach to curriculum planning.

A minority of schools do not monitor how well teachers use a suitable range of teaching approaches to ensure that pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and digital competence skills across the curriculum.

There are a few schools that have made only tentative steps in developing the curriculum, as they are waiting for definitive guidance and direction from the Welsh Government before committing to deep-rooted change.

The four stages of curriculum development

A curriculum development self-evaluation model has been developed in consultation with schools, the Welsh Government and regional consortia. The questions posed also take account of the key findings and recommendations from the OECD as well from the scrutiny of Estyn inspection reports.

Questions for schools to consider are grouped under the following headings:

- Stage 1: Evaluating the current curriculum within wider self-evaluation arrangements
- Stage 2: Planning and preparing for change
    o Leadership
    o Researching
    o Resourcing
    o Stakeholder involvement
    o Professional learning
- Stage 3: Realising change
- Stage 4: Evaluating change

Involving parents – Communication between schools and parents of school-aged children

Main findings

1   Almost all schools establish constructive relationships with a wide range of partners, including parents. There is a close relationship between the outcomes of an Estyn inspection and the extent of parents' satisfaction gathered in pre-inspection questionnaires to parents.

2   Many schools are adopting an increasingly comprehensive range of strategies to communicate with parents. However, only a few schools actively consult with parents to identify their preferred methods of communication.

3   The frequency and quality of communication received by parents vary considerably within and across the school sectors. Parents of secondary school children receive considerably less communication from their child's school than parents of children at primary school.

4   A majority of schools use text messaging and social media platforms to give parents information about school events. A minority of schools use a range of digital communication channels to develop a valuable two-way dialogue between teachers and parents, for example through the use of digital applications (apps).

5   Too often schools communicate with one parent only. Because of this, mothers receive the vast majority of communication from schools and this can inadvertently exclude fathers. Only a majority of primary school parents and around a quarter of secondary school parents surveyed feel that their school involves fathers and mothers equally in their child's learning. A few schools have adopted successful strategies to encourage fathers to engage more closely in their child's learning and to contribute to the life of the school.

6   Schools in general have been able to access little external support for their parental engagement approaches, including how to set up and manage their social media accounts. As a result, not all schools know how to use these and other digital platforms well enough or have clear protocols in place to protect the wellbeing of staff and pupils confidently when using them.

7   Generally, parents of primary school children find reports and parents' evenings more useful than parents of secondary school children. Parents prefer it when teachers discuss their child's specific strengths and areas for development. This is more valuable than reports or parents' evenings that only present generic curricular information. In too many schools, reports mainly describe what is taught in lessons rather than how well each child has developed their skills, knowledge and understanding.

8   A majority of schools have adopted a range of different approaches to make it straightforward for parents to raise concerns or ask questions in person. Many

parents know the process for raising concerns at their child's school but around half of secondary school parents do not find contacting their school easy. Where schools have ensured that parents understand whom to contact with different concerns, this has had a positive impact on parents' confidence in approaching the school. Schools that manage their communication from parents well have put in place clear processes for responding to a variety of communication from parents.

9   Most schools across all sectors measure the value of providing additional activities, such as workshops to help parents support their child's literacy or numeracy development, or information evenings on upcoming examinations. However they do this based simply on parent attendance. Too few schools evaluate the impact of strategies to engage parents on pupils' standards and wellbeing.

10   Around half of primary school parents and a minority of secondary school parents report that the school is effective in helping them to support their child's learning. Nearly all schools work appropriately with outside agencies to support individual pupils and their families.

11   An increasing number of schools have appointed home-school co-ordinators to support their work with vulnerable pupils and their families. Occasionally they also support or lead on strategic approaches to family and community engagement activities.

12   Nurture groups and pre-school programmes generally have a positive impact on children and their families. A few schools also provide a valuable range of opportunities for parents to develop their own parenting skills.

13   A majority of secondary school parents and a minority of primary school parents do not feel that they have suitable opportunities to become involved in the life of the school. Schools report mixed responses to their efforts to involve parents directly in the life of the school.

14   Only a minority of parents feel that their school consults well with them on their child's education. Schools across all sectors report that responses to consultation are sometimes low. An increasing number of schools have set up parent forums to enable them to collaborate more effectively with parents on school improvement.

15   Only a few schools are confident that their governing body reflects the socio-economic mix of parents and pupils well. Around half of parents surveyed are not confident that their views are represented well by their child's governing body. This is in part due to their composition, or because parents are not sure who their governors are or what they do.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1   Consult with parents about their communication and engagement needs and review their approaches accordingly to enhance two-way communication

R2   Improve their channels of communication in order to engage with all parents

and guardians, in particular fathers

R3   Ensure that reports and parents' evenings focus on a child's specific strengths and areas for development

R4   Make clear how staff and parent governors can be contacted, and implement helpful and clear processes for dealing with parental communication

R5   Consult on and put in place protocols for parents, pupils and staff on the use of digital communication channels, including social media

R6   Seek ways to ensure that they take good account of the views of the full range of parents that make up the socio-economic mix of the school in self-evaluation and other consultation exercises

R7   Evaluate parental communication and engagement approaches for the purpose of improvement planning, to ensure that they have an impact on pupils' standards

Local authorities should:

R8   Provide support for schools to develop their parental engagement strategies, including the safe and effective use of electronic communication channels, particularly social media

The Welsh Government should:

R9   Give further guidance to schools on how to ensure that governors represent and engage with all parents effectively

Religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3

Main findings

Standards

1   In many schools surveyed, standards of religious education are good. In key stage 2, most pupils make good progress in developing their religious education skills and knowledge, although a minority of more able pupils do not make appropriate progress in line with their ability. In key stage 3, most pupils make good progress in lessons and achieve standards in line with their age and ability. However, a minority of schools often repeat work covered at key stage 2, and as a result pupils do not always make sufficient progress in improving their skills and knowledge.

2   In religious education lessons, most pupils engage well with a wide range of fundamental human and religious questions that focus on the search for meaning, significance and value in life. They discuss important questions with interest and enthusiasm. Many pupils offer considered reasons for their opinions and listen to the views of others respectfully. In the majority of schools, pupils express their personal responses confidently. They use their knowledge of different religions to make appropriate comparisons between their own lives and those of others. Most pupils respond positively to the opportunities that they have to take part in a wide range of interesting debates.

3   Many pupils have a secure understanding of the beliefs and practices of different religions. They have a sound knowledge of Christianity and Islam in particular along with a basic knowledge of at least two other religions.

4   Many pupils consolidate and extend their literacy and thinking and reasoning skills well in religious education lessons. Too few pupils, at key stage 3 in particular, apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively within religious education lessons.

5   Many pupils have a positive attitude towards religious education lessons and contribute with interest to group and class discussions. The majority of key stage 3 pupils understand how religious education supports them to become informed global citizens and feel that this helps them to contribute well in their local community. They are also aware of the issues facing many parts of the world today and feel that their religious education helps them to understand and respect the similarities and differences between people. As they mature, the majority of pupils recognise how this knowledge will benefit them in their adult life and that it will help them in their future careers. In many schools, religious education lessons help pupils to become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

Provision

6   Many schools plan well for religious education at key stage 2. In schools where curriculum planning is weaker, schemes of work do not support staff to teach skills

and knowledge progressively and ensure that they cover the full requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. In the majority of secondary schools, curriculum planning at key stage 3 is good. In these schools, the curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of interesting and stimulating learning experiences that build successfully on their skills and knowledge as they move through the school. A lack of transition work means that in a minority of schools, topics and skills taught in key stage 2 are repeated in key stage 3.

7   Most teachers plan lessons that are stimulating and engage pupils in their learning successfully. However, in key stage 2 most teachers do not plan activities to challenge more able pupils to extend their skills further, or consider more complex religious ideas. In key stage 3, in a few schools, teaching does not engage pupils well enough as teachers do not use a wide enough range of stimulating activities and strategies. Additionally, where teaching is weaker, tasks are too difficult for less able pupils and do not stretch more able pupils well enough.

8   Most key stage 2 teachers have appropriate religious education subject knowledge. A minority of teachers are fearful that they might 'say the wrong thing' when teaching religions other than Christianity, particularly when their knowledge is less secure. Often, a combination of specialist and competent non-specialist teachers teach religious education lessons at key stage 3. In a few cases, the use of non-specialist teachers limits pupils' progress.

9   Nearly all primary schools have strong links with Christian organisations that enrich pupils' learning experiences. However, only a few schools have developed useful links with organisations relating to other faiths. For example, only a minority of pupils at key stage 2 visit a place of worship that is not Christian. Although most secondary schools have a few links with local Christian organisations, these tend to focus on giving pupils opportunities to perform concerts at local places of worship. Only a minority have developed strong and purposeful relationships that enhance learning through visits or visitors contributing to lessons.

10   The quality of teachers' feedback to pupils in key stage 2 and key stage 3 is variable. In lessons in both key stages, most teachers provide pupils with suitable oral feedback on their work. At key stage 3, many teachers' written feedback helps pupils' progress. Written feedback for pupils at key stage 2 is helpful in a few schools.

11   In key stage 2, only a very few teachers use any standardised material to assist them to make judgements on pupils' achievement in religious education. Staff in only a very few primary schools liaise with other schools to moderate their judgements or use Welsh Government exemplar material to assist them.

Leadership

12   Leadership of religious education from headteachers and subject leaders is good overall in the majority of schools. In many primary and nearly all secondary schools, subject leaders regularly monitor that teachers are covering the agreed syllabus. However, at key stage 2, they rarely evaluate the quality of pupils' learning in religious education and, as a result, leaders do not have a secure awareness of

pupils' standards. Nearly all secondary schools undertake an annual self-evaluation for religious education. In a minority of these schools, leaders focus on a narrow range of evidence and do not consider standards of teaching and learning well enough.

13 In most schools, teachers have very limited access to professional learning for religious education. Local authorities and regional consortia offer very little specialist professional learning in religious education for teachers or subject leaders. Only a few primary schools and a minority of secondary schools receive support and challenge specifically for religious education from local authorities or regional consortia. Where there are regular meetings for secondary school subject leaders to share resources and develop schemes of work, teachers find that these help them to improve practice in their school. Most headteachers are aware of the local SACRE but are unsure of its role and purpose. A few SACREs provide schools with a list of approved places of worship to visit. In only a minority of secondary schools are religious education teachers involved in any recent or meaningful school-to-school working that support improvements in teaching and learning in the subject.

14 There is very little transition work between secondary schools and their partner primary schools relating to religious education. As a result, pupils often repeat religious education topics and skills in secondary schools.

15 In most schools, leaders have a secure understanding of their role and responsibilities under the Prevent duty (HM Government, 2015) relating to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Great Britain, 2015). Many leaders recognise how important religious education is in contributing to this agenda. In a few schools, leaders do not fully understand these responsibilities. Many schools need advice on how to address sensitive issues with pupils and how to deal with parental concerns on visiting places of worship.

16 In most schools, leaders have considered changes to the teaching of religious education in light of Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015), although only a minority have made changes to their curriculum so far.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1 Ensure that more able pupils achieve in line with their ability in religious education

R2 Strengthen monitoring and self-evaluation arrangements in key stage 2 to focus on improving pupils' standards and skills in religious education

R3 Strengthen transition arrangements so that learning experiences in key stage 3 build on those in key stage 2 and avoid repetition of work

R4 Evaluate their curriculum for religious education to prepare for the development and implementation of the new Humanities Area of Learning and Experience

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R5 Work with SACREs to provide:

  a. suitable professional learning opportunities for teachers of religious education
  b. support for schools to evaluate their curriculum and plan for religious education as an integral part of the development of the humanities area of learning and experience
  c. advice for schools on how to address sensitive issues with pupils and how to deal with parental concerns on visiting places of worship

R6 Ensure that all leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015

R7 Provide schools with guidance on approved places of worship to visit

The Welsh Government should:

R8 Work with local authorities, regional consortia and SACREs to ensure that there is clarity over the place of religious education within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience

Improving teaching

Main findings

Education research strongly suggests that, of all education factors, classroom teaching has the greatest influence on pupils' learning. In his book, Leadership (for) Teacher Learning, Williams (2016) summarises the findings of many longitudinal studies of teacher effectiveness. He states, 'there is considerable evidence that there are substantial differences in the relative effectiveness of different teachers' and it is likely that, 'the most effective teachers are five times more effective than the least effective' (Williams, 2016, p.35). Williams (2016, p.35) concludes, 'the magnitude of the differences between teachers in their effects on student learning means that it is hard to envisage any effective way of improving the quality of educational outcomes for young people that does not involve a sustained effort to improve the quality of teaching'.

New professional standards for teachers in Wales, (Welsh Government, 2017a), put effective pedagogy at the heart of school improvement and say that this must be the driving focus for school leaders. The OECD report, (The Welsh Educational Reform Journey: A rapid policy assessment, 2017), states that developing a high-quality teaching profession is the key to the future success of schools in Wales. This advice builds on the OECD's 2014 report, Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective, where building professional capital among teachers and leaders was a central recommendation.

The thematic section of the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015-2016 focused on the strengths and areas for development in teachers' professional learning (Estyn, 2017). Evidence gained through inspection activity and thematic survey findings shows that the key areas that contribute to successful professional learning and pedagogy are:

- creating the right culture and conditions for professional learning
- building collaborative and supportive professional relationships within and between schools
- engaging with research evidence and carrying out research
- using data and new technologies as catalysts for improvement and innovation
- learning how to lead professional learning and staff development

The report concluded that good schools place a high premium on learning, for staff as well as for pupils, and that improving teaching was the key process that contributed to improving pupils' standards.

The 2016 OECD report 'What makes a school a learning organisation?' states that organisation-wide practices and culture are the key to a successful learning organisation. The report says that the school's vision must centre on the learning of all pupils, creating a culture of supporting the continuous learning of all staff, and promoting team learning and collaboration among staff. The report suggests that the components vital for staff collaboration are: trust, time, technology and thinking together.

Leaders in all the schools visited as part of this survey are building a culture of trust and collaboration within their schools. Many are fostering a non-threatening and supportive culture around lesson observations and are moving away from routinely making judgements of individual lessons. Instead, they are encouraging staff to evaluate their own practice by using video technology or peer observations. Many want to promote an open classroom culture where teachers learn from each other and willingly discuss strengths and areas for development in their own practice and that of their colleagues. Team learning and collaboration are central to the school as a learning organisation and to the pedagogical development of teachers and support staff. The research of Hattie, Masters and Birch (2016) supports this finding. They conclude that co-operative learning is effective and that the effect of peer learning and feedback is particularly powerful in helping teachers (and pupils) to refine their practice.

Hattie (2009) synthesised the findings from over 800 meta-analyses spanning a 15-year period. The balance of evidence suggested that the classroom practices with the biggest effect on pupil learning were:

- reciprocal teaching – teachers enabling pupils to learn and use self-learning
- feedback – specific responses to pupils' work
- teaching pupils self-verbalisation or self-questioning
- meta-cognition strategies – awareness and knowledge of one's own thinking
- problem-solving techniques

Hattie concluded that, 'these top methods rely on the influence of peers, transparent learning, intentions and success criteria, using various strategies attending to both surface and deep knowing' (Hattie, 2012, p.52).

In the schools visited, leaders and teachers are moving away from a closed classroom culture where teachers do not discuss their teaching. Leaders want teachers to feel comfortable to admit that they are challenged by teaching a particular topic or finding a class difficult. They do not want staff to feel that this is an admission of failure, but rather that it is one professional looking for constructive advice from trusted colleagues. Many schools use a coaching or mentoring approach to help teachers discuss and improve their practice. For example, many schools structure coaching conversations using the GROW model developed by Whitmore (1999). GROW stands for:

- Goal – what do you want to achieve?
- Reality – where are you now?
- Options – how could you achieve your goal?
- Will or Way Forward – what are you going to do?

These approaches have proved beneficial in facilitating professional learning conversations and in helping staff to reflect on and share their practice. In these schools, teachers do not see lesson observations as a part of an external validation process, but as a way to improve practice and pedagogy in their organisation.

In a few weaker schools, leaders use lesson observations as something they 'do' to teachers. They rely heavily on a tick-box approach and make graded judgements

that do not reflect the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. In these schools, leaders tend to make over-inflated judgements about the quality of teaching. They often struggle to identify strengths and areas for development in teaching at a whole-school and individual practitioner level.

In schools where there is effective pedagogy and teaching, leaders know their staff well. They understand individual teachers' current level of practice and the steps needed to reach the teacher's and the school's pedagogical improvement goals. Leaders understand that just gaining more experience does not necessarily improve teacher performance.

Williams (2016) uses a range of research findings to conclude that a teacher's initial performance on entry to the profession is not an indicator of their performance in five years' time. Improving teaching requires deliberate practice within a structured framework of activities that have the explicit goal of improving performance. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest that teachers will not improve their ability, for example in giving effective feedback, only because leaders advocate that it is a good approach. Teachers, whatever their level of experience, will need to observe, experience, inquire into, and try out techniques to develop effective feedback. Leaders in effective schools understand that changing what teachers do in their classrooms will take time and effort. Williams (2016, p.163) states that, 'Sustaining changes in what teachers do in their classrooms involves changing highly automated routines, changing practice is essentially a process of habit change'. Lally et al. (2010) researched how long it took adults to form a habit and found that it took on average **more than two months.** How long it took varied depending on the behaviour, the person, and the circumstances. This suggests that changing practices in teaching will not happen quickly and will take teachers differing amounts of time to embed the desired improvements.

In the past, too many schools and school improvement services have implemented strategies that are not backed by evidence-based research. For example, Pashler, et al. (2008, p.117), concluded that, 'the contrast between the enormous popularity of the learning styles approach within education and the lack of credible evidence for its utility is in our opinion, striking and disturbing, if classification of students' learning styles has practical utility, it remains to be demonstrated'. There is also no evidence that activities such as brain training and brain gym are effective in improving standards. Williams, (2016, p.177), states that, 'Frankly it is self-indulgent to spend time on things (neuroscience, brain gym, lesson study, learning styles) which may or may not help students when there is solid evidence about what does help students'.

Schools that are effective in improving and sustaining teaching performance do not always follow the most recent trends, particularly those that are unproven. Leaders are strong enough to say 'no' to initiatives that do not align with key priorities at their school. In these schools, leaders look for evidence that proposed innovations are likely to have benefits for teachers and pupils. They use research evidence and action research to inform their decisions.

The most effective schools in this survey were those that used evidence well to inform their practice. They were external facing, regularly discussed research, and learnt from best practice in their own and in other organisations. In these schools,

teachers were curious about what worked best for their pupils. They thought critically about pedagogy, read broadly about teaching and learning, and discussed their work with other teachers. Staff strove to understand the "why" and the "how" of teaching as well as the "what".

Leaders in these schools encouraged extensive networking across phases, departments and schools. They had a clear and explicit focus on whole-school pedagogical strategies linked to pupil progress and measured the impact of professional learning on pupil outcomes regularly. In less effective schools, staff waited until the end of an academic year to reflect on how well improvement strategies had affected pupil outcomes.

The most effective schools had clear policies to support teachers in delivering lessons. The policies identified teachers' responsibilities unambiguously in terms of their classroom practice, including planning, assessment and feedback. The policies also made strong links between curriculum, pedagogy, teaching and learning. This led to high levels of consistency and accountability.

Inspection suggests that excellence in teaching combines highly effective pedagogical strategies with contextualising these strategies within different subjects and areas of learning. The most effective teachers and departments have deep subject knowledge and choose the best approach for the activity and subject. Leaders often place similar emphasis on staff learning about recent developments in their phase or subject alongside effective and evidenced pedagogical improvement strategies. This means that the schools are in a good position to deliver the 12 pedagogical principles and address the fundamental interdependency between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy as cited in Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015).

In many of the schools involved in this thematic survey, senior leaders focus well on improving teaching and pedagogy. Generally, they:

- engender a culture of enquiry and engagement
- trust their staff to make professional choices
- have an open classroom policy
- create opportunities for professional dialogue around teaching
- regularly place teaching and pedagogy as agenda items on senior leader and staff meetings
- use professional development days as strategic opportunities to explore further initiatives in teaching and learning
- create dedicated time for teachers to take part in peer observations and action research
- use research to inform the decisions and strategy for their school
- have clear policies for teaching, feedback and curriculum that all staff understand and adhere to
- establish professional relationships within and beyond their region
- seek and act on expert advice

Over the last few years, the Welsh Government has introduced various strategies with the intention of improving the quality of teaching and learning, and of helping

practitioners to develop their practice throughout their careers. The aim is to build capacity and to drive out variations within and between schools. Current education reforms are based on a model of a self-improving system and of school-to-school working. This means that, in the most effective schools, leaders and teachers take responsibility for their own development and that of their peers. This self-improvement approach is school-led, and balanced by support from local authorities, regional consortia and the Welsh Government. Many of the schools visited as part of this survey are well placed to deliver these strategies successfully and to achieve enabling objective 1: developing a high quality education profession as cited in the plan, Education in Wales: our national mission 2017-21 (Welsh Government, 2017b).

Preparing for the Digital Competence Framework (DCF)

Main findings

Leadership

1   In the schools visited, leaders manage change well and have a clear vision about how to prepare for the DCF. These leaders include staff in creating a vision for the DCF and ensure that the governing body understand fully the importance of implementing it well. They communicate their vision clearly with staff. They ensure that staff understand that leaders support the realisation of the DCF fully, and monitor its development carefully.

2   Many of these leaders translate their vision into a comprehensive and practical plan to drive the DCF forward and provide a clear rationale for auditing, training, resourcing, monitoring and evaluating developments. In a minority of schools, arrangements to evaluate the effectiveness of their digital plans are not fully developed.

3   Nearly all these leaders offer effective professional learning opportunities for staff to prepare for the DCF. They ensure that staff have the equipment and opportunities to develop the competence and confidence they need to realise the DCF. A few leaders do not have a good enough understanding of the technical issues that could impact on the school's capacity to realise the DCF fully.

4   Leaders say that they are unsure about when the DCF should be implemented and give this as a reason for some not realising the DCF. There is no explicit realisation date for the DCF, which suggests to some that it will be introduced at the same time as new curriculum, six years after the DCF was first made available. As a result, the DCF could lose impetus.

Role of the digital lead

5   Digital leads in most schools have a thorough knowledge of the DCF. Many teachers value the enthusiasm and support of their digital lead. However, a minority of digital leads have a tendency to create a culture of dependency and troubleshoot technical problems rather than supporting teachers to develop their skills so they can fix these problems themselves. In nearly all instances, the effectiveness of the digital lead is greatest when they have the full support of senior leaders. Digital leads in secondary schools are most effective when they are members of the leadership team or are otherwise able to impact on whole-school decision making.

6   In the majority of secondary schools, digital leads have formed a DCF working group that includes heads of department and teachers from various departments across the school. This approach is effective because it includes a wide range of teachers and ensures that nearly all departments are engaged with the DCF and understand its impact on whole-school developments.

7   In most schools, the digital lead has carried out a hardware and infrastructure audit to ensure that they are robust enough to deliver the DCF. Most digital leads audit teachers' skills carefully to evaluate their readiness for the DCF. They use the information from the audit well to plan training, spread over a realistic timeframe. In a minority of schools, the digital lead has not audited the training needs of all teachers, is unaware of their training needs, and cannot plan fully to support staff.

8   In schools that have mapped the DCF across the curriculum, many digital leads have not decided yet how to address the issue of gaps in provision. Mapping of digital coverage and progression is important to ensure that pupils experience the breadth and richness of skills across the whole of the DCF framework. Unless these gaps in provision are addressed, schools are in danger of replicating current inadequate provision in ICT across the curriculum.

9   Too few digital leads in secondary schools have mapped the provision of the DCF across key stage 4. As a result, most secondary schools are not preparing well enough to realise the DCF in its entirety.

Professional learning

10   In around half the schools visited, nearly all staff have been involved in discussing the digital plan for the school. Through their involvement, many staff are aware of the plan's content, what is involved, and the expectations of them. As a result, most teachers have positive attitudes towards preparing for the DCF and feel involved in the developments.

11   Teachers say that they are more confident with the content strands of 'citizenship', 'interacting and collaborating' and 'producing', than with 'data' and 'computational thinking'. This broadly reflects many teachers' knowledge and understanding of the ICT curriculum content. However, digital leads in school and in consortia consider that this assessment is optimistic and in particular they believe that teachers do not fully appreciate the breadth of the citizenship strand.

12   Practitioners in the foundation phase feel competent enough in most aspects of the DCF to enable them to support pupils appropriately. Practitioners in key stage 2 and above are less secure in delivering the full range of digital skills. Most teachers in special, primary, secondary and all-age schools have started to discuss how to adapt long, mid and short-term plans to incorporate the DCF into the curriculum.

13   Where leaders have not communicated their vision successfully enough, a few teachers do not feel involved and have negative attitudes towards the preparation for the DCF.

14   Centres of initial teacher education and training are beginning to equip trainee teachers with the skills that they need to deliver the breadth and range of digital skills required by the DCF. However, the development of students' skills is too variable due to their limited involvement in DCF developments, and to their lack of awareness of the weaknesses in ICT provision in schools.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1   Involve all stakeholders in developing a clear vision for the DCF

R2   Appoint a digital lead, secure the full support of senior leaders, and monitor developments regularly

R3   Audit teachers' professional learning needs and use this information to plan training, support and guidance over a realistic timeframe

R4   Map the DCF across the curriculum and ensure that there are no gaps in provision and sufficient progression and continuity

R5   Carry out hardware and infrastructure audits

R6   Ensure that staff collaborate with others to share good practice

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R7   Support all schools to address the above recommendations

R8   Monitor how well individual schools are progressing with the realisation of the DCF and challenge limited progress

The Welsh Government should:

R9   Communicate clearly to schools the expectations for embedding the DCF, including timescales

R10   Ensure that initial teacher education courses provide new teachers with the necessary skills to realise the DCF successfully

R11   Improve the audit tool so that it better meets the needs of schools in assessing teachers' confidence to deliver the DCF

New qualifications

Main findings

Schools

1   In English and Welsh lessons, many pupils demonstrate strong oracy skills. However, a few are reluctant to contribute and do not develop their oral skills appropriately. Many pupils have suitable reading skills, but a minority lack competence in higher-order skills, especially those of synthesis in English and of comparison in Welsh. In general, pupils do not use and develop the skills of summary and synthesis frequently enough.

2   Writing is the least developed skill in both languages. In English, a minority of pupils continue to make too many basic errors and have a poor sense of audience. In Welsh, there are basic spelling and grammatical errors in the work of a minority of pupils.

3   In mathematics and mathematics-numeracy lessons, many pupils have a secure understanding of fundamental concepts and a majority have a firm grasp of algebra. A majority are confident in selecting appropriate methods to solve problems. However, a minority of pupils do not have a competent understanding of these concepts and struggle to solve problems effectively. A few pupils do not possess secure basic number skills.

4   In 2017, just over half of pupils successfully completed the skills challenge certificate at level 2 and just under 40% achieved the National (level 2) Welsh Baccalaureate overall. Around 30% of pupils were accredited with the Foundation (level 1) Welsh Baccalaureate. Substantially fewer pupils gained the very highest grades in this qualification than in English, Welsh or mathematics. Girls perform considerably better than boys (Welsh Government, 2017b). During their skills challenges, most pupils develop skills such as teamwork, personal organisation and time management. In many of these lessons, pupils develop their oracy, reading and writing skills suitably. Generally, pupils do not develop their numeracy or ICT skills well enough in Welsh Baccalaureate lessons.

5   In most cases, pupils are very positive about their English, Welsh and mathematics lessons. The majority feel well prepared for their examinations. A majority of pupils are broadly positive about the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification, although a minority are negative. Pupils' attitudes generally reflect the status that a particular school, especially its leaders, places on this course.

6   Most schools have redesigned their schemes of work to prepare pupils for the 'PISA style' questions seen in the new GCSE specifications. A majority of schools have made suitable adaptations to their teaching in response to the new specifications. However, there has not been enough planning to extend more able pupils, especially in the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification. Teaching is effective in many GCSE lessons and in the majority of Welsh Baccalaureate lessons.

7   Most subject leaders show enthusiasm for their subject and many lead their departments competently. The majority have a suitable understanding of how to evaluate learning and teaching in their department. A minority do not correctly identify weaknesses in provision, which restricts their ability to plan for improvement. In the majority of schools, staff are chosen to deliver the Welsh Baccalaureate mainly on their timetable availability, and there is too much variation in the enthusiasm and expertise among teachers delivering the course. The quality of leadership for the Welsh Baccalaureate is also too variable.

8   Most senior leaders have supported departments strongly in preparing for the new courses. Many senior leaders have increased the curriculum time for these subjects. However, there has been a narrowing of the curriculum in many schools. For example, although nearly all schools include a suitable focus on literature as part of their English language and Welsh language lessons, the proportion of pupils following GCSE English or Welsh literature and other subjects has declined considerably since 2012.

9   Many schools enter pupils early for examinations. This strategy may be appropriate for the most able pupils and in ensuring that pupils at risk of disaffection or leaving the area before the end of Year 11 gain a qualification. However, large-scale early entry is expensive, disrupts the normal running of schools, and often results in pupils sitting examinations for which they are not fully prepared. Pupils often settle for the first grade they receive and do not continue with their studies in that subject. As a result, they frequently do not reach their full potential in terms of the grades attained or in their understanding.

10   There has been a wide variation in the quality of support for schools from the regional consortia, local authorities and the WJEC. In a majority of cases, feedback from schools indicates that there has been suitable support from the WJEC to deliver the new courses and to prepare pupils for the new examinations. However, in a minority of instances, schools feel that there has been a lack of clarity and consistency in this support.   Schools are generally positive about the support provided by regional consortia. Overall, the system of support offered to schools has been successful in facilitating the transition to the new specifications.

Further education colleges

11   Most learners consolidate their learning from school well and many make suitable progress in preparing for GCSE resit examinations in English and mathematics. The Welsh Government does not publish data about the outcomes of these examinations.

12   Most learners have positive attitudes to their work in their GCSE English and mathematics resit lessons. In general, colleges have planned well so that learners can study for and resit GCSE courses. There has been a substantial increase in the number of learners enrolled on GCSE English and mathematics, but not in GCSE Welsh programmes.In their Welsh Baccalaureate lessons, most learners engage well with tasks and gain a useful range of skills that supplement their vocational skills. However, only a minority of learners would take the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification out of choice.

13   Most teachers have a strong rapport with the learners and maintain classes that are calm, well focused and conducive to learning and good behaviour. In a few lessons, teachers do not adapt their teaching sufficiently to meet the needs of all learners. As a result, lower ability learners struggle and higher ability learners are not are challenged enough. In general, colleges do not receive enough information from schools about learners' prior attainment for them to address specific areas for development in a timely manner.

14   Most Welsh Baccalaureate teachers receive appropriate training and understand the requirements of the specification well. However, only a minority have access to networks of good practice with other colleges or schools.

15   Senior leaders are committed to ensuring that learners have access to GCSEs in English language and mathematics and the Welsh Baccalaureate qualifications. In most colleges, roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability in relation to the GCSEs are clear. There has been appropriate investment in recruiting new staff and training existing staff to deliver the new qualifications

16   Most colleges have effective self-evaluation procedures. However, in a few cases, self-evaluation does not result in an accurate picture of the quality of teaching, or of learning, especially in Welsh Baccalaureate classes

Recommendations

Schools and colleges should:

R1   Challenge the full ability range and provide stimulating tasks that develop the resilience of learners

R2   Ensure that learners improve their writing in English and Welsh

R3   Have high expectations that all learners contribute orally especially in Welsh

R4   Improve pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics and in mathematics-numeracy

R5   Develop pupils' higher-order reading skills in English, Welsh and mathematics and the Welsh Baccalaureate

R6   Improve boys' performance in Welsh, English and the Welsh BaccalaureateHelp more pupils to gain the highest grades in the Welsh Baccalaureate

R7   Provide better opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy and ICT skills in the Welsh Baccalaureate

R8   Consider carefully their staffing and timetabling for the Welsh Baccalaureate and the status they place on the qualification

R9   Provide training for middle leaders to help them evaluate standards and teaching in their departments

R10 Work together better to ensure that they have legal, secure, and comprehensive arrangements for sharing information about learners' prior attainments and to develop networks of professional practice

In addition:

R11 Schools should consider the breadth of their curriculum, including opportunities and encouragement to study English literature and Welsh literature

R12 Colleges should increase the number of learners resitting GCSE Welsh language

Youth Support Services in Wales

Main findings

1   All young people have a right to high quality support through youth work. They need access to activities outside of formal education, in safe environments that open them up to new opportunities, help them make relationships, build friendships, and learn new skills. From time to time, they will also need support that helps them to understand their life choices and make important decisions. In Wales, professional youth workers traditionally provide this support.

2   The most vulnerable and marginalised young people additionally face multiple difficulties, including poverty, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, learning difficulties, substance abuse, mental health issues, and homelessness. Helping these young people remains a major moral challenge for society. The support for these young people that is most successful in the long-term is engagement with well-trained youth workers who take time to build a relationship of trust with them. They then can foster these young people's personal development, build their confidence and resilience, and develop their social skills, so that they are more likely to make better life decisions and in due course re-engage with learning programmes. Such support needs to be flexible and non-judgmental.

3   There are many varied and effective youth support services available to young people in Wales underpinned by a wide range of legislation and policy, derived from the UK Government, the Welsh Government, and the European Commission. However, these services are not available to all young people. There is no overall strategy for the planning, provision or funding of services, and policy makers and providers do not have one clear, shared vision for the delivery of services, or how youth work contributes to young people's personal development and their role in the community and wider society.

4   The type of youth support services being delivered in Wales has changed since the publication of the Extending Entitlement directions and guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002). For a variety of reasons, there has been a decline in the availability of traditional open-access youth provision, and of community-based and street-based work. In some cases, third-sector charities have replaced local authorities in providing this type of provision. There has been a corresponding increase in targeted, referral-based, 'corrective' intervention work with young people. This increase has led to a fragmentation of services, with young people being referred to several different intervention services. Many young people who would benefit from services no longer have open-access to support.

5   Open-access youth provision is attended voluntarily by young people, and usually provided on a neighbourhood basis. These services were previously based on the self-determined needs of young people. Many of the services now provided are focused on individuals or groups to address specific needs identified by others to meet national policy agendas, rather than on the self-identified needs of young

people themselves. The majority of these services are aimed at the under-18 age group. This targeted work is most effective where youth work practice is the dominant model used by professionals.

6   While it is sensible for scarce resources to be used to support the most vulnerable, the policy of more 'targeted' interventions has had the unintended consequence of many of the most vulnerable young people being unable to access the support they need, because they are often not engaged with the services that can refer them.

7   The core principles of Extending Entitlement (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002) are still relevant. However, since Extending Entitlement, the large number of new policy developments have not taken enough account of the entitlements and rights of all young people to access services. The wide diversity of priorities introduced by these policy developments has weakened the ability of local authorities and other providers of youth support services, including the voluntary sector, to plan and deliver services effectively and in collaboration. Presently, there is no integrated model for planning services that builds on the provision within the sector as whole. Recent legislation affecting local authorities has led to the dissipation of formal partnerships for the delivery of youth support services.

8   Cuts in resources have also impacted on local authorities' abilities to plan and prioritise youth support services. Local authorities take different approaches to the planning and delivery of services, but the core principle of Extending Entitlement, which is that planning should focus on the specific needs of young people and that young people should help determine those needs, is no longer the basis for much of the provision. Ensuring a focus on young people's needs is made more difficult where funding is tightly bound to hard outcomes, such as recognised qualifications. These fixed outcomes make it difficult for youth workers who work with the most vulnerable young people, who need significant personal support before they can begin learning programmes. Even so, in most areas, youth workers in the local authority youth service and voluntary sector settings have shown resilience and the ability to adapt, and apply the core principles of youth work in a variety of settings.

9   The wide range of youth support services available to young people is often developed on a reactive basis, and local planning does not ensure that there is equality of access either to open-access or targeted services. This particularly affects young people living close to local authority borders, where inter-authority planning is weak. There is also a lack of parity of provision of services across the full age range of 11 to 25.

10   The voluntary sector plays a vital role in providing all types of youth support services, but is not sufficiently included by local government in planning processes. There is good and often excellent informal partnership working at local levels, but provision is often developed in an *ad hoc* way, based on available funds and established links. There are now fewer local authority open-access centres where traditional youth work takes place. The voluntary sector now carries out much of this work.

11   National and local mechanisms for consulting with young people are in place, but it is unclear how well this work contributes to the planning and evaluation of services, that affect young people.

12   There is a lack of clarity among service providers and policy makers about the terminology used when discussing services to support young people. The term 'youth work' is often confused with 'work with young people'. This leads to conflicting ideologies and priorities, which does not help to support policy development. For example, youth work refers to a professional methodology for working with young people. It is based on a clear set of values and underpinned by the voluntary nature of the relationship between the young person and the youth worker, but this is often confused with the settings in which it is delivered. It is also confused with general work with young people even when there is no supportive or educational aspect.

13   Youth work is a professional, skilled way of working that makes an important contribution to developing young people as individuals and in supporting the development of their social skills. Youth work in schools is now more established, better understood, and increasingly valued by 'formal education' providers. Access to a youth worker often plays a key role in supporting young people with multiple barriers to learning. Young people value the services, but access to a youth worker is often targeted and therefore not always available to all young people. There is not as much youth work taking place in further education colleges and work-based learning providers.

14   The important contribution of planning for the development of the youth work profession, and the importance of appropriate qualification and in-service training of youth workers, is not included in the current national strategy for youth work in Wales.

15   There is no effective strategy to ensure that Welsh and English languages are treated equally in the delivery of youth support services. Open-access provision in Welsh is usually provided by the voluntary sector, but there are few Welsh or bilingual services, and especially a lack of specialist support services through the medium of Welsh.

16   How youth support services are held to account for the work they do is unclear. The primary accountability is to those providing grant funding. The introduction of the Quality Mark for youth work has brought positive and supportive aspects to the quality assurance of local authority and voluntary sector youth services and a few youth support services. However, it is unclear how young people's rights enshrined in Extending Entitlement are delivered and the impact of the services on young people is not well evaluated.

Recommendations

Local authorities should:

R1   Consult meaningfully with young people, so that they can influence the planning for and evaluation of the services available to them at a local level

R2   Provide safe spaces for young people in local areas so that they have access to services, and activities, which support their development as individuals, and as members of their local community

R3   Make sure that strategic plans have clear priorities informed by local intelligence for services that support young people

R4   Make sure that local authority departments and other bodies work in partnership to provide services for young people, which address their needs

Providers should:

R5   Make sure that their services enable young people to identify for themselves their interests, goals, and needs

R6   Work in partnership at a local and regional level to improve access to the range of services for young people

R7   Make sure that professional youth work standards and principles are used by workers in all youth support service projects

The Welsh Government should:

R8   Provide the policy basis through which youth work, as a way of working with young people, becomes embedded in all services

R9   Clarify the use of the terminology 'youth work', 'youth service,' and 'youth support services' in Wales in order to provide a universally understood language for policy development and delivery

R10   Establish ways of holding local authorities and their partners to account for the quality, range and types of youth support services they provide in their area

R11   Include the qualification, training and ongoing development of youth workers in the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales

The quality of education and training for young people engaged with youth offending teams

Main findings

1   Most YOTs are now working with fewer young people who have been referred to them by the courts, though these young people still represent around half of the YOT cases across Wales. The other young people that YOTs work with are those in danger of offending. Most of those young people have complex needs, such as speech and language difficulties, mental health issues and involvement with social services due to factors within their families.

2   For young people of school age, most YOTs have good arrangements with local authorities and schools to gain education assessment information. Generally, the YOT supports school staff well to help minimise the disruption to young people's education. However, in a few areas, schools do not notify the YOT quickly enough when they exclude young people from education.

3   Young people of school age engaged with the YOT improve their engagement in education, although generally the amount of time they spend in education or training is too little.

4   Too many young people above school age who are engaged with YOTs are not in education, employment or training. YOTs face a range of challenges in finding suitable opportunities for these young people and do not plan strategically to improve the range of opportunities.

5   Nearly all YOTs aim to develop soft skills, such as confidence, social skills and self-esteem, in which many learners need to make progress. However, YOTs do not have clear methods of tracking the progress young people make in developing these skills.

6   Most YOTs have a dedicated worker to secure education, employment or training opportunities for their young people. A very few services do not employ education, employment Or training co-ordinators, and in these cases staff do not always have the effective links with the local 'opportunity providers' needed to enable young people to make progress.

7   Engagement in education, employment or training is one of the most important factors in reducing reoffending. However, YOT services do not routinely record, monitor or report to their management boards the length of time that it takes for their young people to access education, employment or training, particularly if the young people are not in education, employment or training.

8   Literacy and numeracy are key enablers for young people to progress into and within education, employment or training. However, across Wales YOTs do not have a consistent or effective strategy to ensure appropriate support for young people whose literacy and numeracy skills need to be further developed.

9   There are good examples of the YOT working with individual opportunity providers to secure provision for young people. However, YOT management boards do not engage strategically with key providers such as further education and work-based learning, to understand and influence the range of opportunities across the local area. No management boards have further education and work-based learning providers as members.

10   YOTs obtain views well from young people and their parents or carers, to help improve bespoke support and evaluate progress.

11   YOTs manage quality mainly by discussing with young people, their parents or carers and case workers about how effectively young people are progressing. However, there are no consistent methods to enable managers to evaluate the impact of their work on the progress that young people make.

12   Overall, quality improvement and strategic planning are underdeveloped.

13   YOT management boards do not hold partners to account well enough for the quality of their work or for planning strategically to improve the opportunities available to prevent young people from offending or reoffending. They focus too narrowly on reporting against national performance indicators.

Recommendations

Local authorities and YOTs should:

R1   Assess the progress that young people make in developing soft skills, such as confidence, social skills, and self-esteem, and in improving their literacy and numeracy skills

R2   Ensure that all services have a dedicated education, training and employment (education, employment or training) co-ordinator

R3   Ensure that young people receive their entitlement to education in a timely manner, and report to management boards the length of time that young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET)

R4   Develop effective strategies that support young people in developing literacy and numeracy skills

R5   Evaluate the quality, effectiveness and impact of their service better to improve quality, and inform strategic planning to enhance education, employment or training opportunities for young people

R6   Extend the range of non-statutory members of the management board to include key local education and training providers

Higher Apprenticeships in work-based learning

Main findings

1   There has been an increase in the number of learners undertaking higher apprenticeship programmes in work-based learning over the last five years. Over the last four years, the rates at which learners successfully complete their higher apprenticeship qualification have improved, but they are still low in comparison to apprenticeships at lower levels. The rates at which learners successfully complete their qualification vary too much between different providers. A minority of higher apprenticeship learners take too long to complete their training programmes.

2   Most higher apprenticeship learners undertake programmes in health and social care and business, administration and law. There are very few learners taking higher apprenticeships in the skills priority areas of information technology and engineering.

3   Most higher apprenticeship learners demonstrate strong practical skills in the workplace. In many cases, they build on existing skills to develop a clear understanding and set of competences when undertaking complex tasks. Learners joining the programme with degrees or higher-level literacy skills tend to make strong progress in gaining qualifications as part of the framework. However, a minority of learners, particularly those learners moving on from level 3 frameworks, make slower progress and struggle to articulate the required theory knowledge in written assessments.

4   Nearly all learners and employers value the opportunity to participate in the higher apprenticeship programme. Many learners benefit from gaining new qualifications or accrediting their existing skills into formal qualifications. Around half of learners attend useful off-the-job training sessions to support their learning, for example with professional seminars, and workshops for finance and digital literacy. However, many employers do not support learners to attend these sessions.

5   Most employers promote the programme with their existing staff to ensure a better qualified workforce. In the best cases, employers allocate an experienced mentor to work with the learner, but, in a few cases, learners do not receive any mentoring support from their employer. Many work-based learning providers work well with a wide range of employers to promote and encourage learners to join the higher apprenticeship programme. However, a few providers do not engage with a wide enough range of employers to contribute to the higher apprenticeship programmes. In addition, a few providers do not work effectively with employers to match learners on programmes that link well to their job roles.

6   Most providers have improved their recruitment and initial assessment practices. All providers carry out the Wales Essential Skill Toolkit (WEST) assessment process to identify and determine learners' literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs. However, learners say that this assessment process is often time consuming and training providers do not take into account learners' previous literacy and numeracy qualifications as 'proxies' for essential skills qualifications. In a few cases, this

means that learners are required to complete essential skills qualifications or WEST resources unnecessarily.

7   Almost all providers gather information through initial assessment about the language ability and preference of learners. However, few learners take up the opportunity to complete their assessments in Welsh despite being provided with Welsh-speaking assessors and Welsh-language materials.

8   Nearly all providers deliver a comprehensive induction package, either with small groups of learners or in one-to-one sessions. These sessions are generally informative and cover topics such as health, safety and wellbeing, safeguarding, how assessment activities will be carried out, and the learner's responsibilities while on the training programme. In a few cases, providers do not explain clearly the time commitment and amount of work required by learners. This can lead to learners leaving the training programme early due to pressure of work or family commitments.

9   Nearly all assessors use a broad range of methods to assess vocational skills. They support the learners well and understand their individual needs. In a few cases, assessors do not use higher-level questioning to develop learners' skills and knowledge further. A few assessors are not qualified or experienced enough at the level required to carry out assessment activities.

10   Across all the work-based learning providers visited, the standard of learners' work in portfolios was appropriate to the level of qualification. However, the quality of written feedback from assessors is too variable. In the best examples, assessors give constructive feedback on how to improve, but when feedback is of poorer quality, written feedback is very limited or not provided in a timely manner.

11   Most assessors visit learners regularly to review their progress and keep in contact by telephone and email. Generally, assessors set appropriate targets for learners and encourage them to work independently, often using research skills to investigate and analyse the information they need for their assignments. The Welsh Government sets contractual requirements for providers to undertake learner progress reviews. These reviews are generic and do not differentiate between learners from foundation to higher apprenticeship programmes. A few assessors, who have learners in managerial positions, do not always adapt the review process to make it more appropriate for the level of the learners' qualifications and the experience these learners already have in reviewing staff performance.

12   Leaders and managers in the majority of work-based learning providers have not had sufficient impact in securing improvement in success rates. In these providers, quality improvement plans do not focus enough on the performance of higher apprenticeship programmes as part of their quality processes. Only a few work-based learning providers manage their higher apprenticeship programmes well and have been able to secure consistently strong outcomes.

Recommendations

Work-based learning providers should ensure that:

R1   All learners complete their qualification framework in a timely manner to improve successful completion rates

R2   All learners are on the correct higher apprenticeship programme to reduce the high number of early drop outs

R3   All learners have a mentor to support them in the work place

R4   Employers provide support for learners to attend workshops and off-the-job training sessions

R5   They engage with and recruit new employers to participate in training programmes to reduce the over-reliance on existing employers

The Welsh Government should:

R6   Make sure that all providers understand how qualifications can be accredited for prior learning for essential skills qualifications

R7   Match the number of higher apprenticeships in different sector subject areas more closely to demand by employer and the economy of Wales

Readiness for additional learning needs reform

Main findings

1 Between 2015 and 2018, care, support and guidance have been good or better in over nine-in-ten primary schools, seven-in-ten special schools and secondary schools, and a third of PRUs. These schools and PRUs with good and excellent practice have the following characteristics that mean they are well placed to make the transition to the new ALN system:

   - inclusive ethos and culture
   - clear leadership roles
   - being a learning organisation
   - high aspirations based on strong assessment practice
   - working with partners
   - investing in staff
   - supporting parents and pupils
   - strong school improvement processes

2 The majority of schools have a good awareness of the changes planned under the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). Many schools are kept informed of the ALN reforms by senior staff with a responsibility for SEN, such as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). Around half of schools remain updated through personal interest.

3 Nearly all school SENCOs/ALNCOs have received training and support from the local authority on the proposed new ALN system. A particular focus has been on the introduction of PCP.

4 As a result, many schools and staff are aware of PCP. A majority of schools are already introducing the approach with staff, pupils and parents. Generally, this change in approach has been positively received by staff. There is evidence of schools providing a range of strategies to engage positively with parents, including holding targeted information sessions and making DVDs to share the work they are carrying out with parents. The case studies in this report show that involving pupils more in their learning and target setting can empower them and improve wellbeing and attitudes to learning. For a few schools, such as those involved in pilots, this practice is more established than in others.

5 Nearly all schools acknowledge the views of pupils are important in informing their planning. Many schools report that they gain a better understanding of the needs of the child when they use PCP. Many schools believe pupils know who is co-ordinating their support and, where appropriate, pupils are able to contribute to the process and can start to take responsibility for their learning. As a result, just over half of schools believe pupils are more aware of their needs and are engaged in the process.

6   PCP is leading to schools working more closely with other agencies involved with the family and child such as social services or health provision. For those schools who have established this process, the impact of this multi-agency approach for the pupil and parent is positive. The majority of schools state other agencies involved with the child have a better understanding of the child and their needs through PCP approaches.

7   Many schools are aware of the draft ALN Code published February 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017a). The draft Code is being used to support schools to review current provision and to begin to shape the use of PCP. In a few cases, the draft Code is being used to inform early discussions for the implementation of IDPs, although this is in its initial stages, in schools and local authorities. A few schools are focusing on piloting the use of IDPs in consultation with their local authorities.

8   There are a few aspects of current practice which need to be improved for the ALN reform and transformation agenda to achieve the intended outcomes. In a minority of schools, the assessment and tracking of individual pupils' progress are weak. This hinders their ability to plan and implement appropriate strategies to support pupils with SEN. In addition, schools do not always share information well enough with other agencies to develop a full picture of a pupil's needs.

9   Across Wales, teachers' knowledge and understanding of SEN in general and of the specific needs of pupils they teach are variable. Teachers do not differentiate or adapt their teaching approaches well enough to meet the needs of pupils with SEN or use suggested strategies contained in advice or IEPs/IDPs.

10   Too few schools prioritise whole-school training on SEN or do enough to develop inclusive whole-school approaches and ownership of provision for pupils with SEN. They do not work closely enough with other schools to share their good practice or specialist staff and resources.

11   There are areas where the benefits of PCP approaches have not yet been realised. For example, in around half the schools in this survey, only the SENCo/ALNCo has been trained in PCP and so it has not been adopted across the school. A minority of schools feel that other agencies are clear in their commitment to support the pupil and provide information to support the process or attend person-centred planning meetings. However, the ALN reform is at its early stages of implementation.

12   Schools that have adopted PCP approaches have developed good communication systems with parents.

Recommendation

Local authorities, regional consortia and schools should:

R1   Remain up-to-date with all guidance and training materials produced by the Welsh Government and support staff to implement the additional learning needs reforms effectively

The professional learning continuum: mentoring in initial teacher education

Main findings

1   The most effective mentoring takes place in schools where there is an established culture of learning. In these schools, there is a strong focus on developing effective teaching. Supporting student teachers to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding is seen as part of a continuum of professional learning. These schools see themselves as 'learning schools' and that the practice of developing student teachers is part of the same process as developing practising teachers.

2   In the most effective schools, mentoring has a high status. Headteachers identify mentors strategically. They ensure that mentors have the leadership skills to develop others. These schools invest in their mentors and ensure that they support student teachers well. Senior mentors in these schools ensure that mentoring is undertaken effectively, and has a positive impact on students, mentors and the school. However, in many schools, even where there is an emphasis on developing and coaching teachers, mentors do not apply the skills they have learnt through whole-school professional development activities to their mentoring of student teachers.

3   The mentor training currently provided by the centres of ITE places too much emphasis on completion of documentation rather than developing the skills, knowledge and understanding required to mentor successfully. In addition, ITE quality assurance procedures focus too heavily on consistency and conformance at the expense of ensuring quality. As a result, ITE centres do not have robust enough processes to identify the strengths and weaknesses in mentoring, nor do they share best practice effectively enough. There is no common understanding of coaching and mentoring and too many mentors do not have good enough knowledge, understanding and skills of the most effective approaches in teacher education.

4   Many mentors have a good understanding of their role, as required by the ITE centre. Mentors view their role mainly in terms of supporting students to meet the standards for QTS and assessing their progress towards this goal. Very few mentors see their role as teacher educators engaged in the pedagogy of ITE, or identify specifically the approaches that they take to teaching students how to teach, including developing subject knowledge and developing pedagogy.

5   The few most effective mentors have a good understanding of how to build students' knowledge and experience incrementally, starting with more structured and supported learning activities and developing students' independence, reflection and criticality as they become more experienced. They build students' resilience well.

6   These effective mentors are often actively engaged in professional learning activities, research, or higher-level study. Although these learning opportunities are not always related directly to mentoring student teachers, these mentors are able to transfer their learning to consideration of how students develop their teaching. These

mentors use their skills of reflection and critical analysis to develop student teachers. They are good role models of career-long professional learning. A few mentors who have undertaken leadership programmes transfer aspects of this training intelligently to the context of mentoring. In particular, their learning about interpersonal skills, team-building and developing others has helped them to develop the emotional awareness to provide feedback to students that is sensitive, encouraging and stimulating.

7   Effective mentors provide accurate written feedback that captures students' progress fairly and holistically. They describe specific targets, and support students through a wide range of learning experiences to meet these targets. The most effective mentors teach their students using 'learning conversations', dialogue that develops students' critical and reflective skills, and helps students to analyse the practice of teaching and consider educational theory.

8   Currently, there are too few links between the university-based and school-based aspects of ITE programmes and too few opportunities for students to connect educational theory to teaching practice.

9   Very few students are able to identify the skills and behaviours that they need for career-long professional learning. Generally, students do not develop their skills of critical analysis, reflection and evaluation well enough over the duration of their programmes. They do not engage well enough with research and professional dialogue with their tutors and mentors to make the crucial links between theory and practice.

10   A majority of students benefit from undertaking research projects that require them to reflect on teaching and learning and to connect this valuably to educational research. These projects also help mentors to develop their knowledge and understanding of theory in relation to practice. However, many students do not find that the assignments that they are required to write help them to develop their teaching skills.

11   In the main, students do not reflect critically enough in the written evaluations of their teaching and progress against their targets. They do not present evidence of deeper thinking, such as making connections between other learning experiences, or draw upon research and wider reading.

Recommendations

ITE partnership schools should:

R1   Link their work in ITE more strongly to the development of practice and provision in school, and especially to that of professional learning

R2   Work closely with their university partners to ensure that mentors have the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for teacher educators

R3   Develop robust plans to improve the research skills of school staff, making the most of their partnership with their university partner

R4   Ensure that senior mentors play a strategic role in developing mentors and in evaluating the effectiveness of ITE partnership working

R5   Work alongside university partners to design and implement ITE programmes that ensure a successful blend of theory and practice.

Universities should:

R6   Work closely with schools to support the development of research skills and strategies

R7   Improve mentor training and development to focus more on the skills of teacher education

R8   Work with schools to develop more robust processes to evaluate the quality of mentoring

R9   Work alongside university partners to design programmes that ensure a successful blend of theory and practice

R10   Strengthen student teachers' skills of reflection, evaluation and critical analysis

R11   In collaboration with their partner schools, consider the most effective ways to assess students that takes good account of their development towards QTS

Welsh Government should:

R12   Work with ITE providers to support a national approach to mentor development in ITE

A levels in sixth forms and further education colleges

Standards

1   Many A level learners make strong progress in their knowledge and understanding. These learners have secure recall of previous learning and apply their prior knowledge and skills confidently to new situations. A few learners make insufficient progress. In some cases, and particularly for learners with modest levels of academic achievement at GCSE, this is because they do not have the background knowledge, depth of understanding or the level of skill required to study at advanced level. In other cases, learners lack the perseverance and motivation to do well and do not have sufficient interest in their studies.

2   Most learners enjoy their A level studies, although finding them much more difficult than GCSEs. They appreciate the level of intellectual challenge and the opportunity to study a limited range of subjects of their choice. Many also gain a sense of achievement and pride because they have to do more for themselves and display a clear sense of ambition regarding the grades that they hope to achieve.

3   Well-developed independent learning skills are crucial to success at A level. Many learners develop these skills well during their A level studies, but a majority lack strong enough independent learning skills when they start their A level courses and a minority remain too dependent on others for support. On the whole, current GCSEs do not prepare learners well enough for the level of independent study required to study A levels. Many learners organise their work and their time efficiently, though a few, particularly boys, have weak organisational skills and struggle to keep up with the demands of their studies.

4   Most learners find studying A levels stressful because they feel that A levels are 'high tariff' qualifications that have serious implications for the rest of their lives. The demands of studying three or four subjects as well as an additional qualification such as the Welsh Baccalaureate adds to this stress, especially as around half of learners have additional responsibilities such as part-time jobs or caring responsibilities.

5   Studying A levels is not the most suitable option for all learners who study these qualifications. Around 20% of Year 12 learners fail to progress from AS to A levels. Learners with low attainment at GCSE are more likely to not complete Year 12 or not progress to Year 13 than other learners. In most cases, A level courses were not the best option for these learners.

6   Between 2014 and 2016 there was a flatlining in performance at A level in Wales. During this time, Wales was the poorest performing region in the UK in terms of A levels. In 2017, A level results in Wales showed strong improvements and these were, on the whole, sustained in 2018. However, comparisons with England and Northern Ireland are increasingly difficult to make because of growing differences in the regulations and assessment protocols between these countries. There has also been a decline over five years in the number of entries for both AS levels and A levels. This is largely due to the reduction in size of the 18 and 17-year old

population groups. It can also be partially attributed to a fall in the average number of A and AS level qualifications taken by learners, with many taking fewer A and AS levels, partly because they study the Welsh Baccalaureate (Qualifications Wales, 2018).

7   There is a notable difference between outcomes at A and AS level, with A level performance being markedly stronger. In particular, a high number of U grades are awarded at AS level. There are many more entries for AS levels than A levels.

8   Girls in Wales generally outperform boys at both A and AS level. The poor performance of boys at AS level is a concern. At AS level nearly 92% of all subject entries by girls in 2018 gained A-E grades while the equivalent figure for boys is around 88%. In each of the past five years, there are around 4000 more entries for A levels by girls than boys.

9   Differences in approach to collecting, analysing and publishing post-16 data in schools and colleges has meant that it has not been possible to make straightforward comparisons across these sectors or between providers, although they deliver the same A level qualifications. Currently, there is no published national 'value-added' data that shows how well learners progress from their starting points. A new suite of post-16 'consistent measures' in development intends to address these difficulties. However, schools and colleges are not yet sufficiently aware of the new measures and are not using them to evaluate their provision enough.

10   Many A level learners successfully progress to university. A few secure places at highly competitive universities such as Oxford or Cambridge and a minority gain places at Russell Group universities. However, the collection of data regarding the destinations of A level learners is inconsistent and does not give a clear picture.

Provision

11   A passion for the subject, secure subject knowledge, and a thorough understanding of examination requirements are features of effective A level teaching. Successful A level teachers also facilitate independent learning particularly well.

12   Many teachers encourage wider reading around specific topics or texts but not so much around the subject in general. In many cases, and often due to time restrictions, all learning is linked to examinations. Conversely, a few teachers stray too far beyond the syllabus and do not focus sufficiently on the requirements of the examinations. There is a lack of a general, wide-ranging consideration of the subject often required by universities.

13   Over recent years there has been considerable reform to A levels in Wales. This has also been a time of great change at key stages 3 and 4, including changes to GCSEs. The pace and degree of change means that there is a concern that curriculum reform and planning for progression from key stage 3 and across GCSE and A levels is not always planned in a cohesive manner to provide learners with the breadth and depth of knowledge required for A level study.

14   There are considerable differences across the country in the choice of A level subjects available to learners. The range of subjects offered at A level varies according to geographical location, staff expertise, language medium, provider size,

whether or not there are partnerships with other centres, and between schools and colleges. Most centres offer vocational qualifications as well as A levels, though, in most schools the choice of vocational qualifications is more limited than the choice of A levels.

15   While most learners are offered an apparently 'free choice' in terms of A level subjects, their choices are restricted by a number of factors. These include centres often appropriately setting minimum grades for study or requiring learners to study more subjects than they wish.

16   While many learners and their parents are happy with the quality of advice and guidance they have received, in reality they do not have access to clear information about which are the best A level providers in their locality.

17   Advice and guidance for a few learners, mainly those with low attainment at GCSE, are unsuitable. These learners are more likely not to complete Year 12 or not to progress to Year 13 than other learners. In general, advice and guidance is too focused on academic routes such as A levels and university, at the expense of other career paths. In schools with sixth forms, advice and guidance is often focused on keeping learners in their sixth form.

18   Many leaders and teachers have expressed concerns over the lateness of the availability of courses and materials to support their teaching such as examination specifications and specimen papers.

Leadership

19   The limitations of current A level data (as outlined in appendix 1) has meant that it has been difficult for schools and colleges to know how well they are performing, for learners and their parents to compare providers, and for centres to be held to account for their A level outcomes. As a result, the main focus of the accountability system for secondary schools has been on key stage 4 outcomes and until recently there has been relatively little focus on post-16 outcomes. The Welsh Government has recognised that the current performance indicators at post-16, in schools and colleges, are not fit for purpose and do not give a clear picture of performance. The new set of 'consistent measures', designed to address these shortcomings, are in the final stages of development.

20   In a majority of schools, self-evaluation and improvement planning processes do not focus sufficiently on provision and leadership or on the impact on outcomes. In many colleges, self-assessment and improvement planning processes focus too heavily on success rates and not on the grades learners attain.

21   Schools and colleges do not collaborate enough in terms of sharing good practice and improving teachers' subject expertise. There is a lack of professional learning opportunities for A level teaching and subject specialisms.

22   A level funding drives certain behaviours in schools and colleges that have negative unintended consequences. For example, where funding is allocated per A level, centres may encourage learners to study more A levels or relax entry requirements for learners with low attainment at GCSE, although this may not be the most suitable option for these learners. This contributes to weaker attainment and a higher 'drop out' rate.

Recommendations

Schools and colleges should:

R1   Improve A level outcomes, particularly at AS level and especially those of boys

R2   Improve the advice and guidance given to learners by:
   a.   considering carefully learners' levels of educational attainment at GCSE when giving advice and guidance
   b.   providing learners with accurate and up-to-date information about the full range of sixth form, further education and apprenticeship opportunities open to them
   c.   giving advice on the best combinations of subjects for them
   d.   developing a clear policy on progression from AS to A level
   e.   considering carefully the number of qualifications taken by each learner, taking into consideration the likely progression route of each learner

R3   Improve the independent learning skills of pre-16 learners in order to prepare them for A level studies

R4   Work together to improve professional learning opportunities linked to A level teaching

R5   Give due attention to outcomes and provision at A and AS level in self-evaluation and improvement planning processes

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R6   Facilitate networks of professional learning related to A level across schools and colleges

R7   Help schools to evaluate the effectiveness of their A level provision

The Welsh Government should:

R8   Monitor the success of the new consistent measures data sets across schools and colleges

R9   Ensure that changes to the curriculum and qualifications secure continuity and progression

R10   Review the funding formula for A levels in schools and colleges, and its application across authorities, with the aim of eliminating unintended consequences, such as encouraging learners who are not best suited to study A levels to do so

R11   Develop a way to communicate to learners and their parents clear information about A level attainment and provision in individual centres