Estyn

Preparing for the Curriculum for Wales
– case studies and cameos from secondary, all-age and special schools

November 2020

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- ⅄ 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

Contents

Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education in her remit letter to Estyn for 2019-2020. It focuses on how maintained secondary, all-age and special schools are preparing for the Curriculum for Wales. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia.

This report follows on from [Curriculum innovation in primary schools](#) (Estyn, 2018a) that looked at how primary schools were preparing for the new curriculum. It is part of a series of reports providing guidance during this period of change in education. Previous reports include: [Improving Teaching](#) (Estyn, 2018b), [Preparing for the Digital Competence Framework](#) (Estyn, 2018c), [Leadership development – case studies of professional learning for school leadership](#) (Estyn, 2020a) and [Partnerships with employers in secondary and special schools](#) (Estyn, 2020b).

This report draws on evidence from visits to a selection of secondary, all-age and special schools across Wales. The report is based on evidence from visits to a broadly representative sample of roughly equal numbers of pioneer, quality improvement or innovation schools and of partner (non-pioneer) schools. It also draws on evidence from engagement visits and inspection reports from September 2019 to March 2020. It includes case studies and cameos of emerging practice throughout. See Appendix 1 for further details of the evidence base.

Background

In 2014, the Minister for Education and Skills asked Professor Donaldson to conduct a review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales from the foundation phase to key stage 4. The resulting report, Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015), outlines proposals for a new curriculum that builds on the existing strengths of Welsh education. The report identifies four purposes that provide a starting point for a new Curriculum for Wales:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Donaldson, 2015, p.29)

The Successful Futures report recognises that the four purposes will 'inevitably require a wide repertoire of teaching and learning approaches' and that there is a 'fundamental interdependency between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy' (Donaldson, 2015, pp.63-64).

In 2014, the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) published a review of education in Wales ('Improving schools in Wales: an OECD perspective') (2014). The report provided recommendations to strengthen the education system over the long term. The report noted that schools were facing challenges in implementing a range of policies and frameworks, and that the scale of reform over a short timescale meant that only partial implementation of some policies was occurring. The OECD published a follow-up report in 2017, 'The Welsh Education Reform Journey: A rapid policy assessment' (2017). This report 'analyses the reforms adopted since 2014 and offers recommendations to inform next steps' (OECD, 2017, p.7).

Since 2017, a few schools across Wales have worked with the OECD to develop an all-Wales model of schools as learning organisations based on the 2016 report 'What makes a school a learning organisation?' (OECD, 2016). The resulting model, 'Schools in Wales as learning organisations' (Welsh Government, 2017b) sets out a framework with seven dimensions, highlighting how schools can develop as a learning organisation.
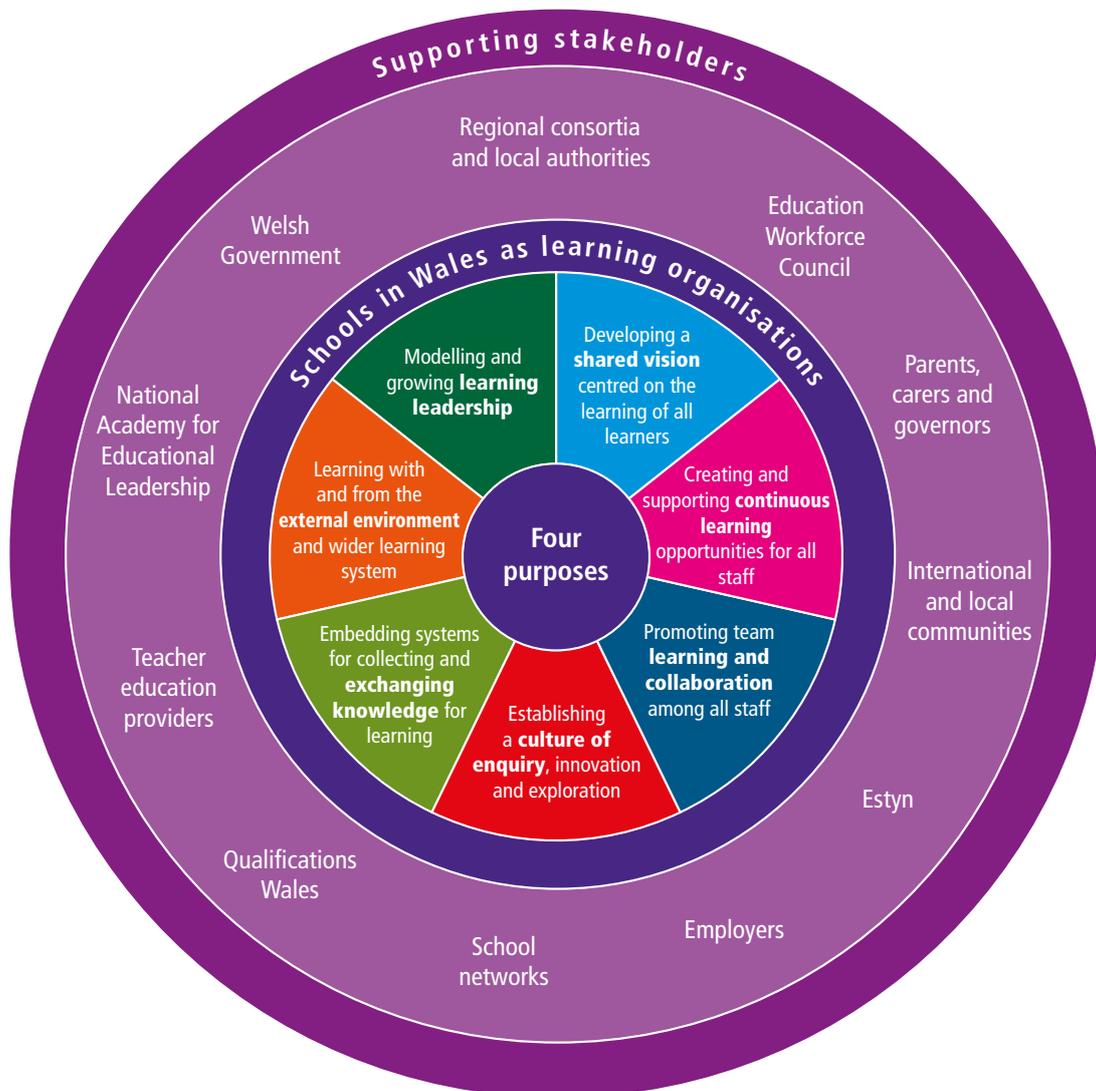
'Education in Wales: Our National Mission: Action Plan 2017-21', (Welsh Government, 2017a) states that developing transformational curriculum and assessment arrangements is an integral aim of the National Mission and that work to realise the new curriculum will require a focus on the following four key enabling objectives:

1. Developing a high-quality education profession
2. Inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards
3. Strong and inclusive schools, committed to excellence, equity and wellbeing
4. Robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system (Welsh Government, 2017a, p.3)

Aims for 2021 include:

- using pedagogic research and effective collaboration to support the develop of a world-class curriculum that will help raise standards in Wales
- developing a transformational approach to the learning
- teaching and assessment of the Welsh language and extending and promoting pupils' wider experiences so that the curriculum is rich and varied as well as being inclusive, broad and balanced

The Successful Futures report (Donaldson, 2015) recommended that the principle of subsidiarity be applied to the process of curriculum reform. At the heart of this approach is the pioneer school model. An evolving network of pioneer schools has worked with the Welsh Government, Estyn, regional consortia and other key partners across the Welsh education system to develop the Curriculum for Wales. In 2018, the Welsh Government (2018) produced a report evaluating the pioneer school model. It contains five recommendations:

1. A need for greater engagement with all partner schools in Wales
2. A need to continue to monitor and review the ways in which the roles and responsibilities of all partners are delivered
3. A need to ensure that robust risk management processes are in place
4. A need to engage with universities, research centres and experts in curriculum development
5. A need for stronger links between curriculum pioneers and professional learning pioneers

In Estyn's report on 'Curriculum innovation in primary schools' (2018a), a curriculum self-evaluation model was developed to support schools. This model has four stages:

Stage 1: Evaluating the current curriculum within wider self-evaluation arrangements
Stage 2: Planning and preparing for change
Stage 3: Realising change
Stage 4: Evaluating change

A few schools have taken this 'road map' and adapted it to reflect their own curriculum development journey.

In 2019, the Welsh Government (2019c) published research by Wavehill social and economic research on how schools were preparing and changing how they structure their activity to reflect curriculum and assessment arrangements laid out in Successful Futures. Key findings include the importance of leadership as an aspect of curriculum change and a lack of clarity regarding assessment criteria. Reorganisation of responsibilities among staff represented the main structural changes enacted and training is identified as a core activity. The report concludes that curriculum change was moving at a pace that schools and staff deemed adequate. Challenges include ensuring effective internal systems for informing staff and disseminating information. The lack of formal internal communication systems meant that progress in relation to curriculum change was varied even among staff in the same school.

After publication of the draft curriculum in April 2019 (Welsh Government 2019b), the Welsh Government held a consultation with education professionals and the public between April and July 2019. The resulting report, 'Consultation – summary of response: Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum: Proposals for a new legislative framework' (Welsh Government, 2019a) summarises the key findings, including that there was broadly consistent support for the principle of developing a more pupil-centred approach to teaching and learning. There was a clear emphasis on the importance of achieving a balance between a pupil-centred, flexible and practitioner-led approach, and an overarching structure or prescriptive foundation upon which local curricula can be developed. Concerns were raised about the possible negative impact on workloads. Another concern was about the need for sufficient resources including sufficient funding, suitably qualified teachers (including those able to teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh) and enough time for professional learning and curriculum development.

In September 2019, the Minister for Education and Skills made a written statement on shaping legislation to support the new curriculum. The full statement can be found here. The Minister proposed to make provision for a statutory framework for the statements of 'what matters' and for setting out the broad approach to, and principles of, progression in each area of learning and experience and across the curriculum as a whole. This will be in addition to legislating for the four purposes, the areas of learning and experience and cross-curricular skills. The Minister added that legislation will also set out that Welsh and English will be compulsory parts of the new curriculum.

In January 2020, the Curriculum for Wales guidance (Welsh Government, 2020a) was published. This guidance aims to help each school develop its own curriculum, enabling their pupils to develop towards the four purposes of the curriculum – the starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales. The Curriculum for Wales guidance sets out:

- the proposed curriculum requirements set out in legislation for all learners aged 3 to 16, to ensure all schools cover the same core learning and to secure a consistency of approach for learners across Wales
- guidelines for schools in developing their curriculum
- expectations around assessment arrangements to support learner progression (Welsh Government, 2020a, p.4).

The curriculum requirements, set out in proposed legislation, and the supporting guidance, form the Curriculum for Wales Framework. The legislation for the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill can be found here. Schools must design, adopt and implement a curriculum that:

- enables learners to develop in the way described in the four purposes
- is broad and balanced
- is suitable for learners of differing ages, abilities and aptitudes
- provides for appropriate progression for learners and includes a range of provision to ensure this (Welsh Government, 2020a, p.13)

A school curriculum must:

- contain the six areas of learning and experience
- encompass the statements of 'what matters'
- reflect the principles of progression set out in the progression code
- include the mandatory curriculum elements
- encompass the mandatory cross-curricular skills (Welsh Government, 2020a, p.14)

What is working well

1 The schools visited for this report represent a range of contexts across Wales. In these schools, headteachers and their staff are enthusiastic about the opportunities the Curriculum for Wales presents to provide pupils with relevant and engaging learning experiences. They see it as an opportunity to re-think what is important for their pupils and community in the 21st century.

2 Understandably, many of the schools that have been involved directly in curriculum reform as pioneer schools, quality improvement schools or innovation schools are generally further ahead in their thinking about curriculum design than other schools. Being part of the curriculum reform process has developed their confidence to innovate and manage change. These schools have been able to trial and refine their approaches over a period of around two to three years. In a very few cases, leaders collected the views of pupils and staff after each trial to evaluate whether pupils' experiences improved.

3 In the special schools visited, leaders and teachers feel positive about the way the Curriculum for Wales promotes a more personalised approach to the curriculum. They feel the curriculum encourages an approach that customises learning to each pupil's strengths, needs, skills and interests. This approach and the values promoted by the four purposes underpin strategies already adopted by many special schools. They welcome the focus on pupils' wellbeing and their personalised learning experiences.

4 Where leaders, but particularly the headteacher, have a positive attitude towards curriculum innovation, strong communication and a culture of sharing are the key aspects of their work. Headteachers' clear commitment to and understanding of the new curriculum form the basis of the positive ethos that permeates the schools that are working effectively. These leaders encourage a bespoke approach to curriculum design, always considering the best approach for their school. Staff confidence and trust in leaders are key ingredients in the successful development of a new curriculum.

5 In most schools visited, senior leaders recognise that curriculum development is a strong priority, and they allocate enough time, resources and responsibilities to it. A focus on developing staff is at the heart of all of these schools' work. Strategic thinking that has considered pedagogy, curriculum, skills and professional learning underpins this work. There are high expectations of staff in all of these areas.

6 In most schools visited, leaders have worked effectively with all stakeholders and spent considerable time developing and reviewing a vision for their school and its pupils. A majority have started to construct a vision for their schools within the context of the four purposes and their own values. These schools are developing a strong understanding of how their vision will inform the curriculum, the approach to teaching and the outcomes for their pupils.

7   A majority of the schools visited have reviewed their approach to teaching. They have reviewed their teaching and learning policies and used current research to inform pedagogical approaches. By focusing on teaching and learning, teachers in these schools develop a common understanding and sense of purpose, not through the 'what', but through the 'how' of teaching.

8   Where leaders manage the pace of change sensitively with a calm, measured approach, teachers engage positively with the process of innovation and change. Effective leaders understand that a good school curriculum needs to be broad and balanced, and that curriculum innovation does not mean that all previous practice has to change. These leaders stay true to the established principles and values of their school, remain focused on high-quality teaching and learning, and make changes when needed to improve the quality of education for their pupils. The amount of change needed will vary from school to school. Effective leaders review honestly how their current school curriculum is aligned with the four purposes. In addition, these leaders are aware of the strengths and areas for development relating to teaching and learning in their schools.

9   Where leaders think through and introduce new systems and processes sensitively, curriculum reform is progressing well. The reform process is comprehensive, staff understand it and it matches the priorities identified by the school closely. This ensures that staff understand the reasons behind any changes and therefore 'buy into' them.

10   Where senior leaders trust staff and encourage them to take considered risks to improve curriculum design, planning and outcomes, leaders have described this as a 'game changer'. Staff enjoy the opportunities to be creative and to experiment. Where this works particularly well, there is flexibility and a realisation that the approach to the curriculum does not have to be the same across all disciplines or areas of learning and experience, but should be adapted to suit the subject matter, the learning environment, the teacher and the pupils.

11   In the majority of schools visited, leaders have taken this opportunity to review their staffing structure. This has sometimes led to opportunities for staff to be seconded to the leadership team to lead on a specific aspect of curriculum development. Leaders are aware of the importance of leadership at all levels to ensure that key messages are disseminated to the whole school community. The strategic use of enthusiastic, skilful staff who can motivate others supports the work to win 'hearts and minds'. The time spent by leaders on developing their staff understanding of the Curriculum for Wales is key to developing minds-sets that are open to change and willing to try new approaches.

12   In a minority of schools visited, leaders are thinking about how they can increase time for staff to work collaboratively, for example through reducing all teachers' teaching load by one lesson per fortnight. In one school, the school day now starts an hour later, while not reducing overall teaching time for pupils. A later start time means that staff can use the first hour of the day flexibly, for example to work in teams on curriculum planning. In a few schools, leaders have allocated time to hold meetings during the school day. This ensures that meetings after school provide ring-fenced time to develop the new curriculum. In another school, since September 2019, disciplines use one departmental meeting every half term to discuss their

approach to working in areas of learning and experience and to plan and evaluate the existing provision. The school has also used two evening sessions and one INSET day to undertake this work. Where this time is used most effectively, it helps to break down barriers between subject areas and facilitates joint planning, while maintaining subject specialisms. Groups of teachers not only plan together, but also evaluate the impact of changes promptly and take swift action where trialled approaches do not work.

13   A minority of the schools visited make effective use of school-to-school collaboration, for example developing work between primary and secondary schools. They aim to make strong links in curriculum development and understand what the progression of pupils from 3 to 16 looks like. In addition, secondary schools are working with other secondary schools on joint planning, which involves a change of mind-set, with middle leaders moving from being leaders of qualifications to being leaders of the curriculum. Many special schools are also working more closely together when deciding on the best approach to developing a curriculum suited to their pupils' needs.

14   Once good quality teaching is in place and staff are confident in their understanding of the curriculum, a few schools are engaging with professional research. This research enables teachers to trial new approaches to curriculum planning and delivery. The impact is strongest when leaders complete regular evaluations of these trials by judging the impact on classroom practice and pupil outcomes.
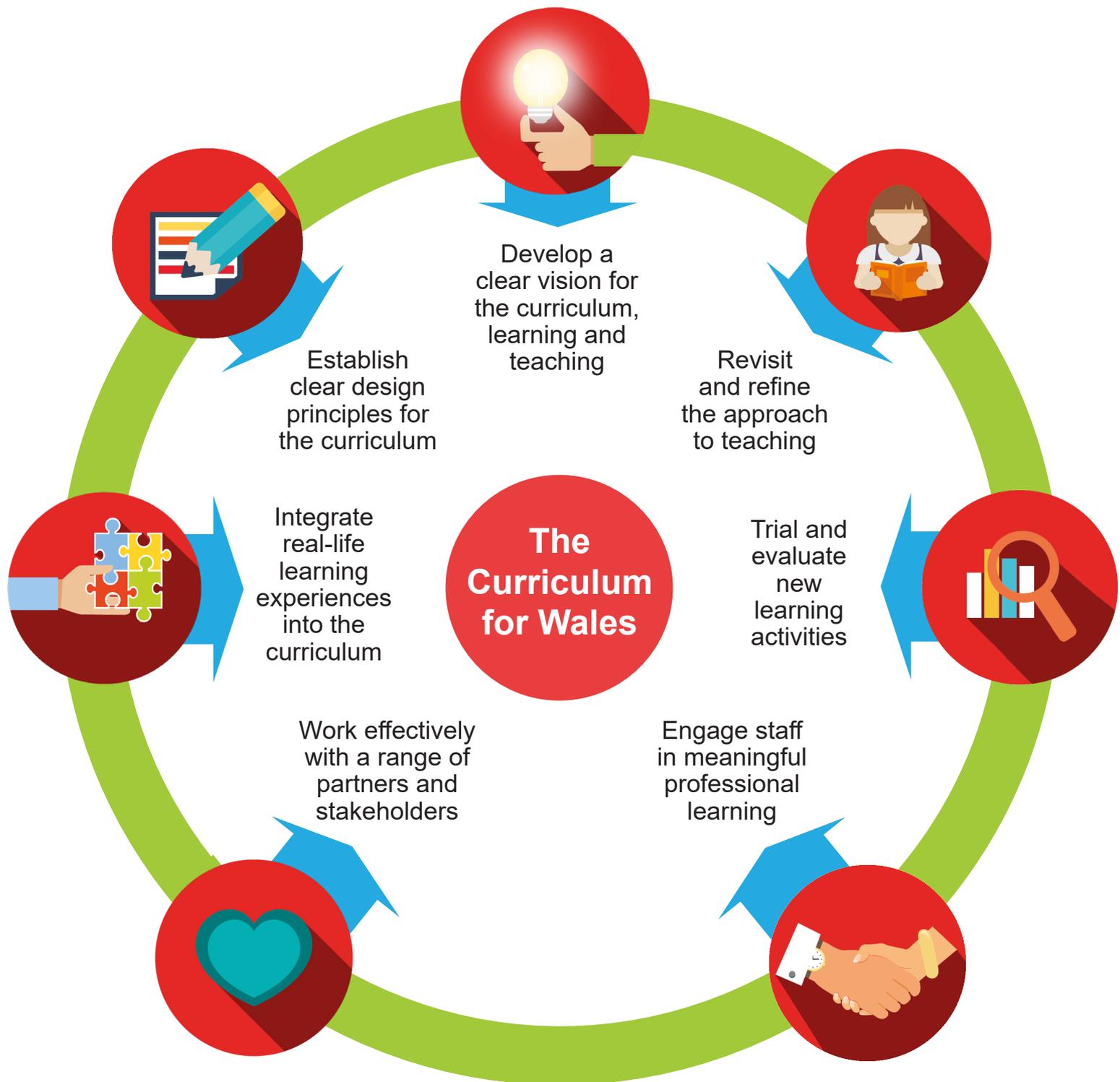
Barriers to progress

15   Nearly all of the schools visited are broadly positive about the opportunities provided by the Curriculum for Wales. Despite this, there are perceived barriers that inhibit progress in many of the schools visited.

16   All schools welcome the additional INSET days planned to support curriculum development. Although it was never the intention that curriculum development would be achieved in INSET time alone, leaders feel that the time they have may not be enough to address the professional learning and curriculum planning required. Secondary schools are also responding to changes in qualifications. Special schools especially feel the pressure to prepare for the Curriculum for Wales while ensuring all staff complete the mandatory training required in these settings relating to the complex physical and medical needs of their pupils.

17   In most schools, staff have not yet had the professional learning opportunities necessary for them to understand whole-school curriculum design process. This may be because strategic partners have not shared information well enough or because leaders have not understood the importance of focusing on these underlying principles (designing your curriculum). As a result, these schools tend to plan changes and activities in a piecemeal way, without developing a clear purpose or considering the impact on pupils' progression across the curriculum. Often, these schools do not have effective systems to evaluate the impact of planned change.

18   In a majority of schools visited, staff are concerned about the loss of subject expertise and do not want to dilute the use of specialist teachers. In these schools, leaders and teachers may have misinterpreted the intentions of the new curriculum. They may not understand that the model for curriculum delivery is the responsibility of individual schools and that while working across boundaries between subjects is encouraged, there is no suggestion that subject specialisms should be lost.

19   In a majority of schools visited, there is a reluctance to plan new whole-school curriculum and assessment arrangements while still delivering a curriculum that meets the needs of current public examinations. A minority of schools visited cited the lack of information about future qualifications and assessment arrangements as a reason to delay the development of a new curriculum. These schools use accountability as a reason not to develop an exciting curriculum or to make even minor adaptations. This suggests that the focus in these schools is more on 'teaching to the test' rather than on delivering a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

20   In a minority of schools visited, teachers feel that the restrictions of their current timetable inhibit the creativity with which they can approach the Curriculum for Wales. Many schools are reluctant to be bold with timetable design. They find it challenging to think differently about the possibilities that currently exist within the school day. A few schools start a three-year GCSE programme in Year 9. This means that pupils at the age of 12 are choosing options, which narrows the breadth of their educational experiences at too early a stage, and goes against the principle of a broad and balanced education.

21   In a minority of schools, one member of staff has the responsibility for leading curriculum initiatives. Without a curriculum team for sustainability and succession planning, momentum is often lost if this member of staff leaves the school.

22   In a few schools, senior leaders do not fully understand or embrace the underpinning aims of the new curriculum. These leaders do not think or plan strategically enough when developing their vision for the curriculum, learning and teaching in their schools. A few schools copy the approach, structures and content of the curriculum of other schools rather than developing their own arrangements. In addition, a few schools focus too much on developing thematic approaches to learning without first establishing their vision for the curriculum as a whole, or how they will improve the quality of learning and teaching. This reduces the benefits to a school of going through the change process of review and reflection and may result in a curriculum that does not serve the needs of their pupils, and limit buy-in and support from the school community.

23   Improving the quality of teaching and developing an understanding of the interdependency between the curriculum and pedagogy is a key stage in preparing for the new curriculum. A few schools have important weaknesses in the quality of teaching, and their curriculum journey is likely to take longer and be more limited until the quality of teaching is improved.

24   A few schools have used the Curriculum for Wales as an opportunity for staff restructuring, especially at middle management level. This has led to some concern and distrust among staff and an unwillingness to engage with curriculum change. This is particularly the case where schools have adopted systems and structures of other schools, rather than consulting with staff and developing their own.

25   In a very few schools, 'change fatigue' has reduced the speed with which the school has felt able to start planning for the Curriculum for Wales. In others, staff express a fear of failure and worry that their interpretation of the new curriculum may be wrong. These leaders and staff often lack the confidence and understanding to proceed with curriculum reform and are looking for more guidance or professional learning.

26   Weak curriculum links between primary and secondary schools limit planning for progression. Current curriculum links mainly focus on English/Welsh and mathematics, and in a few examples may include a transition activity across Year 6 and Year 7. Curriculum links beyond this small group of subjects are rare. Transition arrangements focus primarily on pupils' wellbeing and supporting pupils who require additional support rather than developing a clear understanding of what pupils can achieve in order to build a more effective Year 7 curriculum. Despite recognising the importance of transition, pupils often arrive at secondary schools that work with several partner primary schools with a wide variation in knowledge and skills. This makes it more difficult to plan for continuity in learning.

27   Partnership working between pioneer, quality improvement, innovation and their partner schools to develop the curriculum has been limited in some areas. Partner schools report that they have generally received information at regional consortia events rather than directly from pioneer schools. This may be due to a lack of formal communication systems between pioneer and partner schools. A few schools feel that the expectations placed on them by consortia are too demanding and that there

is pressure for them to be further advanced with curriculum reform than is necessary at this stage. A few schools feel that they have received mixed messages from the different national area of learning and experience groups.

Preparing for the Curriculum for Wales – cases studies and cameos

Develop a clear vision for the curriculum, learning and teaching

Revisit and refine the approach to teaching

Establish clear design principles for the curriculum

Trial and evaluate new learning activities

Integrate real-life learning experiences into the curriculum

The Curriculum for Wales

Engage staff in meaningful professional learning

Work effectively with a range of partners and stakeholders

Do leaders develop a clear vision for the curriculum, learning and teaching?

28   In most schools visited, leaders have worked effectively with all staff and spent considerable time reviewing their current school vision. They have developed a new ambitious vision for the curriculum and the learning and teaching that supports it. As a result, most staff understand the fundamental elements of the Curriculum for Wales, and the realisation of the curriculum has begun in terms of developing the school's vision for the curriculum, learning and teaching in the context of their pupils and community. A majority of schools have started to build their vision for their pupils within the context of the four purposes and their own values. Many schools start with an end product in mind, for example by asking 'What should a pupil of our school look like?' These schools understand how they want pupils to develop. They use this understanding to guide and support their vision for teaching and learning and for their planning for the Curriculum for Wales.

A cluster of secondary school headteachers in south east Wales considered the following questions.

- How do we ensure pupils build well on what they have learnt?
- What will pupils be proud of when they leave our schools?
- To what extent do we provide opportunities for staff to debate and research in preparation for the Curriculum for Wales?
- How will we evaluate the impact of the changes being made?
- What would the ideal Year 6 curriculum/ Year 6 pupil look like?
- What do pupils in our area need?
- Who is most resistant to change and why?
- Who can help us?
- How will we involve all stakeholders?
- How will we develop a local 3-16 curriculum to achieve the four purposes?

This approach helped these leaders begin to develop a clear understanding of where their school 'is heading' and start to develop a systematic approach to their curriculum reform journey.

29   At Bishopston Comprehensive School, leaders set out their strategic leadership of curriculum reform by establishing the following underlying principles:

- What is best for our pupils and community?
- Four purposes underpin all developments – completely pupil centred
- Clear vision shared with all school
- Audit and map current learning experiences and curriculum provision
- Support and challenge from Governors
- Retain excellent subject expertise and knowledge
- Drip feed professional learning
- Effective leadership of change – shared ownership and distributed leadership
- Dedicated resources
- Highly effective self-evaluation and improvement planning

These principles provide a useful framework against which leaders and staff can evaluate proposed changes.

30 Leaders at Bishop Vaughan Catholic School have taken a measured and carefully planned approach when developing their whole-school approach to curriculum reform. They have engaged all staff in developing their whole-school vision and have planned their actions well with clear timeframes to ensure all staff have time to develop and test approaches and to avoid 'change fatigue'.

Bishop Vaughan Catholic School

Action

The senior leadership team has worked effectively with all staff to establish a clear vision to develop the curriculum and support all pupils. The vision focuses on their core Catholic belief that everyone is created in God's perfect image and has their own unique God-given talents and abilities. The school strives to ensure every pupil is supported towards being the very best they can be academically, morally and socially. This has helped them to engage all staff in discussions around how to develop their curriculum and ensure that it remains pupil-focused.

The school has worked closely with all staff to engage them in discussion about the pupils they are trying to develop and to identify what the four purposes mean for the school, its pupils and the wider community. All staff views have been valued and listened to and this has enabled leaders to develop a common understanding and a motivated staff who understand the reasons for change, and are ready to plan for change.

A strength of this approach is the way in which senior leaders have involved all staff when creating and sharing their expectations. Together, they have developed a common understanding of the attitudes and dispositions they wish to include as part of their curriculum planning, teaching and learning to ensure all pupils develop as active, informed and positive citizens.

Outcomes

The school has ensured that their Catholic ethos is rooted in their whole-school vision. The leaders' approach to engaging all stakeholders has established a vision that is well understood and supported by staff and pupils. This has led to improved staff engagement and a positive attitude toward curriculum reform. Leaders have also noted an improvement in attitudes and engagement of pupils during lessons.

31   The examples below illustrate how schools have established a shared vision that is specific to their context.

Penyrheol Comprehensive School has established a clear vision for curriculum development, which is well understood and shared by staff. The vision focuses on pupils having opportunities to develop their subject knowledge and apply their skills in a range of authentic contexts. Senior leaders have engaged well with middle leaders to develop their leadership of teaching and to evaluate the quality of their current curriculum offer within the context of this shared vision.

King Henry VIII Comprehensive School developed a community vision, using the idea of co-construction and prompted by the school's work on schools as learning organisations. The school vision was co-created with pupils, staff, parents and governors. The vision is to 'work together to create a happy safe and inclusive learning environment'. Leaders are very clear that this vision is for the whole school community and not just for pupils.

Cardinal Newman Catholic School felt that the four purposes link well with the gospel values that are already an integral part of the school's vision. The vision remains focused around their pupils and 'developing a love of learning'. Within the framework of their vision, leaders have focused on developing 'consistency, complementarity and coherence' across the school curriculum.

Crickhowell High School revisited its vision and felt that it became more meaningful when applied to their plans for a revised curriculum. In planning their curriculum, leaders at Crickhowell feel strongly that their pupils should develop as citizens of Wales and the world.

Crownbridge Special School's vision for its pupils has not changed. It remains that the wellbeing and relevant progress of pupils is key. The school has introduced the mantra 'Trust, time and freedom' to reflect its way of working towards leading change and reforming the curriculum. The school aims to continue to offer a curriculum with meaningful experiences, focusing on life-skills for independence.

Bishop Hedley Catholic High School used the idea of a road map to help all stakeholders to understand the actions that the school was taking on their reform journey. Leaders are clear that establishing a clear, well-understood vision is central to understanding the intent for pupils, staff and all stakeholders. Staff at the school focus on 'LOVE': Leading learning, Outcomes and standards, Values and ethos, and Engaging in innovation.

Have schools revisited and refined their approach to teaching?

32   Nearly all schools understand that teaching and learning are at the heart of all they do. Many see the Curriculum for Wales as an opportunity for 'ownership' and 'empowerment' to be returned to the teaching profession. Many teachers see this as a real opportunity, providing them with greater autonomy to meet their pupils' needs.

33   Many schools have taken a fresh look at how pedagogy can support the realisation of the curriculum. In the best cases, leaders encourage and support teachers to expand their repertoire of teaching approaches so that they can choose the most appropriate approach for any situation. Schools looking to review their approach to teaching may consider our report on Improving teaching (Estyn, 2018b).

34   Many of the schools visited had strengths in teaching identified in their most recent inspection report. Nonetheless, in planning for the new curriculum, a majority of these schools still reviewed their approach to teaching. They took the opportunity to look at research findings about approaches to teaching and curriculum design. They reviewed their teaching and learning policies and used current research to inform pedagogical approaches. By focusing on teaching and learning, these schools are making strong links across their school, not through the 'what', but through the 'how' of teaching.

35   In response to the new curriculum and their pupils' needs, Crownbridge Special School has recently introduced new teaching and learning activities. These activities focus on authentic experiences and life skills. There is less focus on specific areas of the curriculum and more on what is important and relevant to pupils, in line with the four purposes.

Crownbridge Special School

Action

The Curriculum for Wales reform process led to leaders engaging all staff in reviewing 'what matters' most to their pupils to enable progress towards the four purposes and ultimately securing a successful future for each of them in adulthood after school.

This process led to a sharper focus on experiences, skills and knowledge, which enable individual pupils to develop independence in learning and for life. Reflecting on whole-school levels of pupil development, additional learning needs and the educational profile across the 3 to 19 age range revealed the most important aspects of the curriculum to staff, and these became 'non-negotiables'. This enabled the school to place high value on aspects of communication, social and emotional development, physical literacy and mobility, thinking (problem solving, organisation and creativity) as well as the skills to become as independent as possible in their daily lives. These aspects then formed the basis of the school's whole

curriculum offer and pedagogical approach.

Outcomes

Crownbridge special school offers a balance of specialist and inclusive teaching, through a curriculum with meaningful experiences, focusing on life skills for independence that is relevant to its pupils. These purposeful activities result in pupils' increasing confidence in their application of important life skills.

36   A minority of schools, particularly those that have had little involvement in formal or informal networks either locally or nationally, have not developed a vision or a common understanding for pedagogy.

Have schools established clear design principles for the curriculum

37   In a majority of schools, leaders have a clear rationale for their approach to curriculum and staffing structures. They are able to explain why their curriculum is structured as it is and the benefits this provides pupils. These experienced leaders stay true to their vision while reviewing current provision and planning new aspects of their curriculum.

38   Ebbw Fawr Learning Community reviewed its current 3 to 16 provision and, realising that it was disjointed, devised a new approach.

> **Ebbw Fawr Learning Community**
>
> **Action**
>
> Rather than starting from scratch, leaders consider how their current curriculum supported their current vision. Staff worked together to undertake a thorough evaluation of the curriculum. They identified that some of the experiences given to pupils aged 3 to 16 were repetitive and there were inconsistencies in the approaches and expectations of staff. As a result, all staff agreed to review the curriculum.
>
> Following the publication of the draft Curriculum for Wales, leaders prioritised developing staff understanding of the principles of the new curriculum before changing curriculum content. Through a programme of carefully structured meetings and workshops, leaders and staff developed a common understanding of the structure of the draft curriculum and ensured that it was accessible for all staff and pupils.
>
> Aligning the draft curriculum with the context of the school, staff began to develop thematic planning through real-life learning experiences around a theme. The initial theme is about understanding the world around them, and their own local area (Cynefin).
>
> **Outcomes**
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> While the school's approach to thematic planning is at an early stage of development, the interest and excitement of staff and pupils around the theme is tangible. Pupils speak with pride and knowledge of their own locality, appreciate their place within society and are able to make sensible links between different aspects of their learning.

39   In around half of schools visited, school development plans include clear and well thought out objectives for developing the curriculum. These plans include preparing, testing and refining approaches, evaluation of trials using staff and pupil input, and cooperation with other schools.

Crownbridge Special School has prepared a useful project book, 'Bridge to a successful future' that outlines the school's journey towards curriculum reform. The book includes references to the school's research and actions taken in terms of curriculum design. Staff consider 'what went well' and the 'even better if' of the curriculum, the elements of the four purposes in the context of Crownbridge pupils. They have also undertaken an audit of current provision. Nearly all staff members have contributed to the content of the book. Staff engage positively with the developments and the project book helps new staff to understand the school's vision for its new curriculum and its ways of working.

Cardinal Newman Catholic School reviewed its current curriculum with the aim of removing areas of overlap and developing a common language. Staff began by refining existing activities rather than making wholesale changes, but always with the question 'why are we putting this back in?'

40   Many schools recognise the important role that middle leaders play in the reform journey. Where leadership appears to be most effective, there is a strong focus on collaboration between middle leaders, who provide staff with consistent messages about the school's approach to curriculum development.

At **Penyrheol Comprehensive School**, senior leaders have engaged well with middle leaders to develop their leadership of teaching and their ability to evaluate the quality of their current curriculum offer. This structured process has enabled leaders to identify clearly the strengths and gaps in their current provision in order to inform their thinking about future developments.

All middle leadership meetings focus on curriculum design, teaching and learning, and research informs discussions. The deputy headteacher provides short, easily-read documents to middle leaders prior to meetings and uses these to shape and inform discussions. This has supported middle leaders to engage critically with research and curriculum planning, enabling them to begin evaluating their current provision and identify where links across and within areas of learning and experiences can be made.

As a result, middle leaders have a sound understanding of the whole-school vision and are committed to ensuring their curriculum development provides high quality learning experiences for all pupils.

41   There is no expectation that staff structures should be similar across schools and the approach to staffing structures varies considerably across the schools visited. For example, some schools have restructured teaching and learning responsibilities in line with the areas of learning and experience and the mandatory cross-curricular skills. Others have co-opted additional staff members as 'associate members' onto the senior leadership team to lead priorities, such as health and wellbeing. A minority of leaders have prioritised school staffing reorganisation to such an extent that it has been at the expense of other aspects of planning for the new curriculum.

42   In a few instances, when evaluating their staffing structure leaders have made a conscious decision not to restructure around areas of learning and experience but

have retained traditional heads of department and these departments work together according to the areas of learning and experience for curriculum planning purposes. Leaders in these schools believe it is important to maintain subject specialisms and staff expertise, while moving gradually towards more creative and collaborative working across disciplines.

43   Few schools have explored the full range of curriculum design principles set out in the Curriculum for Wales (designing your curriculum). In the best cases, schools offer a broad and balanced education that enable pupils to make links between the different areas of learning and experience and apply their learning to new or more complex situations, and support all pupils' progression along a continuum of learning. However, many schools have rushed into piecemeal curriculum design activity, possibly in order to show progress if asked what they have done regarding the new curriculum. Many schools are not taking enough time to understand the principles of curriculum design or develop a whole-school strategy before making changes. A few schools, including some pioneer schools, have found that this piecemeal approach has led to a disjointed curriculum and means that initial plans have to be unpicked and progress is slowed. As a result, leaders have had to return to their whole-school vision, the principles of curriculum design, and to establishing a whole-school strategy for curriculum reform.

Have schools trialled and evaluated new learning activities?

44   In many schools, staff have been energised by the flexibility the new curriculum offers and its creative possibilities. Once schools have established their vision for teaching and learning, and evaluated current provision, they have begun to trial aspects of curriculum design and pedagogy, and evaluate and refine these trials. The starting point for schools in planning for these trials has varied. A majority started with the four purposes, others with the statements of 'what matters', and a few with the 12 pedagogical principles.

45   There are examples of interesting pilot projects across disciplines in several schools. **Tonyrefail Community School** opened as an all-age school in September 2018. To support the development of the Curriculum for Wales, the leadership team structured the school around teams of teachers working in areas of specialism.

Tonyrefail Community School

Action

The school appointed a leader for each faculty with a remit to develop the learning continuum from nursery to Year 13 and to lead on curricular developments. The first development activity involved each team lead co-constructing a vision with their faculty, and exploring the proposed outcomes of their curriculum.

The initial phase began in spring 2018, led by a member of the senior leadership team who had previously worked as part of the pioneer schools programme. Working with the head of the humanities and social sciences faculty and representatives from the cluster feeder schools, they began to understand curriculum design and develop a collaborative research-informed 'professional enquiry' approach to begin to shape the curriculum. Together, the humanities and social sciences faculty co-constructed an integrated humanities curriculum for Year 7 that launched in September 2019.

All other faculties were invited to attend professional learning and development (PLD) sessions during the 2018-2019 academic year. These PLD sessions focused on curriculum design and involved a two-phase approach: face-to-face information sessions focused on curriculum design theory, followed by the development of PLD enquiries, based on either pedagogy, curriculum or leadership.

All faculties were allocated professional learning time during their timetabled week. Staff used this time to meet to develop, collaborate and co-construct elements of the curriculum. Faculties received guidance from the leadership team about what aspects they should focus on during the autumn term sessions.

During the training days held in January 2019 and January 2020, all faculty

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members visited other schools and institutions. The purpose of this was to develop their understanding and experience of developing curricula in schools across Wales and further afield. Members of the leadership team monitor curriculum developments as they emerge across the school with a quality assurance system that uses the curriculum design principles from Successful Futures to monitor planning and delivery.

The health and wellbeing faculty is currently working in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University's School of Sport and Health Sciences, where staff are also undertaking quality assurance of the role of the teacher within an emerging health and wellbeing curriculum.

The school shares good practice through an all-through school improvement group with interested schools from the locality, at stakeholder events, through social media forums, and with higher education partners.

Outcomes

The leadership team places great value on staff working across phases when designing the curriculum. Staff have confidence and know they are fully supported to trial a curriculum that takes them out of their comfort zone and allows them to maximise their combined strengths as a team. The level of knowledge and discussion from faculties about curriculum design has greatly improved.

Staff have shown increased confidence and enthusiasm for the collaborative sessions and their involvement in the curriculum design process. In addition, pupil voice evaluations of these experiences are very positive.

46 **Bassaleg School** uses the four purposes as the starting point for all curriculum development. This has led to a curriculum based on pupil entitlement, which details the types of learning and experiences pupils should have in different lessons and different areas of learning and experience.

Bassaleg School

Action

Initially working as a language, literacy and communication (LLC) pioneer school, the school used its own LLC area of learning and experience to trial new curriculum design elements.

Reflecting on Successful Futures, the starting point was the understanding that all staff in the LLC area of learning and experience dealt with the acquisition and development of language. This led to an alignment of pedagogy and sharing of good practice around the most effective ways of learning and teaching key elements of grammar in an exciting way.

Teachers then considered what they wanted pupils to 'look like' when they finished studying LLC at the end of their school career. The discussion

took place without reference to qualifications but reflected on what the teachers valued and staff considered what type of learning and experiences pupils should be offered. This resulted in the creation of a pupil entitlement, aligning pedagogical and learning experiences with desired outcomes, and linked directly to the four purposes.

Whole-school model

This method of designing a curriculum model, based on learning experiences linking to long-term outcomes, was then replicated in every area of learning and experience. Departments, and then areas of learning and experience, worked together to address the same fundamental questions that LLC had asked regarding their relationship to each other and to pedagogical principles.

All areas of learning and experiences produced their own version of what the four purposes mean in their context, and how they could help pupils' develop these capacities. Leaders are keen to ensure that the curriculum is designed using the expertise that existed in the school staff and trusted them to do so. It was key that planning for the Curriculum for Wales allowed creativity and innovation and did not recreate pre-planned lesson-by-lesson plans and resources.

During the process, all areas of learning and experience produced a document linking pedagogy and learning experiences to the long-term development of pupil capacities, linked directly to the four purposes. They outlined in one page the key areas that the area of learning and experience would cover over the year and outlined the planned skill development and alignment of subjects within the area of learning and experience (see appendix 3).

Learning Points and Areas for Development:

In the early development stages, the LLC team attempted to build the curriculum around ideas such as the statements of 'what matters' or progression steps and at the time, achievement outcomes. They found that doing this led to the focus on long term goals being unintentionally lost and a 'tick box' approach to planning started to emerge. To avoid this, they started the planning with the four purposes.

Outcomes

- The school's planning for pupils' literacy development across subjects is strong.
- Paired and group work is used skilfully to develop pupils' oracy skills and levels of oracy have improved significantly.
- The school invested professional learning time in how to improve oracy as many subject areas highlight good quality discussion as part of what pupils in their area of learning and experience should experience.
- Extended writing, particularly discursive writing, has started to mirror the formal language structures used in speech in class.

- Pupils are challenged with topics at an earlier stage as teachers plan directly in response to the needs and ideas of the class in front of them, rather than using lesson plans too rigidly.
- Pupils are able to make links between learning experiences more readily and their ability to work independently has improved.

In response to the Curriculum for Wales and in particular the change management process, staff feel listened to, freer and trusted to trial new ideas. There is a real sense of pride among the staff when discussing progress towards the new curriculum. Staff relish the opportunities they and pupils have to take risks and be creative. Through coaching and modelling, there is a culture in the school that genuinely reflects a commitment to develop pupils' experiences in addition to preparing them for examinations.

47   Some schools have trialled projects across areas of learning and experience.

In **Ysgol Henry Richard**, teachers have chosen the thematic topics for Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9 carefully. The themes are Japan, chocolate, and the Eisteddfod. These themes were chosen to maximise opportunities to focus on literacy, numeracy and digital competency work, combining Welsh, English and the humanities disciplines. The pupils enjoy the thematic lessons and can see the connections between the disciplines. They find the content interesting and challenging because it makes them think creatively, while continuing to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding.

In **St Martin's School**, teachers have begun to trial a more joined-up delivery of the curriculum. In Year 7, teachers use the theme of recycling as a cross-curricular project. The starting point for planning was the four purposes, with a focus on developing leadership, organisation, resilience, innovation and communication skills. In addition, staff in the expressive arts faculty have taken the topic of the 'Dazzling world of Roald Dahl' and interpreted it through music, art and drama.

48   A few schools have made wellbeing the focus of their trials.

In **Ysgol Glan y Môr,** leaders have taken the opportunity to invest more time in pupils' wellbeing and mental health in response to the new curriculum. Leaders feel that the Curriculum for Wales gives them the flexibility to do this. The head of Year 7 works with the school's health and wellbeing teachers to develop pupils' social, mental health and physical skills. They have introduced singing and keep fit activities in the morning registration time. Pupils' enjoy these sessions and staff feel they contribute to a sense of community and to a greater awareness by pupils of the importance of maintaining their own wellbeing.

At **Ysgol Bro Morgannwg**, a project that has evolved over the last three years is Fi Fy Hun, Fy Mro, Fy Nghymru a Fy Myd[1]. The purpose of this project is to raise awareness among pupils of themselves as individuals who are familiar with their own culture, community, society, and the world of today and yesterday. Over the year, every department contributes to the project, leading to co-operation between departments and authentic educational experiences for the pupils.

At **Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe**, the 'Mentro' curriculum reinforces aspects of the curriculum creatively. Pupils study aspects of learning, such as study skills, digital learning, financial literacy, how to revise, and health and wellbeing. The personal tutor introduces the lesson to the pupils each week, strengthening the role of the teacher as a learning champion. The school works with other agencies to prepare visual, Welsh-medium resources that promote the principles introduced during these lessons.

In **Ysgol Bryn Castell,** staff provide a stimulating curriculum, often within real-life contexts, that meets the needs of its pupils.

Curriculum planning provides valuable opportunities for personalised learning for pupils to develop the skills of literacy, numeracy and use of ICT. Pupils in the Autistic Spectrum Disorder classes take part in independent thematic 'mission' work. Each mission starts with a big question or statement such as 'Where does Wales fit?' 'Where did it all begin?' or 'Plan Prepare Survive'. An image related to the mission then leads pupils to think about and discuss what they see, think and wonder. This approach develops a culture of enquiry and exploration.

Staff plan activities that engage pupils' curiosity within the context of the four purposes. Pupils work on a thinking mission, an art mission, a topic mission, a health and wellbeing mission, a literacy mission and a maths mission. This is a flexible approach to learning, which the pupils enjoy. Pupils work independently and develop an interest in and an understanding of exciting and relevant themes such as 'The Lost World' and 'Extreme Earth'.

49   A few other schools have focused on one area of learning and experience.

At **Tredegar Comprehensive School**, staff have trialled an approach driven by the four purposes to develop pupils as 'ethical and informed citizens'. Across the humanities disciplines through the topic of conflict, teachers use 9/11 as its initial stimulus. Teachers planned the topic together and each discipline created new teaching and learning resources. The school reported the following impacts:

- pupils felt the topic had made them more ethically informed, giving them opportunities to be more creative in their responses to learning and to learn about relevant current affairs topics
- pupils developed their literacy skills successfully across subject areas, for example through writing poems and discursive essays

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[1] Myself, My Area, My Wales and My World

In **Radyr Comprehensive School,** the humanities disciplines have worked together on short projects based on big questions such as 'How can we learn from the past?' or 'Who inspires me?' These try-outs have trialled an integrated approach to the humanities curriculum and resulted in positive pupil and staff feedback. Teachers report strong standards in subject skills and good progress in specific literacy and numeracy skills. For example, through links with the mathematics department, pupils have been able to analyse data to answer the question 'How did soldiers die in the First World War?'

Cwmtawe Community School has planned a curriculum trial involving the science, mathematics and technology disciplines.

The mathematics department has developed an activity based on the heptathlon Olympic event. Activities include 'how the scoring system works to arrive at the gold medal'. This active mathematics approach expects pupils to collect data from the disciplines of the heptathlon to create data sets, develop their graphical skills and draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

In biology, pupils investigate the effects of exercise on the body and how to achieve optimum performance. They consider the impact of lifestyle choices on their health, with pupils in the role as coach or analyst.

At the same time in chemistry lessons pupils consider the question 'Which materials will be used for a sports kit and which materials allow heat to pass through and allow athletes to keep cool?' Pupils write hypotheses and plan the testing of materials. This investigation focuses on how they should test materials before asking the pupils to develop a proposal and pitch to present to a major sport manufacturer.

In physics, the big question revolves around investigating the content of different foods that athletes eat as part of their training and build up to participation in their event or competition, and how these may be different to the pupils own daily energy needs.

How well are real-life learning experiences integrated into the curriculum?

50   Many schools visited are beginning to pay attention to developing authentic curricular experiences that enable pupils to realise the four purposes and support their development of knowledge, skills and experiences. This approach allows pupils to explore, discuss, and construct ideas in contexts that involve real-world problems and projects that are relevant to the learner.

51   At Cantonian High School, teachers make connections within and between areas of learning and experience in a variety of ways. The school places importance on genuine opportunities rather than forced or shallow connections. Teachers think as much about what not to include, or what belongs elsewhere, as well as what is most relevant. A particular strength are the outputs and connections to the community and to the local authority's 'Cardiff Commitment'.

Cantonian High School

Action

Over the past year, the school has encouraged all disciplines within areas of learning and experience to work together to consider the best way to provide worthwhile learning experiences for pupils in key stage 3. Groups of teachers use directed time to plan collaboratively. Most teachers appreciate the chance to keep within their subject specialisms but plan with other subject areas. This results in meaningful, uncontrived joint work. A good example of this is how mathematics teachers have worked with physical education teachers to gather and analyse data on pupils' bowling techniques. Using the findings, has enabled pupils to improve their own skills, as they understand 'What Works?'

A key stage 3 project embodies the new ways of working and includes aspects of business, design technology, ICT and computing. Subject leaders have made strong links with local authority staff to build on partnerships with business and industry through the 'Cardiff Commitment'. They use experts, including past pupils, to carry out an engaging project for a high profile van manufacturer. Pupils take the project from the design phase, using 2D and 3D design software, through to a finished product with all the steps in between. The pupils work on their plans during timetabled lessons and on a few occasions during a 'collapsed timetable' day, which gives them experience of working on the project in 'real time'. This also provides useful opportunities for pupils to reflect on a range of career opportunities. The teachers involved found the planning experience stimulating and engaging, by using a range of digital tools to facilitate the project they have also developed their IT skills. Leaders in this faculty are already planning further new experiences for their pupils, keen to build on

this successful learning experience.

Outcomes

Pupils who participated in these initiatives talk positively about the first-hand experiences they have gained. They appreciate the thought that has gone into making the curriculum suit their needs and interests, and report that they have made significant gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills. As a result of trialling this initiative in a managed way, leaders in Cantonian High School have given staff permission and confidence to take risks and explore new ways of planning. They recognise that these projects are the first versions, and will be subject to further refinement. There is still work to do, for example, on building in cross-curricular responsibilities and links across areas of learning and experience.

Overall, staff in Cantonian High School have taken early steps to try out new ideas and to see the benefits and possibilities of working together to create challenging curriculum experiences for their pupils with an engaging local twist.

52   **Ferndale Community School** has developed a range of enrichment activities for Year 6 and Year 7 pupils. These activities support progression from Year 6 to Year 7, and pupils gain new skills, develop resilience, and increase their confidence.

Ferndale Community School

Action

What's on Wednesday's (WOW) is designed for Year 6 and Year 7 pupils in the Ferndale cluster that comprises of five primary schools. Pupils choose a different course each term and are encouraged to try a range of active, creative and thinking activities which include many aspects of the four purposes. Each course lasts for seven weeks and allows pupils to gain new skills, develop resilience and increase their self-confidence.

Outcomes

The aspiration for pupils is that the WOW initiative will help to promote teamwork, support progression from Year 6 to Year 7, and develop a love of learning. At the same time, this initiative has allowed staff the opportunity to trial activities that may have relevance when developing the new curriculum. For teachers, this trial has changed entrenched opinions and supported the development of fresh approaches to teaching and learning.

54   Staff appreciate the flexibility in the curriculum and the opportunities to use real-life experiences that are relevant to the pupils in their context.

Staff at **Bishop Hedley Catholic High School** created an enrichment programme called 'Opening Minds'. The programme helps pupils to develop important life skills and supports the introduction of the new curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to engage in activities that they have not experienced before. These activities help pupils to challenge set ways of thinking and develop a greater understanding of diversity and respecting others. The programme has allowed pupils to take ownership of their development and has improved wellbeing and attitudes to learning. Find the full case study here

St Martin's School has a strong focus on developing real-life learning experiences and equality of experiences. There is an expectation that planning for every unit of work will have links to authentic learning experiences that are of value to pupils. For example, this includes pupils growing vegetables in the school polytunnel that supplies the school restaurant, and maintaining beehives. Local shops sell the honey produced, and this helps to develop the pupils' entrepreneurial and enterprising skills.

School leaders at **Llanidloes High School** have successfully created a culture where teachers feel supported to trial innovative approaches when planning for the areas of learning and experience. There is an emerging ethos of coherent curriculum partnership across the school.

Science and technology curriculum leaders work closely together to create challenging inter-disciplinary projects for Year 7 pupils. Senior leaders have adapted the timetable to align science and technology classes. This enables pupils to understand the links between these subject areas. For example, in science, pupils investigate fluid and static friction to inform decisions about the profile and weight of a model eco-car that they construct in technology lessons.

Curriculum leaders are also careful to ensure cross-curricular projects help pupils understand the relationship between their learning and the world of work. For example, they work closely with a small local business that creates contemporary mechanical moving models. Business leaders support pupils in creating mechanical parts for their eco-car, trial finished products and send prototypes for manufacture. These pupils develop strong entrepreneurial skills and gain a valuable insight into the global economy and manufacturing process.

Pupils at **Ysgol Maes Hyfryd Special School** benefit from a broad variety of personalised learning experiences that reflect the aspirations of Curriculum for Wales. The school's commitment to outdoor and enterprise experiences and cross-discipline learning is well established. Pupils have a valuable input into the types of activities they undertake, and every week, pupils select from a range of engaging school-wide activities including sport, cookery and film making.

55   Where schools have used an 'authentic approach' as a focus for improving teaching and learning, this works best when they ensure that the activities are appropriately challenging and the focus on learning a subject skill is not lost.

56   Schools wishing to strengthen their partnerships with employers, to support the provision for real-life experiences may consider our report on Partnerships with employers in secondary and special schools (Estyn, 2020b).

How well are schools engaging staff in meaningful professional learning?

57   Leaders recognise the importance of professional learning to the development of the new curriculum, but generally professional learning does not focus well enough on curriculum design. In the best examples, staff engagement with professional learning helps to support the development of more effective teaching and an understanding of curriculum design principles. In a few schools, there has been a shift in how leaders use their staff meeting time, from discussing operational matters to developing staff knowledge and skills about curriculum-related topics. Leaders talk of the need to 'prepare staff to design a curriculum rather than to plan lessons'. Where these professional learning sessions take place, there is a greater level of understanding of the principles of the new curriculum, more 'buy in' from staff, and the pace of reform is faster.

58   Schools have taken advantage of regional consortia professional learning programmes for curriculum development, which they have generally found beneficial. Schools that have a strong established culture of professional learning have focused on the 12 pedagogical principles, the four purposes or cross-curricular skills. Features of effective professional learning include:

- co-construction and collaboration with staff to establish a joint vision for teaching using the 12 pedagogical principles.
- considering how teaching may need to change to reflect the aspirations of the Curriculum for Wales, aligning pedagogy closely to developing the four purposes
- not being too prescriptive about approaches across disciplines, while also considering the connections and similarities between areas of learning and experience.

59   Increasingly, schools are working on professional enquiry projects in clusters and regions. For example, one school secured grant funding to carry out research in their cluster of schools, having identified a common issue with the underachievement of more able boys.

60   **Cwmtawe Community School** is using professional learning opportunities to change fixed views ahead of developing a new curriculum. This approach is encouraging more confident, creative approaches to teaching. There is greater sharing of practice, understanding of curriculum design and willingness to develop new pedagogies and learning experiences before embarking on curriculum change.

Cwmtawe Community School
Actions
Professional learning has a high priority for all staff across the school. Teachers take on the role of coaches and work with colleagues across the curriculum to support the planning of lessons, observe lessons and provide non-judgemental feedback. A more focused, skill-based lesson observation template for feedback has been introduced to enhance the

quality and balance of the feedback provided by those observing.

Time is allocated each half term for observations in a different area of learning and experience. Staff work with colleagues within their area of learning and experience to gain a better understanding of teaching pedagogies in readiness for trialling and implementing the new curriculum.

Outcomes

Professional learning is raising the quality of teaching and learning, equipping staff with strategies and skills and increasing their confidence to be more experimental in planning. Lesson observations demonstrate teachers' ability to develop pupils' metacognition skills, to encourage deeper self-reflection, and to develop pupils as independent learners.

Staff engaging with colleagues outside their subject areas, and having in-depth conversations about effective and creative planning has proved to be a strength. This has been vital in breaking down barriers between departments and to promoting a culture of collaboration. Lesson observation feedback forms highlight an improvement in the quality of teaching and more insightful self-reflection by staff. This dialogue and trust in the school has facilitated an 'open door' ethos where staff are willing to be observed to support the professional development of colleagues.

Teaching assistants at the school who have participated in the training are also more confident of their vital role in the classroom, are able to work independently and are less reliant on the guidance of teachers.

61   At Cowbridge Comprehensive School, their mission is to provide 'Education, inspiration and opportunities for life'. They wish their pupils to be resilient, curious, independent and highly-skilled young people. As such, they fully embrace the four purposes and aim to integrate these into everything that they do at the school.

Cowbridge Comprehensive School

Actions

Over the last 18 months, more than 50 teachers have completed one or more accredited programmes for leadership in education, or for high-quality teaching and learning. Professional learning has a high priority at the school.

This focus on professional learning has facilitated and encouraged high-level discussion relating to teaching, learning and leadership across the school. These processes have enabled teachers to share practice, observe each other's lessons and provide constructive suggestions for improvement to colleagues. This has led to an 'open door' culture and a willingness among teachers to strive for higher standards of teaching and learning. In the school's 2019 core inspection, we reported that this approach has contributed well to the school's highly effective teaching and

has had a 'substantial impact on pupils' personal development, wellbeing and the standards that they achieve'.

In addition, staff have been engaged in professional learning relating to improving pupils' behaviour, enhancing their wellbeing and 'understanding the teenage brain.'

Outcomes

The school's evaluation processes indicate that these initiatives are having a positive impact on pupil engagement, wellbeing and attitudes to learning. There is a high level of support and 'buy in' from staff.

62   The examples below show how schools in different contexts have used professional learning to support curriculum development or refine their approach to teaching.

In **Tredegar Comprehensive School,** leaders have taken an incremental approach to introducing staff to research-informed practice by developing a simple and accessible enquiry model. Teachers trial new methods or strategies in their classrooms. They then complete a short report and personal reflection, which includes the aim of the enquiry, the type of enquiry, a brief review of literature, their findings and any implications for their future professional practice. Leaders feel that this approach has helped to engage staff and has been well received.

Since 2015, senior leaders and staff at **Castell Alun High School** have worked to embed a collaborative research and development ethos for professional learning. This has allowed the school to take advantage of their established approaches to gain momentum quickly for their inter-disciplinary approach to developing their curriculum.

In **Bishop Hedley Catholic High School,** staff grouped in threes have worked effectively together on action research projects focusing on one pedagogical principle, and how this approach can improve outcomes for pupils. In addition, leaders have reframed 'lesson observations' as 'professional development observations'. This change in focus is helpful in supporting teachers to continue to develop their teaching skills.

In **Ysgol Y Creuddyn,** curriculum development has focused on the mathematics and numeracy area of learning and experience. Staff read relevant research and consider the impact that new approaches have had in other settings on standards and pupil experiences before making any changes. Staff are clear that a strategic overview of a pupil's learning journey in mathematics throughout their time at the school must be understood before changes are implemented.

How well are schools engaging with a range of partners and stakeholders?

63 A minority of schools identify strengthened partnerships, for example with a range of external organisations, with pupils and parents/carers, or with staff and across clusters of schools, as a particularly positive feature of their preparation for the Curriculum for Wales.

64 Fitzalan High School and their cluster partner primary schools have well established partnerships that are highly effective in supporting transition and developing a 3 to 16 curriculum.

Fitzalan High School

Strategy

Fitzalan High School aims to build relationships across their cluster primary schools to aid transition as well as to achieve a 3 to 16 curriculum. The aim is for all staff to develop a line of sight from 3 to 16, to create the best possible learning experiences that build on prior knowledge and skills. Regular collaborative opportunities enable a shared understanding of curriculum content and focus which is particularly useful around transition. The schools focus their work on five 'bridges': the administrative bridge, social and emotional bridge, curriculum bridge, pedagogical bridge, and management of learning bridge. These five bridges support a distributed leadership approach involving the headteachers' group, transition coordinators' group, subject groups, ALNCO group and specialist teacher support.

Action

There has been an annual cluster inset day in October of each year for the last seven years. All staff across the cluster attend, and over 650 teachers and teaching assistants are trained. All schools offer a series of workshops showcasing their action research over the previous academic year. Collaborative projects are then created to support change and respond to what has been learnt.

The group has utilised a team of ten cluster teachers to provide absence cover in the cluster schools. They also provide cover in a range of foundation subjects to support collaboration and curriculum design. Excellent relationships exist across all schools that are invaluable in helping pupils navigate changes across key stages and support families with their child's learning, as well as creating a strong support network for practitioners.

Outcomes

The cluster approach enables a shared pedagogical response to issues that are prominent across the schools, for example responding effectively

to English as an additional language learners, collaboration around transient populations, cluster response to the literacy and numeracy framework, digital competency framework and parental support. Staff have both formal and informal opportunities to work together, share and collaborate on curriculum and resourcing and assessment, enabling a shared understanding of progression. The use of cluster teachers has enabled schools to conduct a range of school improvement priorities and release staff without concerns of cover. Developing strong relationships across so many staff has allowed the group to work very closely, to achieve an understanding of each school context and collectively respond to the needs of the local community and contribute to improving the life chance of pupils in the local area.

65 In nearly all schools, there is a recognition that pupil voice is increasingly important. There are early indications of enthusiastic pupil attitudes towards curriculum changes in many of the schools we visited. Leaders have sought pupils' views on pilot project activity, for example through questionnaires and focus groups. In these instances, teachers have generally responded well to the pupils' feedback, by adapting or extending projects.

Pupils at **Ebbw Fawr Learning Community** were very articulate and enthusiastic about the recent learning experiences about their 'cynefin'. They liked the application of skills to different contexts and felt much prouder of their locality and are now keen to tell others about how great Ebbw Vale and Blaenau Gwent are and why.

66 Special schools are working well together, for example to define the characteristics of an excellent lesson within a Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties context. Leaders use this information to analyse the quality of teaching within their school. Special schools also work well with other specialist agencies, such as speech and language support, physiotherapists and the educational psychology service. Input from these agencies provides useful strategies for supporting pupils' learning targets.

67 Increasingly, schools recognise the importance of partnership working with partner primary schools to ensure progression in pupils' learning. For example, Prestatyn High School is working collaboratively with its five cluster primary schools to consider how best to develop the four purposes from key stage 2 to key stage 3 through joint curriculum planning.

68 In a very few instances, secondary schools and their cluster primaries are beginning to develop common approaches to teaching and learning across key stage 2 and key stage 3. More generally, secondary and primary partner schools are not working well enough together to ensure a continuum of learning and partnership working does not go much beyond moderation, transition activities and some subject level work.

King Henry VIII Comprehensive School works closely with its cluster primary schools to develop a clear understanding of pupil progression. Through team teaching, joint planning and quality assurance activities, teachers of pupils from 3 to 18, have established a joint understanding of progression in numeracy. Working together in primary and secondary settings, teachers have developed a shared vision and a clear understanding of effective mathematics and numeracy pedagogy. Teacher expectation has increased and as a result, pupil outcomes in numeracy have improved. There is a seamless transition to high school. Pupils benefit from the comfort of 'teacher familiarity' as teachers in high school will have taught some of them prior to transition.

Building on this work, using their peer 'enquiry cycle' underpinned by academic research, the cluster is establishing a progressive and unified approach to the development of pupils' oracy skills.

69   A few schools have strengthened their collaborative relationships with all partners, including higher education providers, as they design and implement their curriculum. For example, students from Cardiff University support Year 8 pupils in Willows High School to design a computer game as part of their weekly 'Genius Hour', an approach designed to develop pupils' creativity and independent learning skills. A few schools have identified their involvement with initial teacher education programmes as contributing strongly to developing their research skills and helping to contribute to a culture of scholarly activity and enquiry among all staff.

70   A few schools use their links with businesses or other partnerships, including further education colleges and work based learning training providers well. These links enrich curricular experiences, help to develop the four purposes or enhance provision, for example, for Welsh language.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- visits to 21 secondary, five all-age and three special schools
- notes from 10 engagement visits

We selected the schools to visit following consideration of their linguistic context, geographical location and socio-economic profile, as well as whether the school had received additional funding and had been involved in shaping the new curriculum.

When visiting schools, inspectors:

- met with senior leaders
- met with middle leaders
- met with pupils (if appropriate)
- scrutinised a range of relevant documents, including minutes of meetings, school development plans and schemes of work

We would like to thank the following schools that supported this thematic review:

Bassaleg School, Newport
Bishop Hedley Catholic High School, Merthyr Tydfil
Bishop Vaughan Catholic School, Swansea
Bishopston Comprehensive School, Swansea
Cantonian High School, Cardiff
Cardinal Newman Catholic School RCT
Castell Alun High School, Flintshire
Cowbridge Comprehensive School, Vale of Glamorgan
Crickhowell High School, Powys
Crownbridge Special School, Torfaen
Cwmtawe Community School, Neath Port Talbot
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, Blaenau Gwent
Ferndale Community School, RCT
Fitzalan High School, Cardiff
King Henry VIII Comprehensive School, Monmouthshire
Llanidloes High School, Powys
Penyrheol Comprehensive School, Swansea
Radyr Comprehensive School, Cardiff
St Martin's School, Caerphilly
Tonyrefail Community School, RCT
Ysgol Bro Pedr, Ceredigion
Ysgol Bryn Castell, Bridgend
Ysgol Glan y Môr, Gwynedd
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe, Swansea
Ysgol Gyfun Y Strade, Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg, Vale of Glamorgan
Ysgol Henry Richard, Ceredigion
Ysgol Maes Hyfryd, Flintshire
Ysgol Y Creuddyn, Conwy

Appendix 2: Information about the case study schools

The rolling three-year national average in 2020 for pupils of statutory school age who are eligible for free school meals in secondary schools in Wales is 17%.

The national average for pupils of all ages on school ALN registers is 21% in secondary schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020b).

All case study data comes from the Welsh Government's Pupil Level Annual School Census database. The latest data is for January 2020.

Bishop Vaughan Catholic School

Bishop Vaughan Catholic School is an 11 to 19 English-medium comprehensive voluntary aided school in the Diocese of Menevia. The school serves Swansea local authority and surrounding areas. There are currently 1,200 pupils on roll, including 252 in the sixth form. The school works in partnership with a neighbouring school to provide sixth form education. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 28%, and the rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 23%. Both are above the national average.

Crownbridge Special School

Crownbridge Special School is the only special school in Torfaen. It has provision for 116 pupils aged between three and 19 years across two sites. Just over three quarters of the pupils are of statutory school age. The school's catchment area comprises Torfaen, Newport and Monmouthshire.

The school was a pioneer school for the language, literacy and communication area of learning and experience and is currently a quality improvement and innovation school.

Ebbw Fawr Learning Community

Ebbw Fawr Learning Community is an English-medium 3 to 16 school, maintained by Blaenau Gwent local authority. There are 1,217 pupils on roll, with 287 in the primary phase and 930 in the secondary phase.

The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 21%. The school has a learning resource for pupils with complex needs attached to the school. The rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 23%.

Tonyrefail Community School

Tonyrefail Community School is an English-medium 3 to 19 school, maintained by the Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. There are 1,515 pupils on roll, with 315 in the primary phase, 897 in the secondary phase and 303 in the sixth form. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 25%. The rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 24%.

Bassaleg School

Bassaleg School is an English-medium 11 to 19 school maintained by Newport local authority. The school is situated to the north east of Newport. It has 1,677 pupils on roll with 302 in the sixth form.   The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 4%, and the rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 6%. Both of them are well below the national average.

The school was a pioneer school for the language, literacy and communication area of learning and experience and is currently a quality improvement and innovation school.

Cantonian High School

Cantonian High School is an English-medium 11 to 19 community school maintained by Cardiff local authority. It is located in Fairwater and serves the surrounding area in the west of Cardiff. There are currently 708 pupils on roll, 54 of them in the sixth form. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is 33%. The rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 38%, well above the national average.

The school incudes the 'Access base', supporting pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, those with general learning difficulties and those at risk of permanent exclusion.

Ferndale Community School

Ferndale Community School is a mixed English-medium 11 to 16 school maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. There are currently 583 pupils on roll. Most pupils come from the Rhondda Fach valley. The school hosts a special needs base that supports key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils from across the local authority with complex needs. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is 13%. The rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 33%, well above the national average.

The school is a professional learning school.

Cwmtawe Community School

Cwmtawe Community School is an 11 to 16 school in Neath Port Talbot local authority. There are 1,228 pupils on roll. Most pupils come from Pontardawe and the surrounding area, with about 50% opting to attend the school from outside the normal catchment area. The school has two specialist teaching bases on site, one for dyslexic pupils and the other specialising in autistic spectrum disorder. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 31%, above the national average. The rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 16%, slightly below the national average.

The school is a professional learning school.

Cowbridge Comprehensive School

Cowbridge Comprehensive School is an English-medium 11 to 19 school in the Vale of Glamorgan. There are 1,527 pupils on roll, including 331 pupils in the sixth form. The school is situated on the outskirts of Cowbridge town where, along with the surrounding villages, most pupils come from. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and the rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals are around 4%, well below the national averages.

The school is a professional learning school.

Fitzalan High School

Fitzalan High School is an English-medium 11 to 19 school maintained by Cardiff local authority. There are currently 1,742 pupils on roll, including 317 in the sixth form.

The school is situated close to the centre of the city, and serves a catchment area in which there are high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 22%. The rolling three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 27%, which is above the national average.

Approximately 85% of pupils come from a minority ethnic background and 67% speak English as an additional language. Over 60 different languages are spoken within the school community.

Appendix 3: Planning for skill development across LLC

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6
English	Tenses Present and past 1st / 3rd person	Declarative Present tense focus	Auxiliary verbs			
Welsh	Present Tense 1st/ 3rd person	3rd person Declarative Reporting facts	Regular and irregular past tense Imperfect Conditional 'I would like'	Quantifiers Comparatives Superlatives	Agree and disagree, to what extent Temporal connectives	Continuing debating skills and opinions Noun clause
MfL French	Indefinite article Gender of nouns	3rd person singular 'To be' Possessive pronouns Adjectives	Definitive article Indefinite article Two verbs in a sentence, where the second has to be infinitive Preposition	Prepositions Present tense Imperatives	Revisit imperatives Short conversations	Discourse Structures Articulate In my opinion, I think that, I agree etc.
MfL Spanish	Definite article 1st / 2nd person	To be – present tense Possessive Adjectives	As above Present tense Irregular verbs	Imperatives Giving directions	As above Application of previous skills Future tense Conditional	As above
Agreed Hook	Arrivals	Community and Culture	Fun	Go Global	Journeys	The argument

Glossary

areas of learning and experience (Area of learning and experience)	Successful Futures refers to the development of six areas of learning and experience as a way of organising curriculum subjects. These are expressive arts, health and wellbeing, humanities, languages, literacy and communication, mathematics and numeracy, and science and technology.
authentic experience	A real-life learning experience and context
Cynefin	The place where we feel we belong
Innovation schools	Innovation Schools have been drawn from the existing Pioneer Schools Network. These schools were invited to pilot aspects of the new curriculum, embedding the curriculum into teaching and learning.
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental economic organisation with 35 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.
pedagogy	The method and practice of teaching
pioneer schools	Schools that worked with the Welsh Government and other schools to develop and pilot the new curriculum for Wales. Pioneer Schools have supported the development of aspects of the curriculum and /or professional development.
professional enquiry	A 'finding out' or an investigation with a rationale and approach that can be explained or defended. The findings can then be shared so it becomes more than reflection or personal enquiry.
subsidiarity	Encouraging appropriate ownership and decision making by those closest to the teaching and learning process
regional consortia	The provision set up by a group of local authorities to deliver school improvement services as set out in the Welsh Government's National Model for Regional Working
Schools as learning organisations	A learning organisation is a place where the beliefs, values and norms of employees are brought to bear to support sustained learning.

Numbers – quantities and proportions

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

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