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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

The Skills Framework at key stage 3

An evaluation of the non-statutory Skills framework for 3 to 19-year olds at key stage 3

May 2012



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Introduction

- 1 In July 2011, Estyn published a report on the impact of the non-statutory Skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales at key stage 2. As part of the Minister's annual remit for 2011-2012, the Welsh Government requested further advice from Estyn about the impact of the Skills framework at key stage 3.
- 2 This report evaluates how well secondary schools in Wales use the Skills framework at key stage 3 to plan and deliver improvements in pupils' development of generic skills.
- 3 The report:
 - evaluates how well secondary schools ensure continuity and progression in the development of pupils' generic skills between key stage 2 and key stage 3, and within key stage 3;
 - evaluates the impact of the Skills framework on standards, teaching and assessment at key stage 3;
 - identifies case studies of good practice; and
 - makes recommendations for further improvement.
- 4 The report is intended for the Welsh Government, senior managers and staff in secondary schools, and local authority officers and advisers. The report may also be of interest to institutions that train teachers and to church diocesan authorities.

Background

- 5 The 'Future Skills Wales 2003 Generic Skills Survey' reported that employers in Wales were concerned about employee skills gaps. They identified a lack of information and communication technology skills as the most common problem. In addition, they also identified weak communication skills and employees' inability to show initiative, solve problems and work independently using transferable skills.
- 6 In the 'Review of the School Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements 5-16' (ACCAC, 2004), the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales advised that there should be a radically revised curriculum that focused on equipping learners with transferable skills.
- 7 In 2008, the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills published the revised statutory National Curriculum Subject Orders and a number of non-statutory frameworks that included the Skills framework. The Skills framework is not intended to be a programme of study, but is meant to underpin the planning for the Foundation Phase, all National Curriculum 2008 Subject Orders, and the frameworks for personal and social education, careers and the world of work, and religious education.
- 8 In end of key stage 3 teacher assessment, pupils' performance has steadily improved in English and Welsh first language since 2004. Within these assessments, teachers

judge pupils' writing skills to be consistently poorer than their reading and oracy skills. Performance in the PISA survey in 2009¹ shows that the performance in reading of pupils in Wales has fallen behind those in other home countries.

- 9 The Skills framework identifies four main areas for skill development including:
- communication, including reading, writing, speaking and listening;
 - number;
 - thinking; and
 - information and communication technology.
- 10 The framework provides guidance on planning continuity and progression across these areas. It emphasises that pupils refine and extend skills in activities that become more complex and challenging over time.
- 11 'Making the most of learning – Implementing the revised curriculum' (DCELLS 2008) provides schools with further support and guidance on how to implement the Skills framework alongside the new National Curriculum Subject Orders. The document reiterates that the aims of the new curriculum are to:
- focus on the learner;
 - ensure appropriate generic skills development throughout the curriculum;
 - focus on continuity and progression for 3 to 19-year-olds; and
 - reduce subject content in order to increase the focus on skills.
- 12 'Making the most of learning' gives examples of the various ways schools may choose to plan the new curriculum. It stresses that it is for schools to decide how they approach the implementation of the revised curriculum and frameworks. The Welsh government hopes, however, that the Skills framework will be used alongside the National Curriculum Subject Orders and other frameworks to help the planning process and it is suggested that the Skills framework 'could, indeed be most effective if used as the first point of reference when planning'.
- 13 'Making the most of learning' also identifies that a whole-school approach to the planning and provision of a skills-based curriculum is pivotal to its success. It suggests that one senior leader within a school should have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the revised skills-based curriculum.

The Estyn report in 2011 on the impact of the Skills framework in key stage 2 found that:

- primary schools do not use the Skills framework well to plan for progression in developing pupils' skills;
- few primary schools use the Skills framework as a starting point for planning their work; and
- few primary schools are planning a curriculum to develop generic skills consisting of progressively more complex activities designed to improve pupils' thinking, communication, number and information and communication technology skills.

¹ Programme for International Student Assessment 2009 (PISA)

Main findings

- 14 The Skills framework's main effect has been to raise awareness of the need to develop pupils' skills, particularly literacy and numeracy. It does not significantly influence planning in most secondary schools in Wales. Most schools do not use the Skills framework when planning the development of skills because:
- they place a higher priority on making sure that schemes of work match National Curriculum Orders;
 - the descriptions of progress in skills given in the framework are not precise enough, are not exemplified, and are too broad to be helpful; and
 - using the framework is not a statutory requirement.
- 15 The schools in the survey use various resources to help them plan the development of pupils' generic skills in key stage 3. Many schools use the Essential Skills Wales programmes of study. Schools use it because it is precise and provides the basis for the progressive development of skills within and beyond key stage 3. The opportunity to gain Essential Skills qualifications also improves pupils' motivation.
- 16 Most teachers see their role as developing both subject-specific skills and generic skills. Schools place the highest priority on schemes of work matching the revised National Curriculum Subject Orders, all of which require teachers to consider pupils' acquisition of both subject and certain generic skills. Teachers develop schemes of work from the subject Orders and then identify opportunities within these to use generic skills.
- 17 A majority of schools use a common approach to teaching aspects of communication skills, but most of these approaches are at an early stage of development. Very few schools have a coherent and well-planned approach to delivering the whole range of generic skills across the curriculum. Very few base their approach on the Skills framework.
- 18 There are good opportunities to develop communication skills across all subjects in key stage 3. Where subject teachers develop writing skills well, they provide pupils with opportunities to answer open-ended questions and offer them appropriate challenge and support in the form of prompts, writing frames or relevant examples. They share and clearly explain assessment criteria agreed by the school with pupils.
- 19 A minority of schools develop pupils' generic skills in extended projects that explore various themes. However, this practice does not in itself ensure that pupils make good progress in developing generic skills. It is most effective where managers:
- have good understanding of pupils' development needs;
 - use this to carefully plan and co-ordinate work; and
 - provide appropriate in-service training for teachers.
- 20 Nearly all schools have a member of staff with overall responsibility for the development and implementation of a strategy for the development of generic skills. In about half of schools, this is either a middle management post specifically for skills

development or a role carried out by a heads of year or leaders of Welsh first language, English, information and communication technology or mathematics departments. In other schools, a senior leader has responsibility for co-ordinating generic skills development across the curriculum. In schools making the greatest progress in developing pupils' generic skills, senior managers clearly communicate a supporting philosophy for the need to develop these skills across the curriculum. They also provide staff with appropriate resources and training.

- 21 There is significant variation in the support and guidance that local authorities provide to schools. Most local authorities do not prioritise the use of the Skills framework because it is non-statutory. Instead, they have concentrated on other initiatives such as the Welsh Government's 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning'.
- 22 Most schools involved in the Welsh Government's project 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning' make good use of the techniques highlighted to develop thinking skills across the curriculum. Many of these techniques also effectively promote reading and writing skills.
- 23 Many schools have useful networks of professional practice to improve their generic skills provision. The most effective of these receive direction and guidance from a local authority and focus on the development of one particular generic skill. The Welsh Government's 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning' project exerts greater influence than the Skills framework on these groups. Most of these groups are at too early a stage to have had any impact on the development of generic skills across the curriculum.
- 24 Very few schools use the Skills framework for their monitoring processes. Even so, a majority of schools monitor provision for generic skills in schemes of work and evaluate pupils' standards in generic skills during lesson observations. A minority of schools do not monitor how teachers are developing generic skills in their quality assurance procedures.
- 25 Only a few schools work closely with their feeder primaries to plan a curriculum that suitably builds on pupils' skills when they move from key stage 2 to key stage 3.
- 26 In nearly all schools, pupils reflect on their progress in generic skills and set themselves targets for improvement in Welsh first language, English and mathematics. However, only a minority of schools give pupils opportunities to set themselves targets to develop their communication skills in subjects other than English or Welsh. Schools do not use similar practices for other generic skills.
- 27 About half of schools track pupils' progress in generic skills, but very few refer to the Skills framework in this process. Most schools track pupils' progress in generic skills through outcomes in English or Welsh, mathematics and information and communication technology. A few schools use outcomes from Essential Skills Wales qualifications.
- 28 Elaborate and complex tracking systems create too great a burden for teachers and do not produce useful targets for improvement in generic skills. Simple tracking systems have a greater success in generating meaningful targets for improvements in standards of generic skills.

- 29 Pupils have opportunities to influence what they learn in only about half of schools. Where this is a common practice across all subjects, pupils feel a greater sense of motivation, enjoy their work more and, in general, make good progress.

Recommendations

Secondary schools should:

- R1 ensure appropriate and progressive coverage in key stage 3 to develop pupils' skills in thinking, communication, information and communication technology and numeracy skills;
- R2 work with their feeder primary schools to ensure suitable continuity and progression in the development of generic skills;
- R3 co-ordinate the approach to teaching, communication, thinking, information and communication technology and numeracy skills in key stage 3; and
- R4 develop effective systems for tracking pupils' progress in developing generic skills to inform future planning.

Local authorities should:

- R5 support to schools in:
- planning a curriculum that develops pupils' literacy and numeracy skills progressively across all subjects in key stage 3; and
 - assessing and tracking pupils' generic skills development between key stage 2 and key stage 3, and throughout key stage 3.

The Welsh Government should:

- R6 review the Skills framework so that it:
- provides clear progression in developing pupils' generic skills throughout key stage 3;
 - provides a simpler structure that schools can easily use to plan, assess and track pupils' progress in developing generic skills; and
 - provide schools with examples of pupils' standards in generic skills across the curriculum; and
- R7 review the value to schools of the Skills framework and consider including the development of pupils' generic skills within the National Curriculum Subject Orders themselves.

Teaching and assessment

- 30 Since the introduction of the revised National Curriculum in 2008, nearly all schools have made changes to teaching methods to encourage pupils to develop generic skills across the curriculum. However, only a minority of teachers across all subjects use these methods effectively.
- 31 A minority of schools have introduced 'skills' lessons into their key stage 3 curriculum. This approach eases pupils' transition into secondary school by increasing the time they spend with their form tutor. This means that one teacher gets to know pupils' strengths and weaknesses well and plans work, across the whole ability range, to develop pupils' generic skills effectively.
- 32 'Skills' lessons usually involve humanities departments working together to provide opportunities to develop pupils' generic skills in extended projects. The proportion of curriculum time that schools give to such initiatives varies from around a third to two-thirds. Most of the schools that adopt this approach use it predominantly in Year 7 and implement a progressively more traditional approach in Year 8 and Year 9.
- 33 In many of these schools this approach provides a useful vehicle to improve generic skills. In the most effective examples of this kind of practice:
- teachers have a good understanding of what progress means in communication, numeracy, thinking and information and communication technology skills;
 - teachers provide themes within which pupils are given freedom to pursue their own interests;
 - teachers and pupils discuss what specific improvements pupils need to make in generic skills and set criteria by which pupils and teachers will assess progress; and
 - assessment feeds into systematic planning for improvement in pupils' generic skills.
- 34 However, this method does not in itself ensure that pupils make good progress in skills. This method has been successful in about half of the schools that have trialled it; others have discontinued the approach. Problems are generally associated with teachers working outside their area of expertise, including:
- loss of subject content, because teachers do not exploit opportunities for pupils to extend their subject specific skills, knowledge and understanding appropriately;
 - uneven development of pupils' subject specific skills;
 - unfocussed lessons that lack appropriate pace and challenge; and
 - no improvement in pupils' generic skills.
- 35 In many schools, teachers develop generic skills by including them as an integral part of subject teaching. A majority of these schools use common teaching strategies for developing pupils' generic skills, such as including 'lesson starters' to encourage thinking, mental arithmetic exercises, and shared marking strategies for basic

grammar. However, much of this development is at too early a stage to have had a significant impact on standards. In a minority of schools, individual departments do not follow a common approach to including generic skills in their schemes of work. In the very few instances where generic skills are developed in a co-ordinated manner, pupils benefit from the combined effort of teachers working together and standards in generic skills improve.

- 36 Nearly all subject teachers provide opportunities to develop communication skills. Where subject teachers develop pupils' writing skills effectively, they provide pupils with opportunities to attempt open-ended questions and structure these carefully to challenge pupils at the appropriate level. They share and clearly explain assessment criteria with pupils. In a minority of cases, over-reliance on worksheets in subjects other than Welsh first language or English means that there are few opportunities for writing at length. This restricts pupils' progress in writing.
- 37 Many teachers discuss generic skills with pupils when setting lessons aims and objectives. In the best practice, teachers explain to pupils how they will use a particular aspect of a skill in the lesson rather than merely listing the skills to be used. They also give pupils specific criteria against which pupils can set themselves targets and assess their own progress.
- 38 While all subjects across the curriculum provide opportunities for the development of communication skills, there are fewer chances to develop numeracy. A majority of mathematics departments provides a suitable range of experiences for pupils to develop their numeracy skills effectively. However, in a minority, activities do not reflect situations that pupils will encounter in their everyday life. In other subjects across the curriculum, science, geography, information and communication technology and design technology provide the best opportunities for developing this skill. Despite this, subject areas such as history and religious education can also provide useful opportunities to practise and improve numeracy.
- 39 A majority of science and geography departments provide suitable opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills because they arise naturally within these subjects. In both of these subjects, there are good opportunities to develop pupils' abilities to:
- produce graphs;
 - use statistical data;
 - measure and record data;
 - search for patterns; and
 - use ratio and proportion.

Science teachers who use the CASE² materials effectively provide pupils with opportunities to develop a greater range of higher level numeracy skills in stimulating contexts. In a minority of pupils' work, the numeracy techniques employed are too narrow and involve mainly graph work. As a result, pupils do not have enough planned opportunities to practise, complement and extend techniques that they learn in mathematics lessons.

² CASE – cognitive acceleration through science education – is a programme taught through science, designed to stimulate and develop pupils' thinking skills. It is a two-year programme consisting of 32 activities that promotes the development from concrete to formal (higher) levels of thinking.

- 40 In general, the development of numeracy across the curriculum is less advanced than that of literacy. This is to be expected as using language to communicate effectively is an essential element in all subject areas. However, most teachers of subjects other than mathematics do not know the mathematical skills of pupils or how mathematics departments teach them. They do not plan a curriculum where there are enough opportunities to progressively develop numeracy skills in subjects such as science, geography or design and technology throughout key stage 3.
- 41 All schools involved with the Welsh Government's 'Developing Thinking and Assessment for Learning Programme'³ make good use of strategies from the 'teacher's toolbox'⁴. Although the intention of these activities is to develop pupils' thinking skills, teachers often find them an effective vehicle for developing other skills such as literacy and numeracy. In these schools, there is a firm focus on the use of various assessment for learning techniques such as self or peer marking, 'paired discussions' and exploring common misconceptions. Even though these techniques improve standards, only a very few schools use them to develop pupils' generic skills. Where teachers provide success criteria for pupils to use these techniques, they are generally about improvements in subject specific skills.
- 42 Very few schools use the Skills framework to structure a curriculum in which aspects of thinking are developed progressively. This is because the descriptions of progress are not precise enough and have not been exemplified. Even so, the range of opportunities that arises naturally within all subjects provides a suitable context to develop all aspects of thinking skills. In a few schools, teachers use Essential Skills Wales qualifications in 'problem solving' and 'improving own learning and performance' to promote the development of thinking skills across the curriculum effectively.
- 43 In a majority of schools, the level of challenge in thinking skills increases appropriately throughout the key stage. However, in a minority of schools, teachers provide work for pupils in Year 9 that is too similar to that in Year 7 to promote good progress in this skill. These teachers do not increase the level of challenge within the key stage to develop pupils' thinking skills enough.

'Essential Skills Wales'⁵ in key stage 3
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- 44 Many schools in the survey follow Essential Skills Wales courses that give pupils opportunities to gain qualifications in generic skills. Essential Skills Wales qualifications provide a useful structure for the development of generic skills in key stage 3 and prepare pupils for the type of work they will encounter in key stage 4. Following these courses increases the motivation of specific groups of pupils, particularly boys, and has a positive impact on pupils' achievements in subjects.

³ Developing Thinking and Assessment for Learning. A Welsh government programme that focuses on the development, implementation and dissemination of good practice in the teaching of developing thinking and assessment for learning strategies.

⁴ Teacher's toolbox. A range of strategies designed to improve pupils' thinking skills that can be found within documents relating to the Developing Thinking and Assessment for Learning programme.

⁵ Essential Skills Wales qualifications. These qualifications comprise Application of Number, Communication and ICT. Each skill is assessed at levels 1-4 via an internally assessed and externally moderated portfolio.

- 45 Pupils at risk of disaffection who follow these courses involve themselves more positively in their lessons and take greater responsibility for the quality their work. A few schools use Essential Skills Wales qualifications successfully to improve pupils' motivation in unpopular curriculum areas.
- 46 A few of the schools following courses based on Essential Skills Wales qualifications were able to demonstrate a positive impact on pupils' achievement in end of key stage 3 teacher assessments. However, the existence of other initiatives, such as the Welsh Government's 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning' project and other factors such as the variation in teacher assessment, means that it is difficult to isolate the impact of individual enterprises.

Assessment of generic skills

- 47 About a half of teachers make useful comments on pupils' progress in extended pieces of writing. In the best practice, teachers use criteria developed from a whole-school strategy that aims at co-ordinating improvements in literacy across all subjects. In the few, most effective examples, teachers pinpoint errors and give pupils clear targets for improvement. The teacher follows this up by giving the pupil a brief, targeted activity so that they can practise the particular aspect of writing that needs developing. More often, however, teachers only highlight spelling errors.
- 48 In nearly all of the schools, pupils reflect on their own progress in communication and numeracy skills and set themselves targets for improvement in the core subjects of Welsh first language, English and mathematics. This practice improves their levels of interest and participation, and results in better acquisition of generic skills, knowledge and understanding.
- 49 In Welsh first language and/or English, most teachers give pupils useful guidelines that clearly and simply describe progress in communication skills. In general, schools develop these from descriptions of progress within National Curriculum Subject Orders for English or Welsh first language. In a minority of schools, pupils use these across the curriculum. These schools give pupils opportunities to set themselves meaningful targets to develop their communication skills in subjects other than English or Welsh first language. As a result, these pupils make consistently good progress in their writing skills across all subjects.
- 50 The development of techniques to give feedback in the skills of numeracy, thinking or information and communication technology is at a very early stage in all schools. Teachers do not provide feedback to pupils to support the development of these skills outside of mathematics or information and communication technology lessons.
- 51 Only in about half of schools do pupils have opportunities to influence what they learn. These opportunities are given most frequently in science, English and Welsh, geography, history, information and communication technology and generic 'skills' lessons. They mainly take the form of presentations, surveys and investigations in which pupils respond to stimulating open-ended tasks. Tasks that motivate more able pupils include:
- an essay in English entitled 'Wonder', where pupils are given free rein to focus on their own interests;

- a project in an integrated skills course entitled 'philosophy and evolution', which allows pupils to examine the background to the theory of evolution from different perspectives; and
- a picture of a family's dustbin in a science lesson, where pupils describe the family and then devise a better diet for them.

Tracking of pupils' progress in generic skills

- 52 About half of the schools track pupils' progress in generic skills in some way. Most schools track pupils' progress in skills through National Curriculum assessment outcomes in English or Welsh first language, mathematics and information and communication technology. A few schools rely on outcomes from Essential Skills Wales qualifications. Only a very few schools refer to the Skills framework in their tracking process.
- 53 A few schools use externally-produced reading, mathematics and reasoning tests at the beginning and end of key stage 3. However, these tests do not measure pupils' abilities in generic skills in the way that Skills framework defines them. Although it is helpful to use outcomes of these tests to determine pupils' learning needs, they are not an appropriate method of tracking progress in skills such as thinking, information and communication technology or writing.
- 54 A very few schools have attempted to produce a tracking system based on the Skills framework. Subject teachers used an electronic spread sheet to record pupils' progress in the individual strands that make up communication, thinking, mathematics and information and communication technology skills. In practice, the process proved too complex, increased bureaucratic demands too much and did not lead to effective targets for improvement in generic skills.
- 55 A few schools use simple tracking systems to good effect. For example, in a very few schools, year tutors are responsible for co-ordinating the work of tutors who deliver a curriculum that develops pupils' generic skills in extended projects. Progress managers collect pupils' work from across the curriculum and meet to discuss individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses in generic skills. In this way, year tutors keep track of pupils' progress in generic skills such as literacy, and form tutors tailor work purposefully to meet individual pupils' needs.

Curriculum planning

Planning transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3

- 56 About half of schools consider continuity and progression in generic skills when pupils transfer from primary to secondary school. Very few schools work effectively with their feeder primary schools to plan a curriculum that suitably builds on pupils' skills when they transfer from key stage 2 to key stage 3. These schools work together, to establish a common strategy for developing skills. In the very few, most effective arrangements, pupils' transfer records include descriptions of pupils' abilities in literacy, numeracy, thinking and information and communication technology skills. Secondary schools use this information appropriately to adapt the work to meet all pupils' needs.
- 57 A very few schools have attempted to gain an understanding of pupils' standards in generic skills by working with their feeder schools to produce a common portfolio. However, lack of clarity within the Skills framework meant that they failed to reach a common understanding of standards in generic skills and they eventually abandoned the project.

Planning in key stage 3

- 58 All schools use a variety of sources to help them plan their key stage 3 curriculum. Most teachers plan their curriculum in accordance with the National Curriculum Subject Orders and then identify opportunities to employ generic skills in schemes of work.
- 59 All schools use individual subjects to provide suitable contexts in which to develop pupils' generic skills. They prioritise the development of pupils' skills in communication, numeracy, thinking and information and communication technology skills at key stage 3. Most teachers recognise that they have an important role in developing pupils' generic, as well as subject specific, skills. A few teachers describe themselves solely as subject teachers. Only a very few identify themselves primarily as teachers of generic skills.
- 60 The Skills framework has helped to improve most schools' awareness of the need to develop pupils' generic skills across the curriculum. However, only a very few schools use the Skills framework as their first point of reference when planning a whole-school approach to schemes of work and generic skill development.
- 61 Only a very few schools use the Skills framework effectively to help them plan a curriculum in which generic skills are developed progressively in all subjects. However, a minority of schools plan to develop generic skills appropriately without using or making a specific reference to the Skills framework.
- 62 Most schools do not find the Skills framework a helpful document to aid planning because the messages within are confusing. Descriptions of progress are not precise, do not always reflect improvement and are too broad to be helpful.

Reference to two documents in planning adds an unnecessary layer of complexity. In addition, it does not provide examples of pupils' work to help teachers understand the context.

- 63 Most schools that made great initial efforts to use the Skills framework in their planning now prefer to use more clearly defined frameworks. These include Essential skills Wales programmes of study, schemes that schools develop themselves and those offered by local authorities.
- 64 Many schools use the Essential Skills Wales programmes of study as an outline for generic skills development in key stage 3. This is because they provide structure, progression, motivation and a focus for developing generic skills in key stage 3. Schools prefer to use these than the Skills framework because they understand the programmes' requirements better and examination boards provide clear guidance with substantial examples.
- 65 A majority of schools plan their curriculum so that there are enough opportunities for pupils to use different generic skills in most subject areas. Where this has been most successful, teachers share an understanding of how to develop generic skills systematically across the curriculum. All staff involve themselves in debating the key stage 3 curriculum, planning its structure and developing it.
- 66 Only a minority of schools map skills development across the curriculum. They ensure good coverage and coherent development of generic skills across all subjects. These schools do not expect all departments to teach all skill areas to the same extent. They prioritise the development of certain skills in specific departments, for example numeracy in science, geography and design and technology. In this way, subjects do not artificially attempt to introduce certain skills into their lessons.
- 67 However, many schools do not manage their curriculum well enough to ensure that pupils make progress in these skills across all subjects. Only a few schools plan a co-ordinated curriculum with an ever-increasing level of challenge in generic skills.
- 68 A minority of schools organise their curriculum in key stage 3 so that pupils develop their skills in extended projects that explore various themes. This closely resembles common practice in key stage 2 and is reasonably effective in about half of the schools who adopt this approach. These schools successfully maintain pupils' progress during transition from primary to secondary school.
- 69 Guidance from the Welsh Government in the document 'Making the most of learning' recommends that a senior leader takes responsibility for the implementation of the Skills framework. In about half of schools, responsibility for co-ordinating generic skills development across the curriculum lies with a senior leader. Other schools have created a specific middle manager post to co-ordinate skills development or have delegated this responsibility to a middle manager, such as a heads of year or leaders of Welsh first language, English, information and communication technology or mathematics departments.
- 70 In the few examples where schools co-ordinate generic skills development well, senior leaders effectively communicate a clear vision of how to improve pupils'

generic skills in all subjects across the curriculum. They are willing to abandon a particular approach if it is proving unsuccessful.

- 71 Most teachers place an appropriately high priority on improving pupils' reading and writing skills. However, only a minority of schools effectively co-ordinate the development of pupils' reading and writing skills across all subjects. In these schools, the English or Welsh first language department takes the lead and sets out general guidance to other departments. In light of this guidance, individual departments consider what constitutes good writing within their subject areas and plan work that builds on this. These departments also include suitable opportunities to expand pupils' reading experiences within their schemes of work.
- 72 Good progress within subjects is dependent on acquisition of good thinking skills. This and the influence of the Welsh Government's 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning' programme mean that improving this skill receives an appropriately high priority in a majority of schools.
- 73 Planning for numeracy and information and communication technology skills across all subject areas is at a very early stage in nearly all schools. Only a very few schools have a co-ordinated strategy in which the level of challenge within these skills progressively increases throughout the key stage.

Training and support

Local authorities

- 74 There is significant variation in the kind of support and guidance different local authorities provide for schools. Most do not prioritise or promote the use of the Skills framework. This is because of the Skills framework's non-statutory status and other more influential initiatives such as the Welsh Government's assessment for learning and developing thinking programme.
- 75 Only a few schools receive useful advice from their local authority on how to use the Skills framework to deliver and assess pupils' progress in generic skills across all subjects. Much of the local authorities' guidance is about developing thinking skills and does not refer to the Skills framework. A few local authorities help schools to set up internal working parties to promote good practice in developing numeracy, literacy thinking and information and communication technology skills. In general the Skills framework has little impact on the work of these groups.
- 76 A few local authorities are creating their own effective approaches to developing generic skills. For example, school improvement officers working for the City and County of Swansea are developing an initiative that aims to improve pupils' reading skills across the curriculum. They identify eight strategies that successful readers adopt and train individual teachers in how to promote them. Although the programme is at an early stage, initial outcomes are promising.

In-house training within schools

- 77 Nearly all schools provide in-service training to stimulate staff discussion on how to develop generic skills across all subjects. Despite this, only about half of schools provide their staff with training that specifically aims to develop use of the Skills framework itself. In the few schools that use external consultants to help create an agenda for change, they provide a useful platform to help schools develop their generic skills provision. However, most schools are at a very early stage in their approach to developing generic skills across the curriculum.
- 78 A minority of schools in the survey are involved in the Welsh Government's project 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning'. In nearly all these schools, teachers engaging in the project share useful information with others during in-house training on methods of developing pupils' thinking skills. Most of these schools make good use of the techniques promoted to develop thinking and other generic skills across all subjects in the curriculum. However, very few schools have been successful in aligning these activities effectively with the 'thinking strands' of the Skills framework.

Working with others

- 79 Very few departments work together to co-ordinate aspects of their work such as teaching of spread sheets in information and communication technology or graph work in mathematics, science, geography and other subjects. As a result, they do not plan a curriculum that develops generic skills progressively across all subjects. Therefore, pupils in only a very few schools benefit from the combined effect of individual departments working purposefully towards the same goal.
- 80 Only a minority of schools visit other schools in Wales and England to gather and distil ideas. All of these schools have benefited from the experience and made positive changes in their practice to improve provision for generic skills.
- 81 Many schools in the survey have useful professional learning communities both within their school and with others to develop their provision for generic skills. The Welsh Government's 'Developing thinking and assessment for learning' project influences the work of these groups more than the Skills framework. Most of these groups are at too early a stage of development to have any impact across the curriculum. In addition, not enough of these groups work together and disseminate their findings effectively to all staff. A few of these groups are developing exciting ideas. For example, teachers from the English, Welsh and French departments in one school work together on a co-ordinated approach to teaching common aspects of literacy such as punctuation and exploring word origins, in the three different languages.

Monitoring

- 82 A majority of schools monitor individual departments' provision for generic skills in their schemes of work as part of their quality assurance systems. They check pupils' work for the inclusion of generic skills across the curriculum and focus on generic skills in lesson observations. However, the Skills framework itself does not influence schools in their monitoring processes. Most schools only monitor coverage of generic skills; they do not evaluate how departments plan to ensure that pupils are making appropriate progress in generic skills.
- 83 A minority of schools do not focus on how teachers are developing communication, number, thinking or information and communication technology skills in their quality assurance procedures. These schools are unaware of how different departments are increasing challenge in generic skills across all subjects.
- 84 Local authorities monitor schools' provision for skills in only a few schools. The use of the Skills framework is rarely a focus during monitoring visits by local authority representatives.

Appendix 1 – Evidence base

This report draws on:

- visits by inspectors to a representative sample of 17 secondary schools across Wales. Inspectors interviewed senior and middle leaders, scrutinised pupils' work in key stage 3, scrutinised documents and spoke to groups of learners;
- telephone interviews with school improvement officers from seven local authorities in Wales; and
- questionnaires completed by 46 subject leaders.

The schools visited as part of this remit were:

- Bassaleg Comprehensive School, Newport.
- Bulth Wells High School, Powys
- Coedcae Comprehensive School, Carmarthenshire
- Cynffig Comprehensive School, Bridgend
- Eirias High School, Conwy
- Mary Immaculate High School, Cardiff
- Monmouth Comprehensive School, Monmouthshire
- Olchfa Comprehensive School, City and county of Swansea
- Pen y Dre High school, Merthyr Tydfil
- Pontarddulais Comprehensive school, City and County of Swansea
- Prestatyn High school, Denbighshire
- Rhyl High school, Denbighshire
- Tonyrefail Comprehensive School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Denbighshire
- Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd, Bridgend
- Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr, Cardiff
- Ysgol Tre Gib, Carmarthenshire

Appendix 2 – Case studies

Case study 1

Planning for skills development

Context

Eirias High School is an English-medium, mixed 11-18 foundation comprehensive school in the County Borough of Conwy. The school draws from the full range of economic and social backgrounds. There are 1,521 pupils in the school and around 13% of these are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

The school uses elements from the Skills framework, the Welsh Government document 'Making the most of learning' and Essential Skills Wales qualifications as a

basis for developing the curriculum. Pupils develop their literacy, numeracy thinking and information and communication technology skills in all subjects and build on these during extended projects.

Action

In Year 7, English, mathematics, a modern foreign language, Welsh and physical education take up around a third of the curriculum time. During the rest of the time, pupils develop their literacy, numeracy thinking and information and communication technology skills effectively in stimulating extended projects with titles such as 'science and ethics', 'conflict in art' and 'Pi in the sky'. Teachers who wish to develop their management skills carefully co-ordinate these projects and ensure that pupils plan challenging work for themselves.

In Year 8, pupils follow a more traditional curriculum but also have the opportunity to improve their literacy, numeracy, thinking and information and communication technology skills in discrete 'skills' lessons.

In Year 9, pupils have the opportunity to gain qualifications in key skills through Essential Skills Wales accredited courses.

Outcomes

- Pupils understand how well they are progressing in different skill areas and are able to set themselves appropriate targets for improvement.
- Pupils plan increasingly complex projects that develop their skills in stimulating contexts.
- Pupils develop their ability to work independently, evaluate their own work and set appropriate targets for improvement.
- Pupils make clear progress in literacy, numeracy, thinking and information and communication technology.

Case study 2

Tracking of progress in skills

Context

Monmouth Comprehensive School is an 11-18 mixed, community school maintained by Monmouthshire County Council. The school has around 1,643 pupils on roll. The ability range and social background of pupils and students are very broad. Around 9% of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

The school uses elements from Essential Skills Wales qualifications curricula as the basis for developing the key stage 3 curriculum. 'Progress managers' keep track of pupils' work and ensure that information from assessment effectively informs future planning.

Action

Pupils follow an 'integrated skills' curriculum in key stage 3, where form tutors carefully structure pupils' learning in extended projects. Form tutors assess pupils' work, specifically focusing on their literacy skills. Tutors give feedback in the form of helpful, diagnostic comments. Progress managers oversee these assessments and, in discussion with form tutors, set meaningful targets for improvements in pupils' skills. Tutors and pupils use this information in partnership to develop agreed success criteria that focus on what the individual pupil needs to do to improve their skills. Progress managers keep track of these targets, share them with all subject teachers and check pupils' progress against them.

Outcomes

Tutors and progress managers accurately identify specific pupils' individual learning needs. Tutors and pupils work together to plan future work that systematically develops pupils' literacy skills. Pupils gain a very good understanding of how to improve as a result of constructive discussions about their work with their form tutors. They make consistently good progress in their writing skills across all subjects in the curriculum

Case study 3**Involving pupils in their own progress in skills****Context**

Pen Y Dre High School is a mixed 11-18 school maintained by Merthyr Borough Council. It has 878 pupils and students on roll, 33% of whom are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

Subject teachers use the Essential Skills Wales curriculum to plan opportunities to develop pupils' skills. The school provides pupils with a booklet in which they track their own progress in each of the skill areas.

Action

Each subject department has a 'skills champion' who ensures that schemes of work include stimulating opportunities for skills development. The school provides pupils with a booklet that maps the various skill areas and teachers refer to appropriate sections of this when they present their lessons objectives. Pupils track their own progress in these booklets by writing brief descriptions of how they completed relevant tasks in different subjects. In Year 9, pupils carry out their own research in interesting extended projects and continue to track their own skills development.

Outcomes

In this school:

- all departments ensure that there are enough appropriate opportunities to develop skills in their schemes of work;
- pupils are fully aware of the skills they encounter;
- pupils are well prepared for the type of work they will encounter in key stage 4; and
- pupils develop their ability effectively to gather evidence independently.

Case study 4

Monitoring provision for skills

Mary Immaculate Catholic High School, Cardiff

Context

Mary Immaculate Catholic High School is an 11-16 school serving the Catholic community of the western region of Cardiff. There are approximately 530 pupils on roll and 29.5% of these pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the national average.

Strategy

Mary Immaculate Catholic High School includes pupils' development in skills in its teaching and learning policy. The school has rigorous monitoring procedures that challenge all pupils to meet their potential in all areas of their learning. The senior management team regularly undertake lesson observations, book reviews and pupil surveys that focus on the progress pupils are making in skills such as literacy and numeracy.

Action

All lesson plans identify opportunities for pupils to develop appropriate skills and teachers make these clear to pupils. The school expects that all teachers will take account of the development of skills across the curriculum. However, each faculty has a specific responsibility for the development of a particular skill. This ensures that generic skills are delivered in many contexts across the curriculum. The school trains its teachers to observe lessons effectively and they all participate in the school's peer observation programme. Lesson monitoring places a clear focus on generic skills. Outcomes form the basis of teachers' personal development programmes. The school is developing a central resource outlining strategies and resources that teachers have found successful in their lesson planning. This provides valuable opportunities for sharing good practice amongst staff.

Outcomes

Teachers are developing resources and strategies that successfully integrate development of pupils' generic skills into their lesson planning. The school plans and co-ordinates these activities so that opportunities to develop generic skills arise naturally within lessons. Pupils receive frequent opportunities to develop and practise using generic skills across all subjects in the curriculum.

Case study 5

Cynffig Comprehensive School

Using accreditation opportunities to plan progress in skills

Context

Cynffig Comprehensive School is a co-educational 11-18 community school in Bridgend and has approximately 700 pupils on roll. Thirty-one per cent of pupils are entitled to receive free school meals, which is above the national average.

Strategy

Over the past four years Cynffig Comprehensive School has embedded developing pupils' skills into its curriculum framework. It implements a key skills strategy across Years 7 to 13. Many pupils gain their first qualification in key skills at the end of Year 9.

Action

All school departments are expected to promote the development of pupils' key skills. Each department is expected to develop expertise in planning for at least two skills. This approach allows the school to develop pupils' skills strategically across the curriculum. Teachers emphasise opportunities for developing skills in lessons. Pupils record their progress in a learning log. Within these, pupils use 'ladders for learning' that set out clear descriptions of progress in different skills. Form tutors keep these learning logs and carry out one-to-one interviews with pupils, focusing on their skills' development each term. The Learning Director monitors these files and this provides a clear overview of pupils' progress in generic skills development across all subjects.

Outcomes

The strategy ensures a consistent and coherent approach to the development of pupils' skills across all subjects. All pupils are aware of their progress in various skills and value the constructive feedback that they receive from their teachers. The type of work pupils carry out in key stage 3 prepares them well for the demands of the key stage 4 curriculum, where attainment is generally well above modelled expectations.

Appendix 3 – Glossary/references

Developing Thinking and Assessment for Learning (Welsh Government)

The programme focuses on the development, implementation and dissemination of good practice in the teaching of developing thinking and assessment for learning strategies.

Essential Skills Wales qualifications

These qualifications comprise Application of Number, Communication and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Each skill is assessed at levels 1-4 via an internally assessed and externally moderated portfolio.

CASE – ‘Cognitive acceleration through science education’

CASE is a programme taught through science, designed to stimulate and develop pupils’ thinking skills. It is a two-year programme consisting of thirty-two activities that promotes the development from concrete to formal (higher) levels of thinking.

Appendix 4 – The remit author and survey team

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