
The impact of advisory teachers on funded non-maintained settings

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| Contents | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Background | 1 |
| Main findings | 4 |
| Recommendations | 7 |
| The role of the advisory teacher | 8 |
| Support and challenge | 8 |
| Resource allocation | 11 |
| Working with others | 15 |
| Sharing good practice | 16 |
| The role of local authorities and regional consortia | 18 |
| Managing the funding and allocating resources | 18 |
| Monitoring the work of the advisory teachers | 19 |
| Continuous professional development | 19 |
| Appendix 1: Evidence base | 24 |
| Appendix 2: Current arrangements for supporting and challenging non-maintained settings (November 2014) | 25 |
| Appendix 3: Advisory teacher visit checklist | 26 |
| Glossary | 27 |
| The remit author and survey team | 27 |

Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2014-2015. The report examines the impact of advisory teachers on funded non-maintained settings.¹ The report includes case studies of best practice illustrating the impact of advisory teachers. Three appendices cover a detailed evidence base for the report, current arrangements for supporting and challenging non-maintained settings and a checklist for advisory visits to settings.

The report is based on visits to 14 settings and evidence from seven local authorities and all regional consortia. It also takes account of evidence from Estyn's inspections of non-maintained settings since 2010.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, local authorities, regional consortia, advisory teachers and non-maintained settings. It may also be of interest to voluntary organisations that support non-maintained settings, Flying Start advisory teachers and staff in primary schools.

Background

Every local authority is required to offer all three-year-old children a free part-time place in an education establishment in the term following their third birthday.² Local authorities offer these places in maintained schools and non-maintained settings. Where provision is delivered in non-maintained settings, funding is provided for 10 hours per week for up to 38 weeks of the year, usually over five sessions per week. The local authority provides funding directly to the setting for each child taking up a funded place.

Not all local authorities fund non-maintained settings. In a minority of local authorities, there are no funded places in non-maintained settings between September and December. Swansea and Neath Port Talbot local authorities offer all three-year-olds a part-time funded place in a school. The number of non-maintained settings in each local authority varies widely from as few as three to as many as 75.

In 2001 the National Assembly of Wales report, 'Laying the Foundation: Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds' stated:

"In order to deliver the required standards of educational input and meet the benchmarks contained in the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACCAC) framework 'Desirable Learning Outcomes' it is recommended that a qualified early years teacher should be employed to work in every approved setting for 10% of the week. This should be regarded as the minimum time commitment required."

¹ Funded non-maintained settings are registered playgroups or private day nurseries that local authorities fund to provide part-time education for three and sometimes four-year-olds.

² The Education (nursery education and early years development and childcare plans) (amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2005

For the purpose of this report, the 'qualified early years teacher' is referred to as 'the advisory teacher'. The role of the advisory teacher is to provide support for teaching and learning, advice and guidance about Foundation Phase practice, and to challenge the setting to improve outcomes for children. Around 60 advisory teachers support about 660 non-maintained settings that provide funded early years education. Around 290 are Welsh-medium settings.

Most practitioners in settings come from a non-teaching background, although they are experienced in working with children. Many practitioners in settings have relevant childcare qualifications and it is a requirement that the setting leader is qualified to at least level 3 of national vocational qualification (NVQ).

The Welsh Government allocates a Foundation Phase Grant to local authorities in order to:

- employ classroom assistants to work towards or achieve the Foundation Phase ratios for three to seven-year-olds
- employ a Foundation Phase Training and Support Officer to manage and deliver training programmes to Foundation Phase practitioners in the maintained and funded non-maintained settings
- deliver a training programme based on the Foundation Phase National Training Pack and incorporating locally identified elements
- provide all funded non-maintained settings with at least 10% of a qualified teacher's time to improve the quality of education provision in those settings

Until recently, local authorities employed all advisory teachers and provided training for setting staff. The introduction of regional consortia has resulted in a change to the employment arrangements of advisory teachers in a minority of local authorities. Of the 20 local authorities across Wales that fund non-maintained settings, 14 have continued to employ advisory teachers and to provide training for non-maintained settings. In six local authorities, one consortium now employs the advisory teachers and delivers a training programme for settings, although overall responsibility for the quality of standards and provision in non-maintained settings still rests with the local authority. The survey team found that the picture was changing rapidly with more local authorities considering the possibility of commissioning regional consortia to provide support and challenge to non-maintained settings. The arrangements at the time of the survey are set out in appendix 2.

In addition to receiving support from local authorities or regional consortia and the advisory teachers, many settings affiliate to voluntary organisations, such as Wales Pre-school Providers Association (Wales PPA), National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) or Mudiad Meithrin. They use the services of these agencies to access some or all of the following:

- group public liability insurance
- access to policy documents that can be adapted or adopted
- representation on issues relating to the early years sector at local, county and national level
- listing on the organisation's website

- advice on training not available from the local authority, such as that on first aid and food hygiene
- advice on quality assurance of pre-school provision
- access to Welsh-language training courses
- entry to the Welsh Government's free milk scheme
- advice and guidance from head office and regional teams
- support with payroll issues (often provided at an additional cost)
- free subscription to the organisation's magazine

Voluntary organisations associated with settings receive funding from the Welsh Government, and many local authorities also fund them to provide specific services. In different local authorities, the voluntary organisations provide different levels of support depending on the amount of funding they receive. This may vary from offering visits to settings to being available by telephone.

Main findings

- 1 The role of the advisory teacher in the non-maintained sector has changed over time. At first, advisory teachers mainly modelled good practice. Now, advisory teachers provide more support for management and administration, but less for teaching and learning. However, the non-maintained sector has a high turn-over of staff and many settings need more support in the form of modelling good practice.
- 2 In a few non-maintained settings where the advisory teacher regularly models good teaching, practitioners are more confident in finding ways to improve outcomes for children and in judging children's standards. Modelling story-telling or how to interest children in mark-making have a positive impact on the standards children achieve.
- 3 A minority of settings do not receive enough advice about how to improve the standards that children achieve or how to present activities in varied and interesting ways. Only a minority of advisory teachers provide guidance on activities to help more able children or children experiencing difficulties. In most settings, the advisory teacher provides effective support in developing practitioners' understanding of aspects of the Foundation Phase, such as making better use of outdoor areas.
- 4 Where advisory teachers focus on the quality of practitioners' interaction with children, this has a significant impact on the standards children achieve.
- 5 In many English-medium settings, the support of the advisory teacher has helped to raise the standards of children's Welsh. For example, they work with practitioners conscientiously to develop basic vocabulary to use in daily routines and encourage the use of song to embed simple language patterns.
- 6 In a majority of advisory teacher visits, there is an over-emphasis on helping the setting to produce policy documents, such as a development plan or a self-evaluation report. Advisory teachers are beginning to provide a greater level of challenge with regard to the standards children achieve, but in a majority of settings they still focus too much on the bureaucracy of management and planning, and not enough on teaching and learning.
- 7 Across Wales, there are many different models of advisory-teacher support. The most successful model is one in which settings receive the full allocation of advisory teacher time on site, additional training is provided, and there is an expectation that settings attend a minimum amount of training each year.
- 8 A majority of local authorities allocate the amount of time each setting receives according to their assessment of need. This means that they do not necessarily comply with the requirements of the Foundation Phase Grant to provide each setting with the support of a qualified teacher for 10% of the time. Many good settings receive less than their allocation and do not receive enough support to become excellent.
- 9 Nearly all settings report receiving additional visits and increased support once Estyn notify them of an inspection. Many settings say that they miss scheduled visits when

a setting elsewhere is due an inspection. Focusing advisory teacher time on preparing settings for inspection is not a good use of time and does not provide the best service.

- 10 The extent to which the work of advisory teachers is monitored varies across Wales. In many local authorities and regional consortia, line managers scrutinise notes of visit, evaluate inspection data and occasionally attend training provided by the advisory teacher. Nearly all local authorities and regional consortia have procedures for performance management linked to teachers' pay and conditions, but very few observe advisory teachers at work in a setting. This means that they do not have relevant first-hand information about the effectiveness of their advisory teachers in supporting settings.
- 11 A majority of local authorities maintain and improve the skills and expertise of their advisory teachers appropriately. In a few local authorities, particularly where advisory teachers do not also work in schools, they do not always receive information about changes affecting the sector routinely in the way that school staff do.
- 12 Local authorities and regional consortia are not always able to provide training in the main language of a setting. Many local authorities in south Wales offer training in English only for Welsh-medium settings. A very few local authorities train through the medium of Welsh only and practitioners who are not fluent in Welsh find it difficult to follow and understand the training fully.
- 13 There are challenges for local authorities and regional consortia in timing training events so that practitioners from all settings can attend. Settings often find it difficult to release staff for training as they cannot provide adequate cover. A few local authorities are aware of this and vary the time of training accordingly.
- 14 In many local authorities, the lack of close working between the advisory teachers and the voluntary sector agencies means that practitioners sometimes receive conflicting advice. In a few instances, there are important gaps in the advice and support that practitioners receive, for example in relation to safeguarding procedures or how to support children identified as having additional learning needs.
- 15 Local authorities do not always take overall responsibility for monitoring the support that settings receive from voluntary sector organisations, even when paying for the service. This means that the local authority is unsure about the quality of the advice provided or whether the advice, on child protection for example, is up-to-date.
- 16 The way best practice is shared between the school and non-maintained sectors varies across different local authorities and consortia, and does not always make the best use of the expertise in either sector. For example, nursery practitioners in schools are experienced in planning children's next steps, which is often an issue for settings, and they could benefit from sharing this practice. Similarly, practitioners in settings often make effective use of activities, such as at snacktime, to develop children's personal and social skills, and this good practice could be shared more widely with schools.

- 17 Local authorities and regional consortia fund advisory teacher time from the Foundation Phase Grant. The very different amounts of money allocated mean considerable differences across Wales in the amount of support provided. A few local authorities are considering devolving the management of the Foundation Phase Grant to consortia, although the differences between local authorities in the way they fund settings, advisory teachers and training are a barrier to this. When allocating Foundation Phase Grant funding, many local authorities and regional consortia make meeting Foundation Phase ratios for staff in schools their priority, followed by providing training and support for schools. As a result, a majority of settings do not receive the recommended 10% of advisory teacher time, because there is not enough resource left to fund this.
- 18 Local authorities do not always plan systematically to ensure that a child's entitlement to funded education is met equally well in both schools and settings, because of variability in how they deploy support and funding across Wales and between the sectors.

Recommendations

Advisory teachers should:

- R1 provide settings with a suitable level of challenge and ensure that visits and training are focused on improving children's standards
- R2 continue supporting leadership and management but do more to model effective practice in the classroom and share new ideas with practitioners
- R3 keep up-to-date with changes in education that affect settings

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- R4 provide all settings with 10% of advisory teacher time and ensure that advisory teachers visit settings regularly
- R5 make sure that both Welsh and English-medium settings receive support and training in the language in which they operate
- R6 monitor the work of advisory teachers and ensure that their training needs are identified and met
- R7 work together and with voluntary organisations to ensure that settings receive comprehensive, joined-up support, particularly in relation to additional learning needs and safeguarding
- R8 hold funded voluntary organisations to account for the quality of their advice and guidance
- R9 ensure that as many non-maintained practitioners as possible can attend training
- R10 consider appointing advisory teachers for a fixed term to refresh the service they can offer

The Welsh Government should:

- R11 consider ring-fencing funding to ensure that all settings receive 10% support from a qualified teacher and regular training in addition to this
- R12 create a network for advisory teachers to share information and best practice

The role of the advisory teacher

Support and challenge

- 19 The role of the advisory teacher has changed over time. Initially it was intended to model good practice and to support the introduction of the Foundation Phase; advisory teachers modelled good practice, such as how to read stories and engage children in different activities. More recently, the role has evolved to provide more support for setting leaders and to evaluate how well the setting responds to advice and guidance. This increased focus on the setting's management has reduced the focus on teaching and learning.
- 20 The non-maintained sector experiences a high turnover of staff and, as a result, many settings require a range of support including modelling of good practice. A minority of settings do not receive enough guidance from advisory teachers about how to improve the standards that children achieve or how to present activities and tasks in different ways to add variety and interest to what they already provide. These are rarely modelled by an experienced teacher. Only a minority of advisory teachers provide specific guidance about tasks and activities that challenge individual children. This means that settings do not always provide well enough for more able children or children experiencing difficulties.
- 21 As settings tend to work in isolation, there are few opportunities for staff to see other practitioners interacting with children. In settings where the advisory teacher regularly models good teaching and learning, practitioners are more confident in trying to do things in different ways and in using new resources to gain children's interest. Modelled activities such as story-telling and demonstrating how to interest children in mark-making activities when put into practice by experienced practitioners have a positive impact on the standards children achieve.
- 22 In most funded settings, the advisory teacher provides helpful support in developing practitioners' understanding of aspects of Foundation Phase practice and encouraging settings to implement these aspects of it in their work. Settings have made good progress over time as a result of the input of advisory teachers if they have been willing to take on new ideas.
- 23 Although many advisory teachers are beginning to provide a greater level of challenge to settings about their work, in a majority of settings there is still too much focus on the bureaucracy of planning provision and not enough on the quality of teaching and how to improve children's progress. Where advisory teachers focus on the quality of practitioners' interaction with children, there is a significant impact on the standards that children achieve.
- 24 In a majority of visits to settings by the advisory teacher, there is an over-emphasis on supporting the setting's paperwork, for example by writing a setting development plan or self-evaluation report. This not only detracts from time that should be spent modelling good practice, but it does not help leaders to develop their own skills.

- 25 In all settings, the advisory teacher supports self-evaluation and action planning. In many local authorities, setting leaders complete pre-prepared proformas to evaluate the setting's performance. In a few local authorities, the advisory teacher uses this to 'type up' the setting's self-evaluation document. This leads to setting staff not having ownership of the process and not evaluating their performance well enough. Often, when inspectors talk to staff they know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve, but this may have been lost in overly-complex systems for recording that are imposed by the local authority.
- 26 Many practitioners in Welsh-medium settings, in predominantly English-speaking areas, do not speak Welsh fluently. Too few local authorities or consortia provide training to improve the language skills of these practitioners or provide training on the principles of the immersion method of teaching³. As a result, children's progress from non-Welsh speaking homes is too slow and the progress of some children from Welsh-speaking homes is impeded. This issue is compounded when the advisory teacher is also not Welsh-speaking and is unable to monitor the quality of the Welsh spoken by practitioners, assess the standards that children achieve, or help to plan suitable activities.
- 27 Nearly all advisory teachers provide settings with a written record of their visit. In a few settings, the written account of visits is not specific enough and is merely a list of areas discussed without identifying the setting's progress in addressing shortcomings or what it should do next. In many settings, practitioners receive a written account at the time of the visit or shortly after. This enables them to share the information with colleagues and to be clear about the actions they need to take. Leaders in a few good settings share the information from visits with staff and ask them to sign the note of visit to show that they have read and understood the feedback. This is good practice and makes all practitioners feel accountable. A few settings do not receive written feedback in a timely fashion. As a result, the setting does not address shortcomings quickly enough or is unsure about what it should do to prepare for the next visit.
- 28 Most practitioners can provide examples of how advisory teachers have improved their provision, such as helping them to develop learning zones and developing the outdoor area. They can only provide a few examples, however, of how they have improved standards as a result of advice received by the advisory teacher. In many English-medium settings, practitioners indicate that the support of the advisory teacher has helped them to raise the standards of children's Welsh as a second language, but only a few practitioners identify standards, other than those in Welsh, that they have improved as a result of the support that they receive.
- 29 In many local authorities, advisory teachers complete a RAG⁴ rating on the performance of settings that they share with lead practitioners. This makes clear to settings how the advisory teacher thinks they are performing in aspects of standards, provision and leadership. However, the statements against which the advisory

³ The immersion method focuses on using Welsh as the only medium of teaching and learning, using practical and visual techniques to help children to develop vocabulary and syntax. The essence of this method is introducing and modelling good language.

⁴ System of rating different aspects of standards, provision and leadership, red, amber or green according to performance, where green is the most successful

teacher judges the setting are often overly complex and do not aid settings to develop a clear understanding of what they are doing well and what they need to improve. In the few local authorities where the RAG rating or similar assessment tool is written in a way that is easily understood by practitioners, it provides useful information for settings to consider when evaluating their performance and planning for improvement.

- 30 The following case study illustrates how Wrexham local authority has raised standards of Welsh in English-medium settings.

Wrexham raise standards in children's Welsh in English-medium settings

Context

Wrexham local authority funds 52 non-maintained settings for part-time education for three-year-olds. Of these settings, seven are Welsh-medium. The local authority employs 4.5 full-time equivalent advisory teachers to support the settings, two of whom are Welsh speaking. In addition, it employs two support assistants who work alongside the advisory teachers.

Strategy

Wrexham's advisory teacher team analysed the non-maintained inspection reports in English-medium settings to look for common areas for improvement. They identified the following areas relating to Welsh:

- Children and adults lack confidence in using Welsh
- Welsh not always an integral part of daily routines
- There is little use of Welsh in play activities
- There are few opportunities for oral Welsh indoors or outdoors, across all areas of learning
- Practitioners do not practise or repeat new Welsh words regularly enough
- Not enough use is made of Welsh in continuous and enhanced provision to consolidate children's Welsh language skills

Action

As almost all practitioners working in the English-medium sector in Wrexham had little or no Welsh, the team decided to develop resources that gradually introduced more Welsh words and phrases as practitioners' confidence grew. This was colloquially called the 'saws coch' (red sauce) approach – practitioners would add a key phrase or word into a predominantly English sentence to build adult and children's confidence. For example, practitioners always used the Welsh word for sand or home corner, so that in time children would naturally ask, "Can I play in the tywod (sand) please?" or "Can I play in the tŷ bach twt please?"

The team developed a Welsh resource pack to support this approach. All practitioners were encouraged to use 11 key phrases initially to gain confidence. The advisory teachers also produced a compact disc of songs and rhymes with strong rhythm and repetition to encourage new vocabulary and strengthen pronunciation.

The advisory teachers made sure that practitioners felt comfortable using the Welsh phrases and songs by providing guidance on pronunciation through writing Welsh vocabulary, phrases and songs phonetically in English. The pack also contained phrases for making Welsh a part of everyday life in the setting, such as during registration and snack time. A booklet for parents explained the benefits of children using Welsh and the importance of encouraging them to use the words and phrases at home with their children.

The advisory teachers provided training for practitioners in using the materials and supported and challenged settings in implementing the resource pack during their timetabled visits to settings.

Outcomes

Estyn visited three settings⁵ in summer 2014, and attended a Forest School workshop at Erlas House with a fourth setting, to look at the impact of this initiative. We found that, in each setting, practitioners used the Welsh phrases, songs and rhymes consistently. Children were confident about using Welsh in a variety of different situations and often independently. For example, children used Welsh words to describe daily routines, such as “It’s amser tacluso (time to tidy up) now,” or “It’s amser stori (story time) after llaeth (milk).” They responded to the question, “Beth sydd yn y bag (What is in the bag)?” by guessing “mouse bach (small)”.

Children often counted objects accurately in Welsh and talked about needing sticks “mawr” (big) to build a shelter for a baby “draenog” (hedgehog). They were unconcerned about making mistakes and Welsh was a natural and fun part of their everyday routines.

As practitioners’ confidence continues to grow, they are adapting the songs and phrases to include new routines and themes that are personal to their setting and are developing their own resource packs for parents.

Resource allocation

- 31 The conditions of the Foundation Phase Grant do not specify how advisory teachers should provide settings with 10% support. Across Wales, there are many different models of 10% support. In a majority of local authorities, the advisory teacher visits each setting about every fortnight for at least two hours. This equates to 10% of the time that the setting provides early education for children. To reduce wastage incurred through travel, advisory teachers tend to provide two hours of support fortnightly rather than an hour each week. Training is often in addition to this support, although a minority of local authorities consider training as part of a setting’s advisory teacher entitlement. In a majority of settings, there is an appropriate balance between the time that settings receive direct support from the advisory teachers and the time spent on training. The most successful model is where settings receive 10% of advisory teacher time in the setting, with training as an addition, and an expectation that settings attend a minimum amount of training each year. However, this model operates in only a few local authorities.

⁵ Chirk Pre-School Playgroup, Caego and Berse Day Nursery and Little Treasures Pre School Group, Li’l Stars Playgroup

- 32 A majority of local authorities use a 'needs identification' model for allocating the amount of time each setting receives. However, this means that they do not necessarily comply with the requirements of the Foundation Phase Grant, because they do not provide all settings with 10% of advisory teacher support. A majority of settings receive less than 10% advisory teacher time and the input of the advisory teacher is sporadic rather than regular. Local authorities and regional consortia generally judge settings that receive less support to be higher performing. However, providing these settings with less than 10% of advisory teacher time does not always mean that other settings receive more than their 10% allocation. In many cases, good settings that receive less than their 10% allocation do not receive the support and challenge they need to become excellent settings.
- 33 Denbighshire local authority has recently introduced a different model of support. It is piloting this approach in 12 settings. In this model, experienced early years teachers from schools support practitioners in their local funded setting. In addition, advisory teachers employed by the local authority visit the setting every half term. Through this process the local authority monitors the quality of support and challenge provided by the school and also ensures that there is consistency of approach for each setting. It is too early to judge the overall effectiveness of this model. However, there are early signs of a positive impact on children's skills and a smoother transition into school from playgroup for these young children. In one setting, the teacher models activities to develop children's skills in information and communication technology and the setting has useful opportunities to share the school's resources.
- 34 Advisory teachers do not generally provide greater support or target additional resources in settings where there is greater poverty or deprivation. Where settings receive additional advisory teacher time and support, it is mainly due to concerns over the quality of provision in the setting. In general, local authorities and regional consortia have not assessed whether providing more advisory teacher support for settings where there are significant numbers of children experiencing the impact of poverty and deprivation has an impact on outcomes for children.
- 35 Nearly all settings report receiving additional visits and increased support once Estyn notify them of an inspection. The advisory teacher rarely maintains this level of support once the inspection is complete, unless significant issues are raised as a result of the inspection. A few settings receive very little support in the period following an inspection even though they require support to respond to the recommendations following the inspection and to reflect on what inspectors found. Many settings report foregoing their scheduled visits because Estyn has notified another setting of an inspection. Focusing advisory teacher time on preparing settings for inspection is not a good use of time and does not provide the best service. A setting that is due to be inspected is not necessarily at greatest risk or more deserving of support than settings that are already known to need support.
- 36 Many local authorities have contracts with settings. These set out the type of support that the advisory teacher will provide and what the local authority or regional consortium expect from the setting in return. This often includes expectations about the minimum acceptable attendance at training events. However, contracts do not generally specify the number of visits by advisory teachers and do not allow settings to hold the local authority or consortium to account.

- 37 Advisory teachers make the most of their visits by planning their work carefully. This ensures the best use of their time and minimises the disruption that sometimes occurs in settings, particularly small settings, when practitioners have to leave children to speak to the advisory teacher, for example in relation to addressing self-evaluation issues. Support may be offered better in training events where practitioners have opportunities to reflect on their practice without having to respond to children's needs. Information on how the best advisory teachers make the most effective use of their time is given in appendix 3.
- 38 The following case study shows how Flintshire local authority supports a setting with its planning and assessment, while maintaining a focus on teaching and learning.

Flintshire local authority successfully support settings requiring improvement

Context

Flintshire local authority funds 58 non-maintained settings for part-time education for three and four-year-olds. Five funded settings are Welsh-medium. The local authority employs 4.5 full-time equivalent advisory teachers to support these settings, two of whom are Welsh speaking. In addition, it employs two support assistants who work alongside the advisory teachers.

Strategy

Advisory teachers spend at least 10% of funded time directly with each funded setting. They also provide additional training. Advisory teachers provide extra support to settings that they have identified as requiring a greater level of support and challenge.

Actions

Once the advisory team identifies a setting as requiring a greater level of support and challenge, the advisory teacher plans to make additional visits in excess of 10% of the time that the setting is operating. The advisory team build this time allocation into their overall planning, but maintains at least 10% support time in other settings. Visits have a specific focus, linked closely to the setting's development plan. Advisory teachers support the setting in drawing up this plan and monitoring its implementation and effectiveness.

The advisory teacher often brings a nursery nurse with her to model activities for the practitioners or to work with the children while she discusses issues with practitioners. This ensures that an adult is working with the children and they are not missing an adult input while the advisory teacher is supporting practitioners. Advisory teachers expect practitioners to act on the advice given and to demonstrate this in subsequent visits.

Advisory teachers produce clear written accounts of their visit. The setting receives these either at the time of the visit or shortly after. Advisory teachers recognise what the setting is doing well and make clear what it needs to improve. The focus of the next visit and when it will take place are noted. Where the advisory teacher identifies significant need for support, the times between visits reduce and there have been instances where she has returned the following day to monitor progress.

Advisory teachers persist in supporting and challenging settings, even when practitioners are resistant to change. They signpost good practice and take practitioners to visit other settings to support them in developing their skills.

Outcomes

Settings identified as in need of improvement make good progress. The advisory teacher has maintained good working relationships with practitioners while challenging them to improve. As a result, practitioners are willing to act on the advice of the advisory teacher and reflect on the progress that they have made under her guidance.

The local authority has been successful in maintaining provision for funded three-year-olds in areas of deprivation where there is greatest need. Without the intensive support provided by the advisory teacher settings would not reach the required standards for funding to continue.

- 39 Not all local authorities fund part-time education places in settings throughout the year. In a minority of local authorities, there are no funded places in non-maintained settings between September and December. This is because, during the autumn term, the local authority admits three-year-olds directly to schools. Nevertheless, these local authorities continue to fund advisory teachers for the autumn term. Maintaining contact with settings, during this time, provides useful opportunities to discuss any improvements that the setting plans to implement. It also helps settings to prepare for new cohorts of children. This is particularly useful when settings are due to admit children with additional learning needs and require advice and support.
- 40 There are challenges for local authorities and regional consortia in timing training events so that practitioners from all settings can attend. Settings often find it difficult to release staff for training as they cannot provide adequate cover. A few local authorities are aware of this and vary the time of training accordingly. A few repeat the training at different times during the week. For a few settings, the time and distance to travel to training events are prohibitive, especially where the consortium delivers training and holds it outside their local authority. When local authorities expect practitioners to attend training outside normal setting hours, they often do not take account of the fact that practitioners have family commitments or other jobs that make it difficult for them to attend. In addition, a few settings do not have the funds to pay for the additional hours staff need for them to attend training. A very few local authorities allocate funds to settings to support them in releasing staff for training events. This tends to improve attendance at training and makes staff feel valued, but does not address the issue that settings find it difficult to provide cover for practitioners.
- 41 Local authorities and consortia are not always able to provide training through the language of instruction used in the setting. For example, many local authorities in South Wales offer and deliver training programmes in English only for Welsh-medium settings. They make materials available bilingually, but report that most delegates choose to access training in English as they feel that their Welsh skills are not good

enough to enable them to understand the training. In a very few local authorities, training is in Welsh only. In these local authorities, where there are few English-medium settings, practitioners who are not fluent in Welsh find it difficult to access training.

Working with others

- 42 A few local authorities have close links with the voluntary sector organisations that support settings. As a result, settings in these areas have a clear understanding of the type of support they can access from the advisory teacher, the local authority, and the voluntary sector organisations. Roles are clearly defined and the relevant voluntary sector organisations are involved in networks of professional practice with the local authority or regional consortium. They work together to assess training needs and share information about settings well. This encourages closer collaboration and consistency of message. An example of where agencies work well together is given below:

Using networks of professional practice effectively – Newport local authority and EAS Consortium

Context

Newport local authority affiliates to the EAS regional consortium. There are 26 settings in the Newport local authority, one of which is Welsh-medium. There are 2.4 full-time equivalent advisory teachers who support the settings. The EAS consortium employs the advisory teachers and they come under the direction of the Foundation Phase Challenge Adviser. The consortium provides statutory module and bespoke training for settings.

Strategy

Newport local authority has developed a system of network meetings where settings, voluntary sector organisations, the local authority and the advisory teachers come together to share information. The aim is to keep every organisation involved with settings informed of what each other provide and to ensure that all settings know where to access the most appropriate support for their needs.

Action

Advisory teachers arrange meetings termly. They take place at times to suit settings. This means that all setting staff can attend together. Meetings provide good opportunities for practitioners to see what other settings are doing. Each meeting tends to follow a common format:

- input from the advisory teacher
- input from the early years team in the local authority
- input from voluntary organisations
- input from an additional learning needs officer in the local authority
- a task or resource to be trialled for the next session
- feedback from the previous task or resource

- opportunities to share good practice
- opportunities to ask questions

Outcomes

Most settings attend the network meetings and find them useful. Feedback from settings about the networks is positive. All organisations involved with the settings know the areas that they are responsible for and what each provides. As a result, they are able to direct settings to the best place for specific advice when asked. All organisations supporting settings hear the same messages and there is consistency of the advice offered.

- 43 In many local authorities, the lack of a close working partnership between the advisory teachers and the voluntary sector agencies results in confusion for practitioners as to who is responsible for what. As a result, practitioners can receive conflicting advice and there are important gaps in the advice and support that they receive, for example regarding safeguarding procedures or how to support children identified as having additional learning needs. The local authority does not always take overall responsibility for monitoring the quality and accuracy of the support that settings receive from voluntary sector organisations, even when it is paying directly for this service.
- 44 Nearly all local authorities have some settings that they fund for early education that also have funded Flying Start⁶ places for two-year-olds. Flying Start employs their own advisory teacher to support these settings. In most of these settings the advisory teacher and the Flying Start advisory teacher are beginning to work together to ensure that the setting does not receive conflicting advice and that self-evaluation and action planning procedures are not duplicated. However, in a few settings, this does not happen and the settings are not sure about how to proceed.
- 45 In a very few local authorities, Children's Services run similar training programmes for the non-maintained sector to those of the regional consortium. Neither agency seems aware of this inefficient duplication.

Sharing good practice

- 46 Increasingly, advisory teachers identify good practice in other settings and accompany staff to view another setting's good practice. A few encourage practitioners to view the best practice case studies on the Estyn website. In many settings, practitioners have adapted their practice after seeing good practice in other settings, for example when developing a key worker system, adapting planning or improving outdoor provision. However, in nearly all these cases there is not enough focus on the standards children achieve.

⁶ Services that deliver free, part-time childcare for two-year-olds to help prepare them for school. They also provide increased levels of support from health visitors and parenting programmes to give young children the best possible start in life. These programmes have been running since January 2007.

- 47 Many advisory teachers use training opportunities well to share good practice. They share examples from the settings they support and sometimes ask settings to make a presentation about an aspect of their practice that is particularly successful. Setting staff find these sessions useful and welcome the opportunity to discuss practice with other practitioners. A few settings report visiting other settings following a presentation at a training event. This is often after they have introduced something new themselves and want to develop it further.
- 48 Where advisory teachers have good opportunities to meet and collaborate, they discuss and share examples of good or excellent practice and feel more confident to make judgements with the support of others.
- 49 Most local authorities share good practice within one sector. Occasionally, a few local authorities share good practice across sectors, although this is usually sharing the work of schools with settings (rather than vice versa). Only a very few local authorities share good practice in settings with schools despite evidence that suggests there are aspects of practice that schools may benefit from. In Ceredigion, for instance, advisory teachers use high-quality training materials produced for settings in school nursery classes in order to re-focus practitioners on good Foundation Phase practice.
- 50 The following case study illustrates how the Education Achievement Service consortium uses Twitter to keep all settings and schools aware of developments in Foundation Phase practice and to share examples of good practice regularly.

Using Twitter to share good practice

Context

The EAS consortium supports 86 non-maintained settings across five local authorities, 10 of which are Welsh-medium. It employs 8.4 full time equivalent advisory teachers, 2.4 of whom are able to support settings through the medium of Welsh.

Strategy

The EAS consortium wanted a simple, user-friendly way to reach as many of its practitioners as possible directly and to share ideas and good practice. The consortium is aware that, if only one practitioner from a school or setting attends training, it is possible that the information can stay with them and they might not share it. As most adults have smart phones or electronic devices, the consortium decided to set up and publicise the use of a Twitter account to share important messages and information and to provide innovative ideas.

Actions

The EAS consortium has an active Twitter account. It was set up in July 2013 and to date it has over 1,300 followers. This figure increases weekly. Advisory teachers believe that 'pictures paint a thousand words' and the twitter feed includes many pictures of children's work, resources and ideas to inspire those working with young

children. The account manager tweets good practice, on a daily basis, from a range of local, national and international early educators as well as sharing practitioners' posts. The advisory teachers actively promote the account on all courses and visits to settings.

Outcomes

The EAS consortium actively promotes key messages from training to wider audiences. The use of Twitter enables the consortium to share good practice with its own schools and settings and further afield. Settings actively post examples of the impact of training in improving standards and provision to the account. Settings feel valued that the EAS consortium promotes their work alongside that of schools and there is a growing culture of sharing good practice with all sectors. Non-maintained settings report that easy access to examples of good practice influences the work of other practitioners within the setting who may not have attended courses. The account raises the profile of the work of settings in the EAS consortium.

The role of local authorities and regional consortia

Managing the funding

- 51 Local authorities and regional consortia fund advisory teachers from the Foundation Phase Grant. There is no common approach to the administration of the Foundation Phase Grant across local authorities and regional consortia. The cost of providing advisory teacher support ranges from around £2,800 to around £6,000 per non-maintained setting across local authorities. The very different amounts of money allocated to providing advisory teacher support mean that there are considerable differences across Wales in the amount and quality of support and challenge provided.
- 52 When allocating Foundation Phase Grant funding, many local authorities and regional consortia place meeting Foundation Phase ratios for staff in schools as their priority, followed by providing training and support for schools. They allocate the remaining funding to meet the requirement for advisory teacher time in non-maintained settings and to provide training for practitioners. There is not enough funding left to provide 10% of advisory teacher time in a majority of settings.
- 53 Local authorities fund settings in different ways. In a few local authorities, the setting receives a sum per hour for each funded place and in many there is a sum per child per term. The amount of funding per place varies across local authorities. In a few settings, the amount provided to cover the cost of a funded place does not match the amount that settings charge parents for a non-funded place and therefore the setting makes more money by providing non-funded places.
- 54 A few local authorities are considering devolving the management of the Foundation Phase Grant to consortia. A barrier to this is the current inconsistency across local authorities in the way they fund settings, advisory teachers and training programmes.

An additional complication is that in two local authorities the responsibility for non-maintained settings sits outside education services, and in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot all three-year-old children have a nursery place in a school. At present only the EAS consortium administers the Foundation Phase Grant for all of its partner local authorities. The EAS consortium also employs the advisory teachers. Although the advisory teachers mainly support settings in one local authority, this enables them to work across local authorities to provide training and support where there is a specific need for their expertise. For example, this ensures that there is appropriate support for Welsh-medium settings, as some of the local authorities have very few Welsh-medium settings, and not all of the advisory teachers speak Welsh. This mixed picture means that three and four-year-old children that attend settings do not always receive the quality and range of provision that schools offer. Local authorities do not always plan systematically to ensure that a child's entitlement to funded education is met equally well in both schools and settings.

Monitoring the work of advisory teachers

- 55 The extent to which the work of advisory teachers is monitored varies across Wales. Many advisory teachers have specific job descriptions that are up-to-date. In a few local authorities, job descriptions are generic and are not adapted to reflect the particular challenges of the role in different areas. For example, some advisory teachers support both English and Welsh-medium settings.
- 56 Nearly all local authorities and regional consortia have procedures for performance management linked to teachers' pay and conditions. However, very few currently observe advisory teachers working in a setting. In many local authorities and regional consortia, lead officers with direct responsibility for advisory teachers sample training events to monitor quality and delivery and maintain an overview of feedback from training evaluation forms. They do not evaluate the impact of the advisory teacher on teaching and learning directly.
- 57 In most local authorities and regional consortia, informal monitoring takes place regularly through team meetings and scrutiny of written accounts of visits. In a minority of local authorities and regional consortia, lead officers sample and annotate written accounts of visits to settings to support the advisory teachers in making them more specific and purposeful.
- 58 In a few local authorities, advisory teachers undertake joint visits with colleagues. This is particularly useful if they have identified an issue in a particular setting and would like a second opinion. An experienced advisory teacher usually accompanies another, and this provides a valuable opportunity to confirm judgements about standards and provision and to agree how best to support the setting.

Continuous professional development

Advisory teachers

- 59 In a majority of local authorities, there is an appropriate focus on maintaining and improving the skills and expertise of the advisory teachers. In nearly all local authorities and regional consortia, the advisory teachers are able to access training, pertinent to their role, provided for schools.

- 60 Where advisory teachers work in both schools and settings, they have greater opportunities to see the impact of new initiatives, such as the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. In addition, they have good opportunities to compare standards in both sectors to ensure that children receive the same quality of education in each. In a few instances, this has led to advisory teachers using settings as an example of good practice where they feel that early education in schools is becoming too formal too quickly.
- 61 In a few local authorities, particularly where advisory teachers do not work in schools, they do not always receive relevant and timely information about changes affecting the sector in the way that school staff do. For instance, they do not routinely receive enough information about key initiatives, such as the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, and are therefore not well placed to support settings in introducing these initiatives.

Practitioners in settings

- 62 All local authorities and regional consortia provide training in the statutory Foundation Phase modules. They often deliver these modules to schools and settings together. However, many practitioners prefer to receive training separately from school staff, as they feel that, where training takes place together, school staff dominate and they often lack the confidence to contribute alongside more qualified colleagues. In addition, there are tensions where schools release teachers from their role and fund them to attend courses, while non-maintained practitioners often attend training without payment as settings cannot afford to fund additional hours. Most advisory teachers take account of this when providing training, but there are benefits in delivering some of the training to both sectors together. For example, it raises the profile of settings and provides practitioners with good opportunities to share their knowledge of child development and to give examples of how they promote active learning. In one local authority, advisory teachers have used these opportunities well to encourage school staff to be less formal with very young children and to adopt some of the practices they see in settings. Practitioners in another local authority found that joint training was particularly effective in improving transition between schools and settings for children.
- 63 In most local authorities, training has been adapted to reflect changes in Foundation Phase practice as it developed. A few practitioners, who accessed the training when the Welsh Government first introduced it, have attended modules again more recently to make sure that they are delivering the Foundation Phase in line with current thinking. The opportunity to refresh the training is beneficial to practitioners. Initial training focused heavily on the organisation of the Foundation Phase. However, there is a greater focus on standards in more recent training. Nearly all settings value the training and can provide examples of how it has changed their practice. However, this is mainly regarding how they organise the environment and introduce new activities. Very few practitioners see a clear link between improving provision leading to improved standards. Advisory teachers check regularly if ideas from training are implemented but rarely challenge settings to show what difference training makes on children's progress and standards.

- 64 In addition to the Foundation Phase modules, nearly all local authorities and regional consortia provide bespoke training sessions on general issues related to settings or local or national initiatives. Where training is particularly successful, it responds to the needs of individual or groups of settings. A majority of local authorities provide settings with useful opportunities to identify future training needs when they evaluate training programmes. The move to consortia working has meant that for a few settings there are not enough opportunities to identify training needs and training tends to be generic. This is because new arrangements to support settings are at an early stage of development and the training organised by the Foundation Phase training and support officer for the consortium is designed to meet the general needs of schools and settings. Where consortia working is more established, advisory teachers address individual needs through a mix of training and network groups and this ensures that settings receive appropriate support to meet identified needs.
- 65 Many practitioners report that training is more effective when they can attend with other colleagues from their setting and can discuss how they could implement the advice. A few practitioners report that receiving training, having 'homework' and being required to feed back on the success of this is a model that has worked well for them. This model ensures that practitioners respond to the training and trial some of the ideas.
- 66 The following case studies show where training is successful in improving provision and in responding to national and local priorities.

Training has a high profile in Ceredigion

Context

Ceredigion local authority funds 30 non-maintained settings for part-time education for three and four-year-olds. Most funded settings are Welsh-medium. Two full-time advisory teachers, both of whom are fluent Welsh speakers, support these settings.

Strategy

Training for settings has a high profile within the local authority. Good use is made of outcomes from inspection and local and national priorities to identify training for all settings.

Action

The local authority plans its training carefully to ensure that it targets it well to improve practice and that it provides good value for money. In addition to training on the Foundation Phase modules and ad hoc training, such as Christmas craft, the local authority has prioritised a few major training initiatives for settings over the last three years. These major training initiatives are a response to identified needs within the local authority or to meet national priorities. For example, over the last three years, it has prioritised improving children's speaking and listening skills and their early reading and writing skills. This in turn has resulted in a greater focus on specialist training to support children with speech and language problems.

Training is often organised because of concerns raised by practitioners, such as behaviour management. The local authority responded to this need by training its advisory teachers to deliver a purchased training programme to all settings.

Often training provides resources for practitioners to use in the setting and advisory teachers monitor their use on visits or occasionally build this into training. For example, during recent numeracy training, practitioners received a set of mathematical equipment. Tutors asked them to return in two weeks to explain how the children responded and what the children learned from the using the equipment.

Training is compulsory and the local authority monitors attendance at training rigorously. The local authority funds supply costs and often facilitates transport.

Any major training initiative, such as the behaviour initiative, requires a business case with appropriate success criteria. The local authority evaluates carefully significant training initiatives through such things as monitoring day-to-day practice in settings, analysing training and inspection data and gathering practitioners' views.

Outcomes

Practitioners feel well trained in Foundation Phase pedagogy. The generally positive outcomes from inspection reflect this. All settings have at least one member of staff trained in behaviour management strategies and providing support for speech and language difficulties. As a result, fewer children require additional support and practitioners are better at identifying children's additional learning needs early on.

Powys takes good account of national priorities and inspection information to identify training needs for settings

Context

The local authority funds 70 non-maintained settings for part-time education for three-year-olds. A few funded settings are Welsh-medium. Three full-time advisory teachers, one of whom is a fluent Welsh speaker, support the vast majority of these settings and deliver all of the local authority based training. Three Flying Start advisory teachers support a few settings, which are located in Flying Start areas.

Strategy

The local authority makes good use of outcomes from inspections, HMCI's Annual Report and local and national priorities to identify training for all settings. The use of cluster training and Professional Network Groups is effective in delivering training and development across the authority. It is proactive in liaising with other organisations such as Mudiad Meithrin, Wales PPA and Llaw yn Llaw to identify future training needs and to share training schedules.

Action

The advisory teachers deliver training across seven clusters of settings every half term. They pay good attention to the main messages from inspection reports when planning the training schedule to provide targeted support to improve practice and

outcomes across their settings. In addition to training about the Foundation Phase modules, the advisory teachers prioritise key training initiatives for settings as a direct response to identified needs or to meet national priorities. For example, over the last three years, they have prioritised continuous provision, snack time, learning in the outdoors, self-evaluation and improvement planning and the role of the leader.

Often training provides resources for practitioners to use in the setting, and advisory teachers monitor their use on subsequent visits and add to a best practice portfolio to share good practice seen in training updates. For example, during recent training about transition, it asked practitioners to develop simple transition leaflets. Feedback on how successful these had been in reassuring parents and children and in sharing information and developing effective working relationships with schools was then shared.

The local authority monitors attendance at training. Practitioners have to complete a training evaluation sheet, which the advisory teachers scrutinise during setting visits regularly.

The local authority evaluates the impact of significant training initiatives robustly through such things as monitoring day-to-day practice in settings, analysing training and inspection data and gathering practitioners' views. Advisory teachers record the observed impact of training and set targets for the focus of their next visit effectively.

Outcomes

Practitioners feel well trained in Foundation Phase pedagogy and, as a result, feel more confident and better able to offer an up-to-date, more professional service. Leaders and practitioners are more involved in and have a clearer understanding of self-evaluation and its link to setting improvement planning. Transition arrangements and improvements in closer working relationships between settings and schools are leading to sharing of resources and expertise. The improvement in children's outcomes and the positive comments in recent inspection reports show the impact of this.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- visits to non-maintained settings
- interviews with local authority representatives
- interviews with regional consortia representatives
- interviews with advisory teachers
- scrutiny of a range of documentation from local authorities and regional consortia, including business plans, training programmes and materials, early entitlement policies and procedures and needs identification assessments
- scrutiny of a range of documentation from settings, including self-evaluation reports, action plans, notes of visit by advisory teachers and training records
- inspection reports since 2010

The settings visited as part of this study were:

- Bridgend College Day Nursery, Bridgend
- Busy Bees Playgroup, Flintshire
- Busy Bees Day Nursery, Bridgend
- Cylch Meithrin Eglwys Newydd, Cardiff
- Mes Bach, Little Acorns Ceredigion
- Giggles Playgroup, Denbighshire
- Greenfield Playgroup, Flintshire
- Gungrog Happitots Playgroup, Powys
- Little Lambs Nursery and Playgroup, Conwy
- Cylch Meithrin Pili Pala, Cardiff
- Playdays Playgroup, Denbighshire
- School Lane Playgroup, Conwy
- Treowen 3 Plus, Powys
- Ty Du Playgroup, Newport

The local authorities visited as part of this study were:

- Cardiff
- Ceredigion
- Conwy
- Denbighshire
- Flintshire
- Newport
- Powys
- Wrexham ⁷

⁷ Visited as part of a study into second language Welsh development in Wrexham, Summer 2014

All regional consortia were visited or contacted by telephone as part of this study:

- Central South Consortium Joint Education Service (CSCJES)
- Education Achievement Service (EAS)
- Education Through Regional Working (ERW)
- North Wales Consortium (GwE)

Appendix 2: Current arrangements for supporting and challenging non-maintained settings (November 2014)

In the North Wales Consortium (GwE) and Education through Regional Working (ERW), local authorities employ advisory teachers directly and oversee support and training for settings. Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, Denbighshire, Conwy, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn local authorities administer the Foundation Phase Grant themselves and employ the advisory teachers directly.

The Education Achievement Service (EAS) administers the Foundation Phase Grant and employs advisory teachers for the Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Newport, Caerphilly and Monmouth local authorities.

The Central South Consortium Joint Education Service (CSCJES) administers the Foundation Phase Grant for the Bridgend local authority and employs advisory teachers to support settings in the Bridgend area. The other local authorities in this consortium have different arrangements. For example, Education Services in the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff continue to administer the Foundation Phase Grant and employ advisory teachers directly. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, the authority's Children's Services department is responsible for the non-maintained sector, while in Merthyr Tydfil the local authority's Social Regeneration department assumes responsibility.

Appendix 3: Advisory teacher visit checklist

Advisory teachers make particularly effective use of their time during visits when they:

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| Have a clear purpose and focus, which is shared with the setting before the visit | |
| Plan the timing of visits with the setting to make sure that it is convenient and minimises disruption | |
| Ensure that the standards that children achieve are of primary importance | |
| Monitor, evaluate and review the areas identified for follow-up in previous visits | |
| Are well prepared and have practical examples and ideas to share | |
| Work with children in the setting to model good teaching and learning | |
| Ensure that visits are a mixture of different types of support and that there is a balance between looking at self-evaluation and planning, modelling activities and providing advice about individual children | |
| Regularly set tasks for practitioners to complete between visits and monitor how well the task is completed, for example the use of new numeracy resources | |
| Evaluate progress since the last visit | |
| Provide useful and informative feedback at the time of the visit, which shows what the setting is doing well and what it needs to do to improve | |
| Assess practitioners' training needs | |

In addition, visits take place regularly and settings continue to receive an appropriate level of support during the term when they do not have any funded children.

From April 2015, advisory teachers will also need to consider how to support settings to make best use of the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant.

Glossary

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Foundation Phase | The statutory curriculum for all three to seven year olds in Wales , in both maintained and non-maintained schools and settings |
| Flying Start | Services that deliver free, part-time childcare for two-year-olds to help prepare them for school. They also provide increased levels of support from health visitors and parenting programmes to give young children the best possible start in life. These programmes have been running since January 2007. |
| Practitioners | Persons working directly with children in settings |
| Regional consortia | Organisations providing school improvement services on behalf of a group of local authorities |

The remit author and survey team

| | |
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