
Statutory use of leadership standards in the performance management of headteachers

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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 2014-2015 about the statutory use of leadership standards in the performance management of headteachers.

The report focuses on:

- how headteachers use the leadership standards to assess their own performance and identify their professional development needs
- how governors and local authority representatives use the leadership standards as part of the headteacher's performance management to support the headteacher's professional development needs
- the extent to which headteachers use the leadership standards to develop the skills of the school's senior leadership teams
- the extent to which headteachers use the leadership standards to develop leaders of the future for schools in Wales

This report is intended for the Welsh Government, governors, headteachers, senior leaders and staff in schools, local authorities and the regional consortia. This document links to the Estyn survey 'Best practice in leadership development in schools', published in June 2015. It may be of interest to parents and staff in other sectors and agencies who work with schools to improve the quality of leadership. This report draws on the evidence noted in Appendix 1.

Background

In 2011, the Welsh Government published the '[Revised Professional Standards for Education Practitioners in Wales](#)' (Welsh Government, 2011). This circular sets out the revised standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), Practising Teacher Standards and Leadership Standards. The Practising Teacher Standards replaced the End of Induction Standard for newly qualified teachers, while the Leadership Standards replaced the National Standards for Headteachers in Wales. The guidance document states that

The overall purpose of the professional standards is to raise standards of teaching and to improve learners' outcomes throughout Wales. The professional standards articulate the understanding, knowledge and values that our teachers, leaders and HLTAs must demonstrate. They provide a framework to enable practitioners to identify their performance objectives and to choose the most appropriate professional development activities, (Welsh Government, 2011, p.1).

A key feature of the current professional standards is that it is intended that all practitioners are able to use the leadership standards to help them identify and

develop leadership skills relevant to the particular stage of their career and to their current roles and responsibilities.

There are six key themes for the Leadership Standards. These are:

- creating strategic direction
- leading learning and teaching
- developing and working with others
- managing the school
- securing accountability
- strengthening the community focus

The themes are subdivided into 66 indicators.

In the following year, 2012, the Welsh Government published revised arrangements for the performance management of headteachers. In relation to the leadership standards, the document states that

Headteachers must demonstrate they meet the Leadership Standards as part of assessment arrangements for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and continue to meet them whilst they are in the role of headteacher. They provide a framework to help headteachers identify their performance management objectives and to choose the most appropriate professional development activities, (Welsh Government, 2012, p.1).

The guidance notes that, where an acting headteacher is in place, the performance management arrangements apply to the acting headteacher. It also notes that, where a headteacher is employed at two or more schools, performance at each school must be appraised. In such situations it is expected that governing bodies should co-operate on timings and arrangements and, where possible, work together to minimise the work involved.

The current performance management arrangements for headteachers also require an appraisal panel of at least two governors appointed by the governing body and one or two appraisers appointed by the local authority. It allows the Diocesan Authority for schools with a religious character to appoint an appraiser.

The importance of effective leadership was highlighted in a recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 'Improving schools in Wales: An OECD perspective' explored the concept of schools building the professional capital to successfully deliver change, and made four recommendations. The fourth recommendation focused on leadership and suggested that the Welsh Government should 'treat leadership development as the prime driver for reform, through adequate resourcing and investment in the system's own leadership capital,' (OECD, 2014, P. 65).

Main findings

- 1 All headteachers visited as part of this survey have performance management arrangements in place relating to their own performance management objectives. In most cases, the headteacher's performance management cycle is timed appropriately to start in the second half of the autumn term to allow the appraisal panel to take the school's previous year's performance into consideration. In many cases, the headteacher's performance management cycle usefully includes an interim review point, allowing new objectives to be set if one or more have been achieved.
- 2 All headteachers interviewed who had been in post over two years, keep appropriate records. In many cases, headteachers record their outcomes in an overview document. They provide a statistical analysis of the school's outcomes and evidence against the objectives set. However, while headteachers pay good attention to 'what is to be achieved (the performance management objectives), in most cases, only a very few reflect fully in writing on 'how' the objectives should be achieved (application of the leadership standards). Overall, the documentation provides a suitable starting point for the appraisal panel's discussion of the headteacher's performance.
- 3 A very few appraising panels use the leadership standards effectively to evaluate the performance of the headteacher. In these schools, governors ask headteachers to reflect in writing on how they have led the school in the previous year. This enables the appraisal panel to gain a more rounded understanding of the headteacher's work during the school year.
- 4 In nearly all the schools visited, headteachers identify their own professional development needs accurately in relation to their performance management objectives. However, most headteachers report that finding suitable professional development is time-consuming and guaranteeing the quality difficult. Most headteachers in substantive posts report that support following their first appointments to headship to be poor.
- 5 Most governors who sit on headteachers' appraisal panels have previous experience of performance management processes. Most governors who have received the training to sit on the appraisal panel judge that the training has provided them with a good understanding of how to carry out the appraisal. However, many governors are less confident about their understanding of the leadership skills.
- 6 In many cases currently, the local authority representative on the appraisal panel is a recently appointed challenge advisor and does not have an in-depth knowledge of the school.
- 7 In most schools visited, headteachers apply a form of distributed leadership with senior staff and a few teachers holding responsibilities for the school's work. In the majority of schools, headteachers do not plan well for distributed leadership and this does not extend overtly beyond middle leaders.
- 8 In a few schools, headteachers take a wide view when developing leadership skills in

their staff. They expect staff not only to perform well in their current leadership posts to the benefit of the school and pupils, but to develop as future leaders. In these schools, headteachers chose senior leaders and middle leaders initially for the strengths and skills they exhibit in a leadership area. They ensure that senior and middle leaders reflect on their performance management objectives and on the leadership standards. They help them to define the leadership standards they exhibit, and offer opportunities for staff to progress through professional development linked to leadership standards staff have yet to demonstrate.

- 9 In many schools, senior staff have roles well suited to their strengths and abilities. However, leaders who remain in the same leadership role for a long time do not always see the need to progress to higher leadership roles or to further develop their own leadership skills and knowledge.
- 10 Most headteachers and appraisal panels are mindful of the leadership standards when undertaking performance appraisals. However, most headteachers do not use the leadership skills robustly enough to help develop their leadership skills and behaviours. As a result, only a few leaders challenge themselves or their colleagues effectively enough.
- 11 While the key themes of the leadership standards remain mostly relevant, there are too many indicators overall to be useful. Additionally, important indicators are not included. For example, creating the vision for the school requires leaders to engage in 'horizon scanning' to keep abreast of the changes in local, regional and national contexts and to review the vision for the school regularly and adjust when necessary. This is a very important skill if schools are to provide pupils with an education that prepares them effectively for the future. Horizon scanning precedes creating the strategic direction. However, this skill, which is one many headteachers find difficult, is not clearly articulated in the leadership standards.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 Revise the leadership standards to convey higher expectations of leaders and to focus more sharply on the leadership skills and behaviours needed to drive change

Appraisal panels should:

- R2 Set appropriate objectives that address leadership behaviours and how leaders undertake their role, as well as quantifiable outcomes
- R3 Record in detail, using the full range of the leadership standards, how well the headteacher has carried out their role, as well as reporting what the headteacher has achieved

Local authorities / regional consortia should:

- R4 Encourage headteachers to reflect holistically on the quality of their leadership using the themes set out in the leadership standards, and in line with the [Individual Leadership Review guidance](#) provided on the 'Learning Wales' website
- R5 Challenge the headteacher and governing body to ensure that there are appropriate opportunities for all staff to develop their leadership skills

Headteachers should:

- R6 Reflect in writing on how well they meet the wider range of leadership standards, as well as on whether they have met performance management objectives
- R7 Ensure there are opportunities for all staff in their school to develop their leadership roles and skills throughout their careers
- R8 Coach and mentor staff who show the behaviours and skills that would enable them to become future leaders

1 The impact of the statutory use of the leadership standards as part of the performance management system for headteachers in schools in Wales

1.1 The performance management appraisal

- 12 All headteachers in substantive posts have suitable performance management appraisal arrangements in place as required by current performance management arrangements for headteachers. In a very few cases, headteachers in acting posts have not yet agreed the performance management cycle with the appraisal panel consisting of representatives of the governing body, the local authority and the Diocese¹.
- 13 In most cases, headteachers, governors and local authority representatives agree the cycle should start in the second half of the autumn term, after receipt and analysis of pupil outcomes from the previous academic year. In many cases, headteachers, governors and local authority representatives agree an interim review of objectives towards the end of the spring term or the beginning of the summer term. In the few most effective cases, where objectives have been achieved by the time of the interim review, headteachers, governors and the local authority representatives agree appropriate new objectives that would be achievable in the academic year or more ambitious objectives which need longer-term work and would be achievable by the end of the following academic year.
- 14 All schools set up an appraisal review in the autumn term to review the extent to which the headteacher had met the objectives set. In most cases, the review is undertaken in two stages: a meeting between the local authority representative and the governors, and a subsequent meeting to discuss outcomes involving the headteacher, the local authority representative and the governors.
- 15 All headteachers interviewed, who had been in post over two or three years, keep well-documented 'Practice, Review and Development' records which they update regularly throughout the school year. In many cases, headteachers record their outcomes in an overview document, where appropriate providing a statistical analysis, for example to show improvement in pupil outcomes in target years or groups. In most cases, headteachers keep clearly organised files, which provide examples of evidence against the objectives set. In nearly all cases, the performance objectives are well linked to school priorities deriving from the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. The documentation in the Practice, Review and Development files form a suitable basis of evidence for the appraisal panel's discussion of the headteacher's performance.
- 16 Most headteachers' Practice, Review and Development files show that over the past three years the performance management objectives for headteachers have become sharper, moving away from exemplification through qualitative data only, to a clearer focus on analysing a wider range of performance data, including the school's data on pupil performance and progress in learning.

¹ Where the appraisal is of the headteacher of a school which has a religious character, the Diocesan authority may appoint an additional appraiser.

- 17 However, while headteachers pay good attention to 'what' is to be achieved (the performance management objectives), in most cases, there is very little written reflection on 'how' the objectives should be achieved (application of the leadership standards). For example, in most cases, the section on the form recording the outcomes of the performance management meeting records in greater detail what has been met in the performance management objectives. This contrasts, in many cases, from the appraisal statement on the leadership standards, where generally the only comment is 'the leadership standards have been met'.
- 18 In most cases, headteachers report that performance management discussions mostly reflect on how well the headteacher has met the performance management objectives, while how well the headteacher has demonstrated the leadership standards receives less attention. They attribute this shift to the greater focus on national priorities and the performance management documentation that makes reference to the leadership standards but does not include them, with the result that performance management appraisers give the leadership standards less attention.
- 19 A very few schools use the leadership standards effectively to evaluate the performance of the headteacher. In these schools, governors ask headteachers to use the leadership standards to reflect in writing on how they have led the school in the past academic year. In these cases, headteachers reflect carefully on their work using the six themes and related indicators of the leadership standards as their guide. This enables the local authority representative and the governors to gain a better, more rounded picture of the headteacher's work during the school year.
- 20 While most headteachers feel that the themes of the leadership standards are appropriate, they feel that the 66 indicators, which underpin the leadership standard themes, are too many. In the very few cases, where headteachers prepare a written statement to reflect their work against the leadership standards, they use the underpinning indicators appropriately as a guide to produce a holistic overview for the standard for the year, instead of writing about each indicator separately.

1.2 Headteachers' professional development

- 21 In nearly all of the schools visited, headteachers identify their own professional development needs accurately in relation to their performance management objectives.
- 22 Most headteachers report that they use networks of professional practice, such as their local cluster group, to gain insights into how other headteachers are raising pupils' standards, embedding new initiatives and tackling similar issues. This may involve visiting schools in the locality or further afield in Wales. In a few cases, headteachers visit schools in the other home countries or in Europe. In most cases, headteachers who are Estyn peer inspectors report that they found the training for this role useful in helping them to develop analytic and evaluation skills.
- 23 At the time of this survey, the change from systems leaders to challenge advisers meant that the person appointed to challenge the school or to act as the local authority representative on the appraisal panel had changed often in the majority of the schools visited. Headteachers said that this uncertainty, combined with financial cuts and reductions in local authority personnel, left them not knowing who to turn to for professional development.

- 24 Most headteachers report that finding professional development suitable to their professional needs is time-consuming and guaranteeing the quality of the professional development difficult. Most headteachers in substantive posts report arrangements and support following their first appointment to be poor. A few headteachers express the wish for post-NPQH professional development packages, or a Welsh headteachers' conference, focused on leadership standards, as an all Wales resource that headteachers in all sectors can use for coherent professional development.
- 25 In a very few cases, headteachers have worked in partnership to find professional development to meet their collective needs. This allows headteachers to focus on common areas of need. These developmental needs range from developing styles of leadership to the practicalities of developing confidence and understanding in applying capability procedures fairly.

2 The role of the appraisal panel in appraising the headteacher's performance.

2.1 The background of the governors

- 26 All the schools visited have implemented performance management arrangements as set out in the revised performance management arrangements for 2012. Most schools have appointed two governors to sit on the headteacher's appraisal panel. In a very few cases, governing bodies have appointed three governors to the headteacher's appraisal panel. In nearly all cases, chairs of governors act as one of the appraisers.
- 27 Most governors sitting on the headteachers' appraisal panels have previous experience of performance management processes. For example, many are drawn from business backgrounds, while a few are drawn from the legal profession and have been appraisers in other professions. In many other cases, governors have experience of performance management appraisal as appraisers in their own work lives and feel confident about applying their knowledge and skills to make appropriate judgements about the headteacher's performance.

2.2 The role of the governors in appraising the headteacher's performance.

- 28 Most governors interviewed have received training from the local authority in appraising the headteacher. Most governors who received the training judge that it has provided them with a good understanding of how to carry out the appraisal and the evidence they should consider. They are aware that the appraisal should review how well the headteacher has met the performance management objectives, and the leadership standards.
- 29 However, many governors are less confident about their understanding of the leadership standards. In a very few cases, although having received training and support from the local authority representative, governors feel less confident about

making judgements about how well the headteacher has met objectives and the standards for leadership, and they rely too much on the local authority representative for guidance.

- 30 Nearly all governors judged the local authority representative to be very helpful in guiding and supporting them through the headteacher's performance management review.

2.3 The role of local authority representatives in appraising the headteacher

- 31 All local authority representatives have undertaken appropriate training in monitoring, appraising and developing leadership capacity and they are aware of the need to focus on both the performance management objectives and the leadership standards.
- 32 In many cases, the local authority representative is a recently appointed challenge adviser from the regional consortia and has not been associated with the school for very long. Therefore, they do not have an in-depth knowledge of the school.
- 33 In most cases, along with the governors, local authority representatives focus mostly on reviewing and setting new quantifiable performance management objectives. While the local authority representatives help the appraisal panel to develop sensible future objectives based on evidence, they also place less emphasis on reviewing and setting objectives linked directly to the leadership standards.
- 34 In many cases, local authority representatives consider that governors generally have a good understanding of reviewing the evidence related to performance management objectives. However, they recognise that improving governors' skills in setting realistic and achievable objectives is an area for development. For example, while governors generally draw appropriately on their business skills in setting objectives, they sometimes penalise the headteacher for outcomes that do not meet the objective exactly. In these cases, local authority representatives need to help the governors reflect on the nature of education and the factors that might affect pupils' learning.
- 35 Most local authority representatives say that governors look to them as educational experts to drive the process and to suggest provisional judgements on which they can reflect and make the final judgement. In a few cases, local authority representatives plan appropriately to work with governors in such a way as to raise governors' confidence in their own skills, knowledge of the evidence, the school and its headteacher. In most cases, this included discussion of the leadership standards and how the headteacher might evidence them.

2.4 Outcomes of appraisal panels

- 36 In most cases, appraisal panels focus well on headteachers' abilities to meet quantifiable performance management targets. Only a very few governors pay enough attention to the wider leadership standards or provide extended written judgement in relation to them. In a few cases, headteachers pick the leadership standards they feel most relevant to their work during the year and write an appraisal

of their performance against the selected standards. In most cases the section for the appraisal panel's judgement on the leadership standard states no more than 'the leadership standards have been met'. In most cases, the appraisal panel judges that the headteacher meets the quantifiable performance management objectives of the previous year.

3 The extent to which headteachers use the leadership standards to support distributed leadership throughout the school

- 37 A few schools have a system of distributed leadership that encourages teachers and learning support staff to have an element of leadership in their roles whatever the stage of their career.
- 38 In most of the schools visited, headteachers apply a form of distributed leadership with senior staff and a few teachers holding responsibilities for the school's work. In the majority of schools, headteachers do not plan well for distributed leadership and does not overtly extend much beyond middle leaders.
- 39 In most schools, the headteacher carries out the performance management review of the senior leaders in the school. In these cases, most headteachers consider primarily whether the member of staff has met their objectives. In a majority of cases, the headteachers also consider the member of staff's contribution to the leadership of the school through reference to the leadership standards. In most cases, the senior leaders reflect on the performance management objectives and leadership standards with middle leaders.
- 40 In many schools, senior staff have roles well suited to their strengths and abilities. However, senior and middle leaders who remain in the same leadership role for a long time often do not always see the need to progress to higher leadership roles or to further develop their own leadership skills and knowledge.

4 The extent to which headteacher use the leadership standards to support the development of leadership capacity for the future in Wales

- 41 In a few schools, headteachers take a wider view when developing leadership skills in their staff. They expected staff not only to perform well in their current leadership posts to the benefit of the school and pupils, but to develop as future leaders.
- 42 In these schools, headteachers chose senior leaders and middle leaders initially for the strengths and skills they exhibit in a leadership area. They ensure that senior and middle leaders reflect on their performance management objectives and on the leadership standards. They help them to define the leadership standards they exhibit, and offer opportunities for staff to progress through professional development linked to leadership standards staff have yet to demonstrate, for example through

taking up responsibilities that challenge staff and provide opportunities through family clusters and other partnerships to experience different leadership structures and styles.

- 43 The above approach is only embedded in a few schools where the headteachers themselves have experienced a good range of professional development activities or have held a range of leadership posts. These headteachers plan effectively for leadership succession, with their own school needs in mind, and also the wider needs of leadership in Wales.

5 Conclusions

- 44 Most headteachers, local authority representatives and governors are mindful of the leadership standards when undertaking performance appraisals. However, most headteachers do not use them effectively or rigorously enough to help develop their leadership skills and behaviours. As a result, only a few leaders challenge themselves or their colleagues effectively enough.
- 45 While the key themes of the leadership standards remain mostly relevant, there are too many indicators overall. Additionally, important indicators are not included. For example, creating the vision for the school requires leaders to engage in 'horizon scanning' to keep abreast of the changes in local, regional and national contexts and to review the vision for the school regularly and adjust when necessary. This is a very important skill if schools are to provide pupils with an education that prepares them effectively for the future. Horizon scanning precedes creating the strategic direction. However, this skill, which is one many headteachers find difficult, is not clearly articulated in the leadership standards.
- 46 The language used in the leadership standards does not communicate high expectations of leaders, or indicate how they should carry out the leadership behaviour. For example, under 'Leading learning and teaching', indicator 21 says that leaders should monitor and evaluate the curriculum and its assessment and identify and act on areas for improvement, (Welsh Government, 2011, p.10). A better indication of how leaders might demonstrate the skill effectively is to say, 'Monitor and evaluate the curriculum and its assessment regularly and identify and act promptly on areas for improvement.' In this way, the indicator communicates the higher expectation of not only what needs to be carried out, but how it should be carried out. The articulation of how these indicators can be demonstrated helps governors to hold headteachers more effectively to account.
- 47 A key feature of the current professional standards is that it is intended that all practitioners are able to use the leadership standards to help them identify and develop leadership skills relevant to their stage of development in their career and to their roles and responsibilities. This means that practitioners use only the leadership skills that they find relevant at a particular time. In doing this, they may omit important skills and not challenge themselves sufficiently. It also means that practitioners may not develop leadership skills across the themes during their career and are therefore not sufficiently prepared to take on senior leadership roles.

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Appendix: Evidence base

This report uses evidence from visits to schools, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and interviews with headteachers, acting headteachers, governors and representatives from the local authority or regional consortia, as appropriate. The report also draws on inspection evidence about the quality of leadership.

Inspectors identified a random sample of twenty English-medium and Welsh-medium schools in the primary, secondary and special school sectors. Inspectors' visits took place in the autumn term 2014.

In many cases, headteachers were in their first headship post and had held the post between three and six years. In a minority of cases, headteachers had only been in post for the term in which inspectors visited or were in post as the acting headteacher.

All headteachers in substantive posts had attained the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and they were aware of the leadership standards. The majority of headteachers in substantive posts had attained the National Professional Qualification for Headship over five years prior to taking up their first headship.

In a very few cases, headteachers gained additional formal qualifications in educational management and leadership (such as a master's degree) to the National Professional Qualification in Headship. In a few cases, headteachers and acting headteachers gained middle leadership qualification in an earlier part of their career.

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