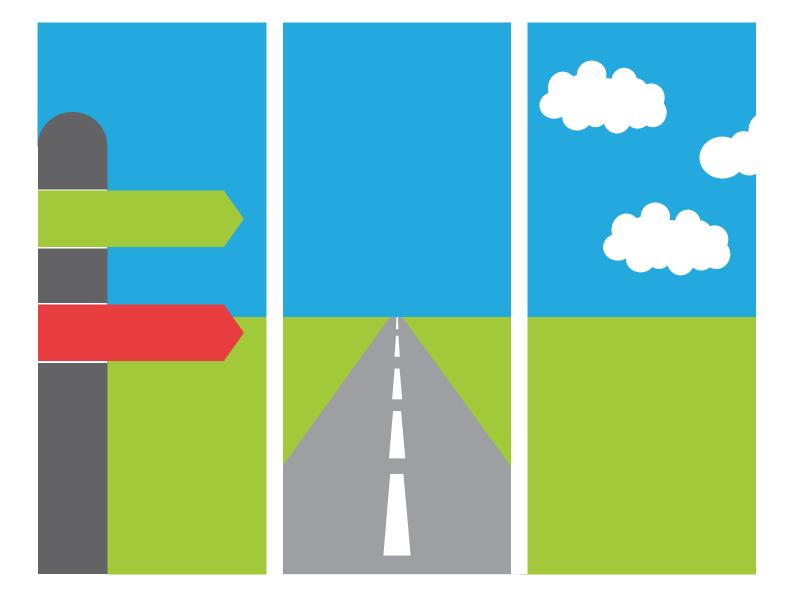# Leadership and primary school improvement
September 2016

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

- ⌖ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ⌖ primary schools
- ⌖ secondary schools
- ⌖ all-age schools
- ⌖ special schools
- ⌖ pupil referral units
- ⌖ independent schools
- ⌖ further education
- ⌖ independent specialist colleges
- ⌖ adult community learning
- ⌖ local authority education services for children and young people
- ⌖ teacher education and training
- ⌖ Welsh for adults
- ⌖ work-based learning
- ⌖ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ⌖ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ⌖ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

Contents	Page

Foreword

I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this important report. The publication of the report coincides with an exciting time for education in Wales, with curriculum reform, a greater focus on professional learning, and new inspection arrangements, all on the horizon. Estyn aims to be at the heart of these developments and is fully committed to supporting the education improvement journey in Wales.

The report draws on the findings of core inspection and follow-up activity since the start of the current cycle in 2010. It includes valuable contributions from differing primary schools across Wales. I am grateful to these schools for helping Estyn produce the report and the associated conferences and I hope that this work will be a catalyst for strengthening the self-improving aspect of our education system.

All schools can improve. Normally, leadership is the most significant factor in influencing the pace, quality and sustainability of the school's improvement. Schools at different developmental stages often need different styles of leadership. For example, a school in special measures may need a different style of leadership from a school that already has strong improvement systems in place. At all stages of a school's development, leaders play a crucial role in developing the professional skills of their staff and supporting them throughout the school's improvement journey.

Inspection can be a key factor in improving schools. The case studies in the report provide clear evidence of this. Inspection helps schools to benchmark where they are on their developmental journey by identifying strengths to build on and recommendations for improvement. This is particularly helpful to schools where self-evaluation processes are not as accurate or effective as they might be.

It is important to recognise that each school will have its own unique improvement journey, influenced by its own context and challenges. However, all schools can learn from the experiences of others and adapt ideas, practice and processes to meet their particular needs. The improvement journey model contained in this report identifies common characteristics of schools at different stages of development. I hope that the model and the case studies will help schools to reflect on their current position and to suggest possible next steps.

Meilyr Rowlands
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Introduction

Part One of this report outlines general characteristics of the different stages of the improvement journey of primary schools and highlights the importance of effective leadership and leadership development on that journey. This summary draws on first-hand evidence from inspections and from visits to the case study schools described in Part Two. The findings of the case studies are summarised in an improvement journey model. The model sets out the characteristics of leadership and leadership development commonly demonstrated by schools at different stages of their improvement journey.

This publication builds on the findings of an earlier report: Best practice in leadership development, (Estyn, 2015). The focus of this current report is on a series of case studies that exemplify how leadership and the development of leadership capacity in primary schools are fundamental to improving school performance. The case studies explore the improvement journeys of 18 primary schools that represent the diverse range of challenges facing schools today, including the formation of federations. All of the schools have different starting points, including schools placed in a statutory category following inspection, as well as schools maintaining high levels of performance over time.

The case studies are grouped to illustrate four stages of the improvement journey:

1. Starting the journey
2. Making progress
3. Building momentum
4. Sustaining high standards

The case studies have been written in collaboration between inspectors and school leaders. To tell a complete story, a lot of detail has been included to explain the context and processes fully.

Part 1: A commentary on primary school improvement journeys

1   There is scope for all schools to improve and some need to improve more than others. Good leaders recognise the need to adapt their leadership styles and adopt different strategies according to a school's position on its improvement journey. Although there are different strategies for different stages, there are also some common tasks that all schools need to address at all stages of their development.

- Define clearly the **vision and strategic direction** of the school; this vision evolves as the school improves
- Establish and maintain a culture where **improving standards and wellbeing** for all pupils is the main priority
- Make **improving teaching** the key process that contributes to improving standards
- Deliver a **curriculum** that fully **meets the needs of all pupils**
- Sustain a consistent focus on improving pupils' **literacy and numeracy** skills, including higher-order thinking and reasoning skills
- Make sure that **continuous professional development** of staff improves the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils
- Make all staff, especially those in management roles, **accountable** for their areas of work
- Make sure that **self-evaluation** outcomes derive from **first-hand evidence** and are **linked closely to school improvement priorities**
- Provide **governors** with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing and encourage them to challenge underperformance

Starting the journey

2   In nearly all schools where standards of teaching and learning are unsatisfactory:

- Strategic leadership is weak, school improvement processes are ineffective and there is poor resource management
- Arrangements to manage the performance of staff are often underdeveloped and do not lead to improved professional practice or outcomes for pupils
- Teachers are unaware of the need to improve their own practice because they are working in isolation
- Leaders do not identify aspects of professional practice that require improvement, through first-hand self-evaluation activity such as lesson observations
- Teachers do not receive enough professional development opportunities to meet their needs or improves the quality of their work

3   In order to improve from a low starting point, schools normally require direct leadership to establish expectations regarding the quality of day-to-day work, particularly the quality of teaching and learning. In schools in greatest need of improvement, the headteacher is usually the main driving force in establishing a base for improvement. In many cases, schools in these circumstances make changes to their leadership. However, a change of senior leadership does not always represent the best or only option to improve unsatisfactory schools.

4   Where schools have succeeded in improving from low starting points, the leaders often demonstrate the following characteristics:

- a clear vision for improvement that focuses on addressing the school's key priorities at that time
- well-developed professional skills, knowledge and experience to identify areas in need of improvement
- the capacity to establish quickly that the school is a place for teaching and learning and that teachers are there to improve outcomes for pupils
- a strong commitment to supporting others to improve within a culture of accountability
- the determination to deal with difficult staffing issues
- high expectations of themselves and others and the ability to model high professional standards
- a sound understanding of effective educational pedagogy and educational research
- good decision-making powers and the ability to prioritise improvement goals
- the drive to implement new structures and systems that support rapid improvement, which they often direct personally
- the ability to evaluate pupil data and the professional performance of teachers
- an understanding of what effective teaching looks like
- a focus on improving teaching and learning to raise standards
- the communication skills to ensure that parents and the wider school community engage with the school and support children in making progress

5   The school leader, whether new to post or otherwise, must understand the need to invest in developing staff, so that they improve the quality of their work and raise standards for pupils.

Making progress

6   As schools start to improve, headteachers begin to hold staff more accountable for the quality of their work and the standards that their pupils achieve. Headteachers often achieve this by:

- agreeing with staff a common vision and sense of purpose that is about raising standards and appropriate expectations
- establishing clear roles and responsibilities in a staff structure that meets the school's needs, including a range of specific leadership positions
- ensuring that improving the quality of teaching is fundamental to securing improvement and developing of agreed whole-school approaches and expectations regarding classroom practice
- developing self-evaluation processes that focus on quality of teaching and learning
- using pupil performance data to identify strengths and areas for improvement at whole-school, cohort, group and individual level
- establishing performance management systems that link to pupil performance and agreed whole-school priorities
- establishing networks of professional practice within and beyond the school
- exemplifying and celebrating good practice within the school
- challenging underperformance rigorously

7   In these early stages of improvement, the headteacher usually leads most improvement initiatives and sets the agenda for change. However, as school improvement gathers pace, there is often an emphasis on developing leadership capacity throughout the school and an increased willingness to delegate responsibilities. This is a development in many schools following the initial establishment of an appropriate staff structure. At this stage, effective leaders often:

- involve staff in reviewing the strategic vision and direction for the school
- allocate specific leadership roles to others in positions of responsibility
- ensure that leaders know what is expected of them
- invest in the development of leaders, for example through school-based coaching and mentoring or external courses, so that they develop their own skills and increase the school's capacity for improvement
- ensure that leaders in all positions contribute to improve the quality of the school's work
- train leaders at all levels to implement, monitor and review the school's developing systems effectively
- maintain a professional dialogue with leaders at all levels and monitor the work of these leaders closely
- provide staff with a platform to develop and display their leadership skills, for example through leading staff meetings
- involve other senior leaders in self-evaluation activity and school improvement planning
- identify other staff with leadership skills or leadership potential
- begin to establish an aspirational leadership culture, through an environment where staff at all levels show a desire to lead at some level
- develop professional learning communities within or beyond the school to accelerate improvement and involve all staff in improvement processes

Building momentum

8   As the momentum for school improvement increases, headteachers begin to adopt a more collaborative style of leadership alongside a direct approach. They enable senior and middle leaders to become more influential in securing improvements. Leaders identify and develop other staff with leadership potential, including those at relatively early stages in their careers.

9   In nearly all the case study schools, staff who had become leaders and received training and development to perform their roles, gained high levels of professional satisfaction from their work. They enjoyed leading. As senior and middle leaders become more experienced and confident, their roles have an increasingly positive impact on school improvement. These leaders remain highly accountable to the school's top-level leader at all times, but as the school improvement journey evolves:

- All leaders contribute to the school's vision for improvement
- There is a strong leadership base that ensures a common strategic direction and consistency across all areas of the school's work
- Leaders at all levels ensure that the school runs smoothly each day and that agreed systems are followed, even in the absence of the headteacher

- Leaders at all levels deal effectively with issues relating to behaviour or discussions with parents; for example senior leaders, such as the headteacher, are confident that other leaders have the capacity to deal with such situations
- All leaders understand and carry out their roles well in relation to improving standards of teaching, learning and wellbeing
- Leaders at all levels have the skills to evaluate the impact of their actions on professional practice, standards and school improvement
- Leaders at all levels contribute to self-evaluation work, improvement planning, the performance management of staff and continuous professional development
- Rigorous and comprehensive self-evaluation processes underpin all improvement work
- Staff at early stages in their careers have opportunities to lead or to work closely with other leaders
- There is a culture of succession planning; promotion of senior or middle leaders creates opportunities for other staff to progress in their careers, and often, though not exclusively, promotions are from within the school, because senior leaders have developed individuals with the skills to fill senior roles
- Leaders make effective use of the National Leadership Standards to set performance targets and inform professional development
- Leaders use high-level professional learning opportunities to develop staff at all stages in their careers
- Leaders at all levels become confident in using a variety of leadership approaches
- Leaders at all levels have the autonomy to make decisions in the best interests of pupils, for example involving the seeking out partnerships with other schools, arranging training for staff or procuring resources
- Leaders create a mutually supportive team ethos
- Leaders begin to innovate, for example by supporting teachers to reflect on their professional practice by filming lessons and evaluating pupils' progress
- A culture of reflection by senior and middle leaders with the involvement of all staff ensures a cycle of improvement that impacts positively on professional practice and outcomes for pupils
- Governing bodies having a clear understanding of the school's work and perform effectively as critical friends

Sustaining high standards

10   Many of the schools identified in this report that maintain high standards have benefited from continuity in leadership. This is not to say that prolonged periods of headship guarantee or are required for success, which depends on the vision, drive and skills of individual headteachers and other leaders. The schools in this report develop a depth of leadership talent with a strong record of delivering improvements in many aspects of their work. This feature is particularly helpful to practitioners in the early stages of their careers, as they benefit from working in positive and forward-thinking environments and alongside effective role models.

11   Schools that sustain high standards of teaching, learning and wellbeing over extended periods demonstrate all of the features identified in the stages above. In

addition, leaders strive to ensure that these schools have the following characteristics:

- There is an evolving vision with a focus on raising standards, based on the views of all stakeholders, which is aspirational, challenging and achievable
- The headteacher possesses highly-effective leadership qualities and uses a wide range of leadership styles that they adapt to address different circumstances
- Leaders are highly committed to the continuous professional development of all staff at all stages in their careers
- Leaders keep standards at the forefront of their thinking at all times and there is a culture where all staff contribute consistently to improving outcomes for pupils
- Senior leaders have a proven track record of taking action to secure improvements
- All school improvement processes, including, self-evaluation, improvement planning, performance management and continuous professional development, are woven together and impact on each other particularly well
- Leaders are confident and inspire confidence in others, supporting staff to innovate and enhance pupils' learning
- Leaders maintain effective procedures for challenging under-performance
- Leaders influence and lead the work of other schools, for example by implementing cutting-edge techniques or by providing support to help them improve

12   Leaders in consistently successful schools often demonstrate their commitment to improving the education system in Wales through their involvement in school-to-school support. These arrangements often benefit the school that provides the support as well as the school that receives it, for example by providing increased opportunities for aspiring leaders to develop their skills in a different environment. There is capacity within schools in Wales for school-to-school support work, but this work needs careful planning to ensure that the schools providing additional support are not over-stretched.

Small schools

13   Most of the schools featured in this report are medium-sized or large schools. Only a few are small. It is important to acknowledge the difficulties that small schools face in developing a wide leadership base. In such schools, the headteacher is normally accountable for all aspects of leadership. A few of our case study schools have adopted innovative approaches to broadening the leadership base in such circumstances. For example, Ysgol Friog in Gwynedd used governor expertise to support the school in implementing its post-inspection action plan.

14   In small schools, where leaders have limited management time, effective headteachers prioritise carefully how they will use this time to improve teaching and standards. This means that, although their systems are not as sophisticated and all-encompassing as those in larger schools, they can be effective in raising standards.

A model for primary school improvement

Common characteristics of improvement at all stages

Leaders
- Define clearly the **vision and strategic direction** of the school; this vision evolves as the school improves
- Establish **professional values and behaviours** amongst staff to support continuous improvement and effective team work
- Establish and maintain a culture where **improving standards and wellbeing** for all pupils is the main priority
- Make **improving teaching** the key process that contributes to improving standards
- Deliver a **curriculum** that fully **meets the needs of all pupils**
- Sustain a consistent focus on improving pupils' **literacy (English/Welsh), numeracy and ICT** skills, including higher-order thinking and reasoning skills
- Make sure that **continuous professional development** of staff improves the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils
- Make all staff, especially those in management roles, **accountable** for their areas of work
- Make sure **self-evaluation** outcomes derive from **first-hand evidence** and are **linked closely to school improvement priorities**
- Provide **governors** with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing and encourage them to challenge underperformance

	Starting the journey	**Making progress**	**Building momentum**	**Sustaining high standards**
Strategic vision	Establish a vision for pupils' education and wellbeing based on securing high standards for all.	All staff and the school community understand the school's vision and aims. Leaders review the vision and strategic direction to ensure that it supports further improvement.	All staff and the school community develop the school's vision for continuous improvement and know their roles in achieving the vision. They review the vision and strategic direction to ensure that it supports further improvement.	The school continues with the vision and strategic direction to ensure that it sustains high standards and supports further improvement. The vision is often influential across the sector.
	Establish a set of values and sense of core purpose.	Continue to embed agreed values and work collectively to achieve the school's core purpose.	Core values and purpose well established and are reflected in the day-to-day life of the school.	The work of all staff consistently reflects powerful values and a shared sense of common purpose to achieve the very best for their learners.

Leadership approaches	Use an instructional or direct approach to deal with identified shortcomings in teaching and standards.	Continue to use an instructional approach. Begin to develop a more collaborative approach to school improvement through widening leadership responsibilities and improving team work.	A collaborative, open and inclusive approach is firmly established, based on high expectation, and there is a high degree of consistency in most aspects of the school's work.	Leaders at all levels use a variety of styles to maintain high standards across all aspects of the school's work.
Developing leadership capacity	Establish a clear management structure.	Distribute leadership opportunities and ensure that staff in these roles understand specifically what they are accountable for and have the skills to fulfil these duties.	Distributed leadership is well established and consistently successful in raising standards of teaching and learning. All leaders clearly understand their responsibilities in relation to pupil standards.	Distributed leadership is well established and highly successful in raising standards of teaching and learning. Leaders often help to improve systems beyond their own schools.
Improving standards of learning and wellbeing, Including developing positive attitudes to learning	There is a focus on improving the fundamentals of behaviour and attendance. Establish clear expectations in relation to pupils' progress and attainment in lessons and over time. Begin to develop pupils independent and 'learning to learn' skills. Foster attitudes of resilience and perseverance among pupils.	Systems to manage behaviour and attendance are consistent and successful and are based on clear and well-understood expectations for all. Maintain specific expectations in relation to pupils' progress and attainment. Move towards a culture of challenge in relation to expectations. Continue to develop pupils as resilient and determined learners.	Standards of behaviour and attendance are at least good. They are strengthened through high quality teaching and learning experiences throughout the school. There are consistently high expectation in relation to pupils' progress and attainment.	Standards of behaviour and attendance are normally exemplary because of the quality of provision and the culture at the school. A culture of high expectations and performance permeates all aspects of the school's work and influences the work of other providers.

Improving teaching & assessment	Set up systems to analyse and use performance information.

Ensure that all staff understand what good teaching looks like.

Establish systems to assess and track pupils' progress accurately at individual, group and whole-school level. | Embed the performance analysis systems and develop them further. Involve staff in this process.

Ensure that all staff usually use a good range of teaching approaches and strategies in lessons.

Continue to assess and track pupils' progress accurately at individual, group and whole-school level. | Arrangements to analyse and use performance information are effective. All staff in leadership positions are involved and make valuable contributions to this work.

All teachers have a secure understanding of what constitutes good or excellent teaching and most lessons are good or better.

Assessment and tracking arrangements consistently support effective teaching and learning and inform future planning. | Arrangements to analyse and use performance information in relation to nearly all aspects of its work are consistently effective and reliable. Aspects of this work fully devolved to senior leaders.

The quality of teaching is consistently good and often excellent. As a result, nearly all pupils make particularly good progress and achieve very high standards.

Assessment and tracking arrangements are highly effective and have notable impact on raising standards. |
| **Developing a curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils including Improving their basic skills** | Ensure that the curriculum and provision for skills meet all requirements.

Improve pupils' literacy numeracy and ICT skills. | Ensure that the curriculum meets all requirements and matches the needs and of all pupils enabling them to make sound progress.

Sustain the focus on improving pupils' literacy, numeracy, ICT and independent learning skills. | Ensure that the curriculum and provision for skills, support high levels of engagement in learning and help all pupils to make good progress.

All staff have a strong understanding of how to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy, ICT and independent learning skills to a high level. | Ensure that the curriculum and provision for skills is highly engaging and supports all pupils to make consistent high progress. Aspects of this provision may be worthy of replication in other schools and the school shares its good practice effectively.

All staff are highly successful in developing pupils' literacy, numeracy, ICT and independent learning skills. |

| **Self-evaluation and improvement planning** | Introduce a culture of self-evaluation based on the analysis of first-hand evidence.

Establish links between self-evaluation processes and school improvement planning. Support the achievement of improvement priorities by establishing effective performance management arrangements for staff and continuous professional development that meets specific improvement needs. | Further develop leaders' self-evaluation skills and their ability to scrutinise and improve teaching and learning.

Further develop links between self-evaluation processes and school improvement planning.

Support the achievement of improvement priorities through effective use of performance management of staff and continuous professional development.

Begin to evaluate the effectiveness of school improvement systems on improving quality. | Culture of self-evaluation is established, well understood and effective in raising standards. It draws on the views of all relevant stakeholders.

There is a consistently good match between findings from self-evaluation work and school improvement priorities. High quality CPD and effective performance management arrangements support the school in making strong progress in meeting all improvement priorities. | Self-evaluation work is highly effective and supports continuous improvement in all aspects of the school's work.

Links between self-evaluation work, school improvement priorities, high quality CPD and effective performance management arrangements support the school in maintaining very high standards of teaching, learning and wellbeing. |

Professional learning	Establish CPD arrangements to: • provide specific support for staff to improve the quality of their teaching • provide specific support to enable staff to support the school in reaching improvement goals • use CPD to establish and maintain high expectations in relation to provision and outcomes for pupils Begin to develop opportunities for staff to contribute to working groups to focus on specific areas of school improvement.	Continue to broaden development opportunities for staff to engage in professional learning to improve their own practice, raise standards for pupils, develop their career prospects and increase leadership capacity at the school. Working groups begin to contribute successfully to school improvement. These groups provide new opportunities to develop leadership capacity. They begin to engage with external partners to develop good practice.	CPD arrangements are effective in improving the quality of leadership and provision. They support improved outcomes for pupils consistently. Many staff engage in enquiry and reflection to improve teaching and learning with outcomes shared across the school. Teachers regularly network with colleagues in other schools to raise standards of teaching learning and wellbeing.	Arrangements for the CPD of all staff are highly effective and support a culture of continuous improvement at the school. All staff engage regularly in effective professional learning individually or as part of a working group. They engage in research, coaching or mentoring activity to improve their own and others' professional practice.
Using pupil voice	Establish arrangements to take account of and act upon the views of pupils.	Further develop arrangements to take account of and act upon the views of pupils.	Pupil voice is influential and an established part of school improvement processes.	Pupil voice has a regular and positive impact on raising standards of provision, learning and wellbeing.
Family and community engagement	Focus on establishing or restoring the reputation of the school with parents and the local community.	Take all opportunities to develop partnerships with parents and the local community that support improvements to provision and outcomes for pupils.	Partnerships with parents and the local community are mutually beneficial and support consistently good outcomes for most pupils.	Partnerships with parents and the local community are mutually beneficial and highly successful in securing the best possible outcomes for pupils.

Part 2: Case studies of how primary school improve

The schools

St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Cardiff

St. Alban's is a medium sized Catholic school with a very high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The school population consists of pupils of many different ethnicities. The school has experienced many challenges in recent years. It is one of very few schools in Wales to have its governing body replaced by an interim executive board. The Estyn inspection of 2011 found the school in need of special measures. Many different leaders and leadership strategies supported the school to come out of this category by 2013. '**The importance of strong leadership in raising standards and aspirations**' tells the school's story from 2011 to the present day.

Deighton Primary School, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent

Deighton is a medium sized primary school with a very high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. An Estyn inspection placed the school in significant improvement 2011. A further Estyn inspection in 2015 judged the school's current performance and prospects for improvement as good. The school made this progress by '**Creating an aspirational culture to raise standards**'.

Wat's Dyke Community Primary School, Wrexham

Wat's Dyke is a large primary school in Wrexham with a very low proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. In 2010, an Estyn inspection identified that the school required significant improvement. The school's leadership focused on improving standards of teaching and learning, especially for more able pupils and came out of follow-up in 2012. The school continues to perform well. Read about the improvement journey in '**Boosting pupils' progress through effective leadership**'.

Craig Yr Hesg Primary School, Glyncoch, Pontypridd, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Craig Yr Hesg is a medium sized primary school. In 2011, Estyn inspectors judged that the school needed significant improvement. The case study explains how the school made progress to come out of this category by 2012. **'Effective federation of schools'** is about innovative arrangements to develop leaders, improve teaching and raise standards for pupils under the leadership of an executive headteacher.

Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Y Friog, Gwynedd

Y Friog is a very small school. Following an Estyn inspection in 2013, the school was in need of significant improvement. Estyn removed the school from this category in 2014 because of its good progress. The school's case study explains how '**Extending the school's leadership capacity using governors**' was instrumental in delivering improvements.

Tonnau Community Primary School, Neath Port Talbot

Tonnau is a medium sized primary school. An Estyn inspection in 2012 placed the school in significant improvement. The school responded rapidly to the inspection findings and came out of this category in 2013. In '**The journey to becoming a more outward looking school through creating a culture of improvement and raised expectations**', the school identifies the reasons for its progress.

Deri View Primary School, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire

Deri View Primary is a large sized school with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. Following an Estyn inspection in January 2013, the school required Estyn monitoring. At the time of the inspection, the school had a significant budget deficit of over £170,000. The school improved swiftly and was removed from follow-up in March 2014. Read more in '**Improving leadership and raising standards in a deficit budget situation**'.

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Rhosafan, Neath Port Talbot

Rhos Afan is a large Welsh medium school. In 2013, Estyn inspectors judged that the school needed further monitoring by Estyn. When inspectors returned just over a year later they found that the school had made good progress overall in addressing the recommendations from the inspection and removed it from further follow-up. A key factor in the school's improvement was leaders' approach to '**Involving parents in raising standards**'.

Tavernspite and Templeton Schools, Pembrokeshire

This is the informal federation of two schools in Pembrokeshire. The case study explains how leaders from Tavernspite School have supported Templeton School to improve and reverse a trend of falling pupil numbers. Read more in '**How sharing effective leadership improved standards and reversed a trend of falling pupil numbers**'.

Hawarden Village Voluntary Aided Church in Wales Primary School, Flintshire

Formed following the amalgamation of the former infant and junior schools, Hawarden Village Voluntary Aided Church in Wales Primary is a large school. Prior to amalgamation, the infants' school had a successful inspection but the junior school required significant improvement. The 2015 Estyn inspection of the newly amalgamated school judged current performance as good with excellent prospects for improvement. Read more in '**Highly effective leadership and governance through amalgamation**'.

Parkland Primary School, Swansea

Parkland is a very large school in Swansea that secured good judgements for current performance and prospects for improvement in its most recent Estyn inspection in 2013. Read how leaders have created a culture that secures consistently good performance and strives for excellence in '**The role of staff development in raising standards and aspirations**'.

Ystrad Mynach Primary School, Caerphilly

The creation of this large primary school was a result of the amalgamation of the former infant and junior schools. The school received an Estyn inspection in 2008 that gave cause for concern. However, the school's recent Estyn inspection in 2015 judged the current performance as good and prospects for improvement as excellent. The case study '**Securing school improvement through excellent leadership**' tells the school's story so far.

High Cross Primary School, Newport

High Cross is a medium sized primary school in Newport. In 2007, Estyn inspectors judged that the school was good overall. A further Estyn inspection in 2013 judged the school's current performance and prospects for improvement as excellent. The school's case study '**Creating a learning culture**' identifies how the school moved from good to excellent.

Ysgol Gynradd Dolau, Llanharan, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Ysgol Gynradd Dolau is a large school of 468 pupils. It provides both Welsh and English medium education. Estyn has inspected the school twice during the current cycle in 2012 and more recently in 2015. On both occasions, the school has received good judgements overall. Read how '**Tiered leadership and succession planning**' enable the school to sustain good performance.

Glasllwch Primary School, Newport

Glasllwch is a medium sized primary school in Newport. The school has a very low proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. In 2008, Estyn inspectors judged the school as 'good with outstanding features' in all aspects of its work. In 2014, the school received excellent judgements for current performance and prospects for improvement. Read more in '**Empowering leaders to maintain excellent standards**'.

Ysgol Glan Gele, Abergele, Conwy

Ysgol Glan Gele is a medium school for Foundation Phase pupils only. In 2009, the school received seven grade-one judgements in an outstanding Estyn inspection report. The school's next Estyn inspection in 2015 judged both current performance and prospects for improvement as excellent. The case study '**Maintaining high standards and supporting improvement in other schools**' identifies how leaders have ensured continued success.

Ysgol Gynradd Brynaman, Brynaman, Carmarthenshire

Ysgol Gynradd Brynaman is a Welsh medium school in Carmarthenshire. In 2009, the school received seven grade 1 judgements in an outstanding Estyn inspection report. The school's next Estyn inspection in 2015 judged both current performance and prospects for improvement as excellent. '**Inspiring leaders at all levels to be accountable for their responsibilities**' explains the key reasons behind the school's sustained success.

Section 1: Starting the journey

Case study 1

St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Cardiff

The importance of strong leadership in raising standards and aspirations

Context

St Alban's Catholic Primary School is in the Tremorfa area of Cardiff. The school has 181 full-time pupils aged between 4 and 11 years.

Just over 53% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is well above the national average of 20%. Many pupils are of white British ethnicity. The remaining pupils come from a wide range of ethnic groups including a few pupils from gypsy traveller or Czech Roma backgrounds. Around 10% of pupils speak English as a second language, and no pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school identifies 28% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is above the Welsh average. A very few pupils have statements of special educational needs.

Prior to, and during the Estyn inspection of November 2011, the headteacher and deputy headteacher were both absent.

The November 2011 Estyn inspection judged both current performance and prospects for improvement as unsatisfactory and the school was placed in special measures. Following the inspection, the local authority replaced the governing body with an Interim Executive Board. They took this unusual action partly because of the outcomes of inspection but also because of slow progress in dealing with other very significant staffing issues at the school.

In July 2013, a team of Estyn inspectors visited the school to evaluate progress and removed the school from special measures.

When the school was placed in special measures, the prospects for improvement were unsatisfactory due to:

- systemic failures at all levels of leadership and management over a long time
- ongoing uncertainties regarding the governance, leadership and management of the school
- self-evaluation procedures not being embedded in the everyday life of the school
- middle leaders lacking support to carry out their roles effectively
- limited professional development opportunities for staff

The school's improvement journey

The key factors having the biggest impact on improving standards at the school include:

- identifying that the existing acting leadership team did not have the required skills to lead the school successfully in the months prior to inspection
- a new senior leadership team seconded in from other schools in the local authority
- having weekly support from an expert in developing Foundation Phase practice
- providing effective professional development for specified permanent staff at the school to develop sustainable leadership skills
- developing a self-evaluation system that uses data effectively to inform judgements and which involves all stakeholders in future planning
- a clear focus on removing the barriers to learning and providing appropriate provision for every pupil through the use of effective assessment and tracking systems
- re-establishing links with the school community which had broken down completely and to the detriment of pupils

The school considers that its improvement journey consists of two distinct stages:

Stage 1 September 2011 to July 2013

- directed and supportive leadership from the top down
- a focus on meeting the recommendations from the November 2011 Estyn inspection, securing improved practice and raising expectations
- engaging with parents and linking with the parish and wider community
- working effectively with key partners

Stage 2 July 2013 onwards

- the beginnings of school to school working
- capacity building and succession planning for leadership

Actions: Stage 1

In 2011, the local authority replaced the school's existing senior leadership team by seconding an experienced headteacher. In the spring of 2012, it seconded a further two acting assistant headteachers. The assistant headteachers took responsibility for standards in English, mathematics and special needs education. The seconded leadership team focused heavily on establishing effective systems and ensuring that staff implemented these to the required standard. This enabled the school to run smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The team worked hard to improve trust and working relationships between all staff. They put in place a curriculum that met the needs of pupils, linking assessment information to lesson planning successfully. They supported teachers and support staff to implement these plans successfully and to focus on developing pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills. Leaders worked with staff to establish expectations regarding teaching strategies and the quality of lessons.

Leaders made re-engaging with the parish and the school's parents a priority. They introduced opportunities for parents to meet with the acting headteacher and placed a suggestions board in the school foyer for parents. The school established reading afternoons and encouraged parents to attend. These events were well attended and proved to be a positive approach to improving parental engagement. The acting headteacher made contact with the parish priest and established a weekly mass at the school. Leaders ensured that classes of pupils visited the church every week. These opportunities were important in enabling pupils to engage in events within the parish and gain a greater awareness of the role of the church in their education. Relationships began to improve.

The local authority made a significant contribution to the school's improvement journey through appointing key staff with the required skills to support the school through its most difficult times. Following the Estyn inspection, this support continued. However, the school's acting headteacher identified that there was too much support and external input to support teachers in raising standards. As a result, she agreed with the local authority that the focus of external support would be reduced to improving provision for literacy and numeracy. This supported the school to make improvement effectively.

The new senior leadership team had a clear focus on addressing the seven recommendations from Estyn's core inspection. These formed the basis of the school development plan, with a clear focus on raising standards. Initially, the school improvement plan focused on the seven recommendations from the core inspection. Senior leaders were accountable for aspects of each recommendation and recorded actions and outcomes in half-termly written progress reports to the Interim Executive Board.

Subject leaders carried out their own subject self-evaluations and developed action plans for the first time. This helped to develop their leadership skills and to promote greater levels of accountability amongst staff.

Leaders expected every pupil to make progress quickly and staff had to raise their expectations of all pupils accordingly. In 2012, the senior leadership team introduced new assessment procedures. This included the creation of individual learner profiles. They identified this as an excellent professional development opportunity for all staff. Suitable training enabled staff to identify individual pupil needs effectively through the profiles. Leaders and staff used this information to put in place a range of targeted provision. This was effective in removing barriers to learning and raising standards. Leaders used the individual learner profiles during meetings with each class teacher to evaluate the progress of their pupils. This increased teachers' understanding of their accountability in ensuring pupil progress and placed each learner at the heart of assessment.

After the core inspection, Estyn visited the school termly. During the first special measures follow-up visit in summer 2012, Estyn inspectors recognised the progress already made. Inspectors judged that teaching was good and that provision, especially for literacy and numeracy, had improved. This feedback gave leaders and all staff the confidence to build on the considerable work that had gone into implementing change. They embedded the effective changes to practice and provision and provided greater consistency and quality for pupils.

Leaders began to develop systems to review and refine practice at the school and involved all staff in this process to develop a sense of ownership and an understanding of how everybody could contribute to sustained improvement. By now, the school had established its own self-evaluation system, which included the effective analysis of pupil performance data. It had the capacity to identify areas in need of improvement, act upon them promptly and secure improvements for pupils as a result.

In July 2013, the school had made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations from the core inspection and Estyn removed them from significant improvement.

Actions Stage 2

The next step of the school's improvement journey required a re-focus, without the Estyn recommendations as a guide.

At this point, the school secured a permanent senior leadership team. The seconded headteacher became permanent and one of the acting assistant headteachers became the school's deputy headteacher. The other assistant headteacher took a new role in the regional consortium. In addition, the school identified potential leaders from within its own staff and began to plan for the future. The deputy headteacher, mentored by a successful headteacher from another local school, achieved the National Professional Qualification for Headship. The school also appointed an existing member of staff to the leadership team with responsibility for developing innovation and technology.

After July 2013, the individual learner profile meetings continued to track progress and this showed improved academic standards and wellbeing. The school developed assessment procedures further by introducing intervention trackers. This enabled leaders to monitor the impact that specific strategies, such as provision for pupils with additional learning needs, had on improving pupil outcomes and to pin-point those that were most successful.

By 2014, effective self-evaluation was embedded firmly and all staff understood the links between self-evaluation and all aspects of school improvement. In line with the Welsh Government's 'New Deal', the school focused on professional development. Performance management targets and professional development opportunities linked well to school improvement priorities. These arrangements began to have a marked effect on raising standards.

From 2014, staff had the skills to assess and track pupils' progress independently, with less reliance on support from senior leaders. The purchase of an electronic assessment system and regular moderation have ensured a consistency in approach without losing the good practice of existing assessment processes. The profiles increased levels of accountability by setting challenging but achievable targets for all pupils.

From 2014, the school became more outward looking. The headteacher accepted a secondment to the regional consortium. This enabled her to share St Alban's

improvement journey with other schools in a similar position. As a result of this secondment, the deputy became acting headteacher and a member of the senior leadership team took the role of acting deputy. This enabled the school to develop its leadership capacity further by creating additional teaching and learning responsibility posts within its existing staffing structure and thus further building leadership capacity.

This succession planning allowed excellent professional development opportunities for all members of the senior leadership team and the school now has aspirational future leaders.

Outcomes

- Standards of leadership, provision and outcomes for pupils have improved significantly, and are now consistently good
- Relationships between the school and the community it serves are much improved
- The school gives a high priority to staff development and has a strong and sustainable leadership base
- Performance in end of key stage teacher assessments has improved considerably in recent years in both the Foundation Phase and in key stage 2
- The Foundation Phase pupil outcome performance indicator has placed the school in the higher 50% of similar schools for the last four years and in the top 25% in each of the last two years
- In the core subject indicator at key stage 2, pupil performance has placed the school in the higher 50% of similar schools in each of the last four years and in the top 25% for two of those years
- Rates of pupil attendance have risen consistently since 2011

Case study 2

Deighton Primary School, Blaenau Gwent

Creating an aspirational culture to raise standards

Context

Deighton Primary School is in Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent. Most pupils come from the immediate surrounding area and a large housing estate, both of which are Communities First areas. There are 177 pupils on roll aged 3 to 11 years, taught in six classes with three containing mixed age groups. There is also a part-time nursery class.

Currently, around 51% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is well above the national average of 20%. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and none speak Welsh at home. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The school identifies around 27% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is slightly above the national average. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs or are cared for by the local authority.

An Estyn inspection in April 2011 placed the school in need of significant improvement. The current headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in April 2012 and April 2013 respectively. In June 2013, a team of Estyn inspectors visited the school to evaluate progress. The school was judged to have made sufficient progress to be removed from the list of schools in need of significant improvement. A further Estyn inspection in June 2015, judged both the school's current performance and prospects for improvement as good.

The school's improvement journey

Strategic aims

The headteacher established quickly a set of strategic priorities to support effective and speedy school improvement from a very low starting point. These included actions to address:

- weak teaching
- the culture of low aspiration
- the lack of leadership capacity

To begin to address the first two issues, he initiated many challenging conversations with staff about their under-performance. The headteacher understood the significance of addressing weak teaching rapidly in bringing about an improvement in standards.

There were inconsistencies in the overall quality of teaching, which the headteacher identified immediately and took steps to address. However, there was reluctance and even opposition to change amongst a few staff. These staff believed that they were doing a good job and initially they did not respond positively to challenges to improve their practice. To resolve these issues took a great deal of time, effort and perseverance from the headteacher, including direct coaching and mentoring.

The school lacked an established and effective leadership structure. Those in leadership positions did not fully understand their responsibility for ensuring high standards for pupils in their own classes, nor did they have the skills necessary to lead others. The headteacher identified the need to establish an effective leadership team to meet the needs of the school.

Levels of collaboration between staff were low in many areas of the school and staff did not work together effectively as a team. The headteacher recognised the need to transform the school's culture to become an aspirational professional learning community where all staff understood that they could improve and embrace positive change to bring about improvements for pupils. One member of staff could not accept the new culture and left the school. However, other members of staff began to change their outlook and became receptive to the new expectations. They started to work together to embrace the required improvements to raise the quality of teaching.

The immediate priority was to work towards meeting the recommendations from the Estyn inspection, which placed the school in significant improvement. The

strengthening of the senior management team began when a new deputy headteacher took up her appointment in April 2013 and the school's additional learning needs co-ordinator began to develop her role successfully.

The appointment of a new chair of governors, with a background in the legal profession, led to greater levels of challenge and a more coherent relationship with the headteacher and staff. The appointment of a new vice chair, with expertise in education and data analysis, was also a vital move forward for the school. Her skills complemented those of the chair well and ensured that the governing body had the necessary expertise to challenge the headteacher effectively.

Managing the change in culture and improving teaching

On arrival at the school, the new headteacher established himself as a good role model for staff and pupils. He worked with staff to evaluate their abilities in order to develop a strategy to move the school forward. This began with lesson observations to assess standards of teaching and learning. In 2010, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level across all core subjects in key stage 2 was very low. In April 2012, the new headteacher quickly identified that many pupils could attain better outcomes and he worked intensively with them and with staff to raise the expectations of both groups. Outcomes began to rise as staff and pupils began to change their attitudes and realise that they could achieve more.

At this point, there was no use of pupil progress data. The school introduced reading tests on a six monthly basis and used the outcomes from these to hold staff to account for their pupils' progress. Six monthly formal interviews as part of the newly robust performance management arrangements enabled the introduction of much higher expectations for pupil achievement.

The headteacher put in place a set timetable for both key stages to ensure proper curriculum coverage. In addition, the creation of an intervention group timetable for literacy and numeracy support, with registers taken at each session, ensured that regular interventions took place. This was vital to raise standards of basic literacy and numeracy.

The introduction of a planning scrutiny by the headteacher on a weekly basis with feedback to staff proved effective in bringing about improved practice. However, initially this required persistence as not all staff were willing to make changes to their planning practice. In addition, the introduction of a monitoring cycle with lesson observations and regular book scrutiny led to performance targets linked to pupil outcomes being set for staff and many difficult conversations. After Estyn's first significant improvement visit, the headteacher increased the level of book scrutiny and reduced the frequency of lesson observations. He found this an effective strategy as it revealed pupil progress over time rather than just in a single lesson.

The school introduced a framework to support teachers to improve the quality of their professional practice. This was a central tool in developing staff as it set out clearly the required elements for achieving teaching of a good or better standard. This formed the basis of performance management interviews and lesson observations. All staff are now very familiar with the framework and it is an effective driver for distributed leadership.

Although the school had a computerised system to record pupil progress, it was ineffective as no use was made of the data. To address this, the headteacher took lead responsibility for assessment. He instigated termly meetings with each individual teacher to evaluate pupil assessment data and to agree targets for improvement. These meetings also focus on the performance of groups of pupils, including pupils eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs. This approach has been very successful and teachers now monitor the accuracy of the data themselves to ensure that pupil profiles on entry to their class are accurate and do not give a false impression of pupils' progress. Staff now have the skills to analyse their pupils' progress themselves and self-evaluate instead of the headteacher doing so, as was the case initially.

Implementing school-to-school working to raise expectations

Making teachers more accountable for the standards their pupils achieve has been a central part of the improvement journey. It has raised staff awareness of the standards that teachers and pupils should aspire to. Previously staff had no concept of what good or excellent teaching looked like as they were working in a very insular environment.

Between 2012 and 2013, the school focused on raising standards of reading for pupils eligible for free school meals. It paired with another local primary school to develop a best practice reading intervention programme. This was primarily a tool to ensure that this group of pupils attained functional literacy through one-to-one intervention with teaching assistants and trained volunteers. Part of the programme was to explore the effective use of tablet computers to stimulate greater interest in reading. Teaching assistants improved their skills by observing best practice in reading intervention and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support this in another school in the region. Outcomes in reading began to show considerable improvement.

The school's learning environment did not support effective teaching and learning. There were no stimulating displays and classrooms were untidy and poorly equipped. During 2013, staff visited another local school to learn about best practice in developing effective learning environments. As a result, staff worked to make classrooms and other areas around the school more vibrant places for pupils to develop their interest in learning.

These actions began to lead to a cultural shift in attitudes and self-perception. The headteacher and deputy headteacher modelled expectations around professionalism, empathy to learners, a continuing focus on high academic and behavioural standards and positive attitudes to the rewards of teaching very responsive pupils. A culture of teamwork began to emerge where previously this was sporadic.

Work with a Newport primary school enabled staff to observe best practice in teaching and learning, with a focus on raising standards in literacy. This included observations of best practice in lessons, professional development training from the partner school's headteacher and deputy headteacher and valuable joint moderation of pupils' work.

In spring 2015, the school joined its feeder comprehensive's 'Schools Challenge Cymru' project. The main focus was to work towards developing outstanding practice amongst teachers and teaching assistants. The project is helping to raise the quality of teaching by all staff across the school.

A professional learning community, with a focus on behaviour, in conjunction with other schools in the area has also helped to share good practice and improve parental links. As a result, parents are more aware of their children's' achievements both academically and socially, through the use of texts and emails.

All teachers take part in weekly business meetings and professional development sessions. Staff have the autonomy and trust to lead their areas of responsibility and to address areas for improvement with confident leadership. The introduction of half-termly teaching assistant forums enabled all staff to contribute to the improvement journey and to make their views known. Teaching assistants have additional responsibilities as well as their daily roles and they have responded favourably to increased levels of trust.

Developing the role of governors

Governors now support and challenge the school effectively to achieve its strategic aims. Initially, this was through the post-inspection-action plan when the school went in to significant improvement. Specific governors were linked to each of the recommendations and took a lead role in monitoring and evaluating the progress the school was making in meeting agreed targets.

The governing body's interest in training in areas such as safeguarding is developing well and this raises their awareness of best practice. There are now link governors for poverty, additional learning needs and health and safety. These governors not only support school leaders but also provide increasing levels of challenge to ensure that the school develops good practice in these areas.

Governors now have an annual involvement in self-evaluation and have regular oversight of progress towards meeting school development priorities. To assist this process, designated governors have link roles with core subject areas and they visit the school regularly to challenge and support subject leaders and to check on progress in their areas of responsibility.

They also support the school well by accompanying pupils on visits, such as to Oxford University as part of a raising aspirations initiative.

Involving parents and the community

Historically, there had been very little involvement of parents or the community in the life and work of the school. The headteacher recognised the importance of developing close links with these groups to improve levels of pupil wellbeing and to provide a better support mechanism for their learning.

The vice chair of governors agreed to oversee a new parent teacher association in 2012. This altered the direction of the organisation for the better, including more

effective use of the funding raised by parents. The new organisation initially funded educational visits, which were an important part of enlivening the curriculum. This had a quick and highly visible impact on pupils' interest in their learning. A calendar of annual fund raising events is now in place. These help the school to purchase much needed new resources to enhance teaching and learning, including outside adventure trails.

The school trained volunteer readers to implement a range of initiatives aimed at improving reading standards. They continue to work regularly in school and contribute well to improving pupils' levels of interest and achievement in reading.

The introduction of a reward system where pupils earn time to spend on activities of their choice has helped to improve behaviour. It includes a popular knitting club run by a grandmother who is a governor and a gardening club, which parents help to run.

Parent helpers support with local visits, for example to the library and the local park. Parents and grandparents have supported the development of the outdoor areas. Several previously disenfranchised parents became involved in the school through this avenue. A large grant from Communities First, accessed independently by the parent teachers' association, enabled the central courtyard redevelopment and this is proving to be a valuable resource to support teaching and learning.

The introduction of open days, where parents work alongside their children for a lesson, is raising parents' interest in the school's aims to improve literacy and numeracy. The school also runs additional parent-learning classes, which focus on literacy and numeracy. Flying Start run weekly sessions for toddler age children and their parents, with a focus on creating rich literary and numeracy home environments for allowing children to learn through play. These initiatives engage parents more in their children's learning and are successful in enabling parents better to support their children at home.

Digital Leaders in Years 5 and 6 are pupils with well-developed ICT skills. They are responsible for training pupils, staff and the wider community as well as attending to minor technical ICT issues around the school. They are a particularly active group, for example running a half-termly workshop for parents and grandparents, to learn about tablet computers, 'apps' and basic computing skills.

Regular celebration assemblies and public events engage with parents. Events at the cenotaph, class assemblies, Christmas concerts, Christmas church visits for carol services and bible readings, and public meetings on uniform, behaviour and bullying have all been used to raise aspirations and bring the community on board.

Transition events, including comprehensive school based concerts and displays, have an excellent response from parents and carers. Valuable meetings between teachers and parents take place early in each term, to agree expectations around reading, homework and other school routines.

Motivating pupils

Although pupil behaviour was good overall, there were no consistent procedures in place to deal with the few pupils whose behaviour was unacceptable and disrupted the learning and play of others. To address this, the school introduced a set of agreed rules for application throughout the school day. These included the introduction of red cards for unacceptable behaviour and the withdrawal of privileges when necessary. The implementation of this strategy was consistent and pupils regarded it as fair and effective.

Establishing an effective school council was a high priority, including the election of a head boy and girl. Council members have helped to raise pupils' awareness of the importance of healthy living in all classes and have supported staff in implementing the new rules for acceptable behaviour. Council members helped to design the adventure trail in conjunction with the trail providers, the parent teacher association and school leaders. They represent the school at a variety of public events such as the local Remembrance Day ceremonies.

The eco-committee has weekly working lunches with the lead staff member and has developed an eco-charter to promote green strategies such as a community litter rota and energy saving.

The school is involved with an initiative to raise pupils' aspirations. Each year, all Year 6 pupils visit Jesus College, Oxford, to learn about the university and how they could achieve a place. This is successfully raising many pupils' aspirations of what they can achieve if they apply themselves to their learning.

Outcomes

Throughout the school's improvement journey school leaders measured progress through a range of mechanisms including lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils, parents and staff. Performance management targets had a clear link to agreed priorities and helped focus staff effectively on the progress that their pupils made. Improved systems to collect and analyse pupil achievement data confirmed that outcomes were improving.

Between 2012 and 2015, the school's outcomes improved considerably, with the exception of the expected outcomes in literacy and mathematical development in the Foundation Phase. However, there are strong indications that outcomes at the expected level in 2012 and 2013 were inflated and this makes valid comparisons unreliable for this indicator.

- At the end of the Foundation Phase, performance at the higher than expected outcome in literacy rose from 29% to 43% and in mathematical development from 18% to 43%
- In key stage 2 at the expected level, performance in English and mathematics rose from 67% and 83% respectively to 97% for both subjects
- At the higher than expected level, performance in English and mathematics rose from 29% and 25% respectively to 41% for both subjects
- These levels of performance are well above those of other similar schools
- Attendance rose from 92% in 2012 to nearly 95% in 2015 and places the school in the top 25% of similar schools

In June 2015, the school received another full Estyn inspection only two years after its removal from significant improvement. This confirmed that:

The school's current performance is good because:

- By the end of Foundation Phase, many pupils achieve the expected outcome in literacy and most achieve the expected outcome in mathematical development
- By the end of key stage 2, most pupils achieve the expected level in English, mathematics and science
- Pupils eligible for free school meals often make rapid progress from their individual starting points, and achieve as well as their peers
- Nearly all pupils behave well and attend school regularly
- The quality of teaching is good
- Teachers and teaching assistants care for their pupils well, especially those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- The strategic approach taken by the school has significantly improved the achievements of disadvantaged pupils
- The headteacher and senior leaders have a good track record of rapid improvement since the last inspection
- Leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils
- Leaders use data very effectively to inform future priorities for improvement
- The school works effectively within a range of partnerships, which benefit pupils well

Read the full inspection report [here](#)

Case study 3

Wat's Dyke Community Primary School, Wrexham

Improving pupils' progress through effective leadership'

Wat's Dyke Community Primary School is in the local authority of Wrexham. There are 325 pupils aged 3 to 11 years, including 37 pupils who attend the nursery part-time. The school has 12 classes. Currently, 6% of pupils in full-time education are eligible for free school meals. This figure is well below the national average of 20%.

Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and nearly all pupils come from homes where English is the main language. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language. The school identifies around 10% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is well below the national average. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

Estyn inspected the school in November 2010 and judged it to be in need of significant improvement. The inspection identified that the pupils' performance was significantly below that of pupils in other similar schools by the end of key stage 2. There were also notable concerns about the quality and impact of the school's leadership.

The school appointed a new chair of governors in the summer term 2011 and a new headteacher in September 2011. Estyn removed the school from the list of schools requiring significant improvement in February 2012.

The school's improvement journey

Strategic aims for improvement

Following the 2010 Estyn inspection, staff morale was low. There was frustration and disappointment at the outcome of the inspection, particularly amongst staff who believed they were doing well. The inspection report came as a surprise to parents. Many were shocked because the school was not performing as well as it should have been and they felt let down. The newly appointed headteacher had to change the existing culture quickly to re-establish confidence within the school and the wider community.

The first essential step on the school's improvement journey was to establish a clear vision for education that focused on attaining high standards of learning and wellbeing for all pupils. One of the cornerstones of the improvement journey was to raise expectations. The message was clear that the existing practice and performance at the school needed considerable improvement and that staff, pupils and governors had a role to play in changing the school for the better.

Actions

Creating an effective post-inspection action plan

Prior to the new headteacher taking up her post, the school had developed a post-inspection action plan. However, there was limited progress towards the identified targets during the summer term of 2011. The one exception to this was the speedy improvement of school governance. The governors developed quickly a clear understanding of the magnitude of the situation facing the school, their strategic role, their understanding of data and the need to challenge the school.

In September 2011, the newly appointed headteacher worked with the governing body to revise and implement a more effective post-inspection action plan. The new plan contained clear measurable targets and specific actions to improve outcomes, provision and leadership. The plan paved the way for the school to introduce a range of systems and strategies to bring about significant improvements in the short and longer-term.

From the very beginning of the school's improvement journey, clear and effective communication with staff, governors, parents and pupils has been of paramount importance. This was essential in sharing the right messages at the right times and clarifying expectations consistently.

There was little leadership capacity in the school and a limited understanding of how to implement change effectively and, as a result, the headteacher initially used a directive approach to drive improvement. The school also faced an imminent Estyn follow-up visit. This meant that, on occasions, the headteacher needed to be firm with staff about fundamental expectations.

The leadership structure

One of the key features identified within the post-inspection action plan was the need to improve leadership. The school needed to establish a staffing structure that was fit for purpose, identifying clear roles, responsibilities and levels of accountability. At the time, the leadership team comprised the headteacher, deputy headteacher, a senior leader for intervention and heads of the Foundation Phase and key stage 2.

The senior leadership team became increasingly accountable for the strategic direction of the school, with clear roles, responsibilities and challenging performance targets. Importantly, the school ensured that it included elements of the national leadership standards in all the job descriptions and performance management objectives of senior leadership staff. This helped them to perform in accordance with national expectations and ensured that the school could identify relevant development opportunities for leaders. This structure has continued to evolve over time as the vision and needs of the school have changed. The school has a rigorous approach to appointing new staff to ensure that they have the attributes to support the school's continuing improvement journey.

As staff became more familiar with their roles, responsibilities and the school's performance expectations, they were able to take on more responsibility. With coaching, mentoring and experience they have developed strong skills and carry out many leadership tasks effectively with high levels of autonomy.

As their skills developed, this prepared them successfully for the next stage in their careers. For example, the deputy headteacher recently secured promotion to the headship of another local school.

There have been many changes to the school's staffing since 2010. All staff have clear job descriptions detailing their duties. There were no such arrangements back in 2010. The systemic development of staff has had a profound positive effect from a very early stage of the school's improvement journey.

Coaching and mentoring leaders

Initially, the school had a very limited understanding of it strengths or weaknesses. Very few staff contributed to the self-evaluation process and the school did not consider the views of pupils and parents. This lack of systemic self-evaluation meant that priorities in the school improvement plan were often not focused on the most important issues, for instance to improve teaching and learning. Arrangements to monitor the impact of improvement plans were not in place and, consequently, the school could not measure whether improvement initiatives were effective.

To address the problem, the school invested considerable time and energy in developing leaders to fulfil their roles. This included coaching to analyse performance data, gathering experience in effective lesson observations, generating evaluation reports and implementing improvement initiatives. The process was important in developing leaders' skills and a more reflective and evaluative culture at the school. This had a particularly positive impact on the quality of self-evaluation, which is now, appropriately, the driver for all improvements.

The effective development of a leadership team accelerated the school's progress as more people were applying the school's new leadership systems successfully. These included:

- a systemic process of self-evaluation that drew effectively on data analysis and the scrutiny of first-hand evidence such as lesson observations and pupils' work
- strong correlation between self-evaluation, improvement planning and performance management
- high levels of accountability for the success of improvement plans
- clear timescales and measures for achieving agreed priorities
- improved arrangements for the continuous professional development of staff that ensured that they had the skills to meet their individual performance targets and raise standards of teaching and learning

Most significantly, the school joined all of the above systems together in a cycle of continuous improvement. This continues to serve the school well.

The school's leadership and leadership development systems have had a considerable impact on the quality of education that the school provides.

Raising standards for more able pupils

Self-evaluation, in 2012, identified that the school's performance was relatively low in comparison to that of other similar schools and the school's family. To address this issue, the governors supported the headteacher in appointing an additional teacher in upper key stage 2 to work specifically with pupils with the potential to achieve level 5 at the end of the key stage in English, mathematics and science. This had a significant impact upon end of year outcomes.

Due to this success, the school appointed an additional teacher in lower key stage 2 to again support pupils with the potential to attain level 5 by the end of the key stage. The experienced additional teacher supported her newly appointed colleague to ensure continuity and progression in this intervention programme. This exemplifies the change in strategic direction at the school at this time. Specifically, it shows that the school's leadership has developed:

- a focus on standards and improving outcomes
- effective systems to evaluate the impact of improvement initiatives
- clear systems to manage finances to secure high outcomes for pupils
- precise, whole school tracking arrangements to monitor pupil progress and to use this information to support and challenge pupils successfully
- effective systems to coach and mentor new staff internally

Both additional teachers continue to have a notable impact on pupils' outcomes. For example, pupil performance has placed the school in the top 25% or higher 50% at level 5 in English and mathematics for the last four years when compared with other similar schools.

This work has developed further over time. The school now works with the local cluster of primary schools and the local high school to provide a bespoke programme for more able learners. This work, in literacy and numeracy, enables identified pupils to take part in challenge and enrichment tasks. Pupils attend the high school every

week to access this provision and make good progress as a result. In addition, this provides exceptional professional development for the additional key stage 2 teacher, as she shares newly acquired skills and knowledge with colleagues, for example during departmental staff meetings. This is having a positive effect on overall standards at the school.

Improving planning, teaching and assessment

Self-evaluation work in 2011 identified a lack of collaboration in planning, teaching and assessment. The school has transformed this culture by putting in place appropriate structures, such as facilitating joint planning time. Teachers and teaching assistants now meet collectively and co-operate successfully in order to reflect on pupils' attainment and progress both formally and informally. They use this information effectively to plan pupils' next steps in learning. There is a more positive response from staff to working collaboratively and taking joint responsibility. This is highly noticeable, for example in professional learning communities within the school. These have achieved notable success, for instance by collaborating to develop and implement common strategies to improve the quality and consistency of teaching.

There are strong links between the work of the professional learning communities, school improvement plans and the performance management of staff. This link between systems is effective. It supports the school in making strong progress towards achieving improvement goals whilst involving and developing all staff in the process.

Improved support and challenge from governors

As part of initial whole school self-evaluation, the governing body reviewed its work and renewed its sub-committee structure. This enabled governors to have more detailed information about specific aspects of the school's work and performance. Many governors attended relevant training courses to improve their skills. This included training to evaluate school performance data effectively. They began to attend professional learning community meetings and visit school regularly to consider standards of provision and pupil performance. This now enables them to contribute effectively to the self-evaluation process. Over time, they have become more honest and critical about the school's strengths and have a better understanding of its priorities for improvement. They ensure that agreed priorities match the findings of self-evaluation work robustly and that the resources are in place to achieve these, for example through the appointment of the key stage 2 'boost teachers'.

Examples of the strategic use of leadership tools

Performance management

At the time of the Estyn core inspection in 2010, the systems for the performance management of staff were extremely weak. Overall, staff had very limited opportunities to improve professionally. The headteacher needed to introduce stronger systems, which all staff understood.

The school's current arrangements for performance management are effective. They ensure that all staff are accountable for implementing whole school priorities in order

to improve outcomes for pupils. These arrangements also provide excellent opportunities for those in leadership positions to develop their leadership skills and to have a direct impact on improving teaching and learning. All staff understand the system well. They are confident that the school will provide them with relevant professional development opportunities to support them in reaching their agreed performance goals.

Lesson observations

There is now a consistent approach to lesson observation and all staff have a clear understanding of the criteria for observing and judging teaching and learning. Leaders focus robustly on ensuring teaching is of a high standard. Those who do not perform to the expected standard receive targeted support. For example, any teacher judged as adequate in any lesson receives specific advice on how to improve. A particularly good feature of the school's work is the arrangement for staff to observe each other teaching. This ensures meaningful opportunities to discuss teaching and learning to improve teachers' practice and raise standards, and makes a valuable contribution towards ensuring consistently good practice across the school in teaching and learning.

Working beyond the school and influencing other schools

Over the past two years, the school has supported another local primary school to improve its capacity to raise standards. This is having a positive effect on the professional practice of teachers and is improving the numeracy skills of pupils in both these schools. More recently, the school has extended this support to another two primary schools in Flintshire and Wrexham to develop practice in working with pupils who have different styles of learning.

Outcomes

- The school has effective self-evaluation and improvement planning procedures
- Leadership responsibilities are distributed effectively throughout the school with a positive effect on teaching and learning in all classes
- Arrangements to develop the school's leadership capacity are successful
- Arrangements for the performance management of all staff bring about real improvements in the standards that pupils achieve

Looking ahead

The school aims to:

- continue to adapt its vision to secure the best possible outcomes for all pupils
- continue to develop leaders to ensure high standards for pupils within and beyond the school
- respond swiftly and effectively to local and national priorities such as 'The New Deal' and 'Successful Futures'
- increase collaborative work with partners to continue to improve leadership, provision and outcomes for pupils at the school and in other local schools
- develop further the use of the pupil voice in setting the strategic direction for the school's work

Case study 4

Craig yr Hesg Primary School, Glyncoch, Pontypridd, Rhondda Cynon Taf

The effective federation of two schools

Context

Craig yr Hesg Primary School is in the village of Glyncoch, near Pontypridd in the Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. The school provides education for pupils between 3 and 11 years of age. There are currently 119 full-time pupils on roll. A further 24 pupils attend the nursery on a part-time basis. The number of pupils attending the school has risen steadily in recent years. Currently, 31% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is well above local and national averages. Nearly all pupils are English speaking and come from white British ethnic backgrounds. Forty-six per cent of pupils are on the additional learning needs register. This figure is well above local and national averages. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

In 2011, Estyn inspected Craig yr Hesg and judged that the school needed significant improvement. The headteacher and an experienced teacher did not return to the school after the inspection. The deputy headteacher, now the acting headteacher, faced immediate and considerable challenges. Within a few weeks of the inspection around half of teachers resigned. Many parents expressed serious concerns about standards and the school's provision. The governing body was relatively inactive and did not provide the school with an appropriate level of support or challenge.

Estyn revisited the school in May 2012 and judged that the school had made good progress in relation to the recommendations from the original inspection. As a result, the school was removed from significant improvement.

The school's improvement journey (Phase 1)

Strategy

The acting headteacher held the strong conviction that the school could respond successfully to Estyn's recommendations and that it needed to do so at pace. With support from the local authority, she identified quickly several key priorities:

- improving communication and levels of trust with parents
- raising teachers' skills and knowledge through a professional development programme focused on meeting the inspection recommendations
- developing a structured curriculum, which met statutory requirements and engaged the interests of all pupils
- securing the accuracy of teacher assessments
- establishing systematic monitoring processes to evaluate the school's progress and keep actions on track

Action

The acting headteacher began to re-build good relationships with parents immediately. She secured the active involvement of the chair of governors and arranged a meeting to facilitate an open and honest discussion about how to move the school forward. This was a well-attended meeting, which provided all stakeholders with a shared vision for the school's future direction. The acting headteacher followed this by operating an open-door policy, which enabled her to resolve parent concerns quickly and effectively. As a result, parents and the school began to work together towards common goals.

The school established strong partnerships within the local authority and acted upon the advice and support offered. The acting headteacher also secured quickly the involvement of the local secondary school in providing professional development for teachers. This improved teachers' subject knowledge and their ability to assess pupil progress in core subjects and areas of learning more accurately.

All staff contributed to the development of a curriculum designed to meet the needs and interests of pupils. They audited the existing curriculum to establish its range, skills and progression and identified gaps in curriculum coverage. The school rectified these shortcomings quickly. This also addressed parents' complaints that their children were repeating work already covered in earlier years.

All staff received training in teaching reading. An important feature of this training was that it built on the prior knowledge and understanding of staff. This was a guiding principle for all subsequent professional development at the school. Staff also received training in teacher assessment, which enabled them to provide pupils with more accurate and meaningful feedback about the next steps they needed to take to make further progress.

Leaders introduced opportunities for staff to plan and assess collaboratively. Previously, staff worked in isolation leading to inconsistencies in planning and a lack of progression and continuity in the development of pupils' skills. Teachers met regularly to moderate and standardise their assessments of pupils' work. This began to improve the accuracy of their assessments and encouraged team working amongst all staff.

Leaders introduced a more systematic and regular approach to monitoring standards of teaching and learning. They provided staff with the appropriate time to carry out monitoring tasks effectively and used a range of evidence including book scrutiny and lesson observations to assess standards.

Outcomes of Phase 1

- Most staff had a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the school's expectations for teaching and learning
- Staff began to take responsibility for self-evaluation and improvement planning activities; this work had a more sustained focus on raising standards of teaching, learning and wellbeing

- Parents began to work in partnership with the school to create a shared vision for improving pupil outcomes and wellbeing
- Governors had a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in supporting and challenging the school to improve
- The school no longer required significant improvement

However, at this early stage, the acting headteacher recognised the need to build capacity and leadership throughout the school in order to sustain future improvement. This was especially important in a small school where staffing changes could have potentially significant implications on standards of teaching.

The improvement journey (Phase 2)

Federation with another school

Federation is where between two and six schools share a single governing body. The schools remain open in their community and retain their own individuality, ethos and school budget. In 2012, the local authority began to discuss the possibility of formally federating Craig y Hesg with another local primary school. The acting headteacher recognised this as a good opportunity for building capacity. The school's staffing and leadership structure was unstable, which left the school vulnerable to the effects of future staff changes. Federation provided more opportunities for sharing good practice and collaboration between staff at all levels across the two schools. In 2014, the current executive headteacher took up his post. The existing acting headteacher and deputy headteacher from the two federated schools took on day-to-day responsibility for leadership and management in their respective settings. In effect, they became heads of school. This was very important as each of the original schools retained a familiar figurehead who was accessible to pupils, staff and parents at all times. It also meant that these leaders had valuable opportunities to build leadership experience.

Developing a shared vision

The executive headteacher shared his vision for improving teaching and learning at meetings for all staff from both schools. He understood the school's priorities needed a strong focus on:

- improving teaching and learning
- developing the curriculum
- improving pupils' skills and wellbeing to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers
- building leadership potential at all levels

Vision to reality

Professional development and training

Leaders provided highly effective professional development workshops with a strong focus on pedagogy. Training was relevant to the school priorities for improving teaching and learning and built upon the good practice that already existed within the school. This validated the knowledge, understanding and skills of staff and secured their commitment to continuous professional development.

All staff are now fully responsible for their own professional development and participate actively in the school's training programme, including all learning support assistants. This group of staff volunteer their time to attend weekly training workshops with teachers, developing a common understanding and approaches to pedagogy among all staff. The school uses high quality external providers to provide training, which further refines and builds upon this programme of professional development.

The professional development programme is flexible and responsive to changes in school priorities and the individual developmental needs of all staff as identified through a robust performance management process.

Coaching and mentoring

The school has successfully developed informal and formal structures for effective coaching and mentoring to take place. This has created a culture where professional dialogue is valued and based on a high level of pedagogical understanding. The executive headteacher secured funding in order to co-ordinate a successful network of professional development with a group of other schools. An external provider provided high quality training in coaching and mentoring with a focus on improving teaching and learning among six primary schools. This facilitated a high level of professional dialogue among teachers and further supported the school's drive to develop a reflective and articulate workforce. It also demonstrated that the school was beginning to think innovatively about improving its own work and influencing the improvement of other schools at the same time.

Leaders continuously challenge all staff through regular questioning to think critically and reflectively about their practice. This develops the ability of all staff to reflect on and justify their pedagogy in terms of the impact it has on pupils' standards and wellbeing. It also encourages the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning. For example, teachers improved the learning environment for pupils following a process of research, replication and peer-review. This included the introduction of learning walls and displays, which pupils design and interact with in order to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. These were changed regularly to ensure that they were relevant to the pupil's needs and abilities as they made progress.

Leaders provide confident role models for sharing effective teaching and learning strategies. They demonstrate good practice to staff through lesson observations or sharing video footage of their own lessons. This instils a culture of credibility and trust between leaders and staff.

The use of digital technology has proved particularly effective in facilitating coaching discussions among staff. Staff regularly video-record their own teaching to share with their colleagues across both schools. These recordings often form the basis for professional development workshops. The school has adapted its own continua for defining standards of teaching from adequate to good and from good to excellent. This supports a high level of professional dialogue about lesson observations and the quality of teaching and learning.

Staff have a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development, based on strong evidence. As a result, they identify suitably challenging targets for their pupils as well as for their own professional development. This ensures that the school's performance management processes support school improvement priorities effectively.

Building leadership capacity

Leaders apply the same principles and strategies for coaching and mentoring to developing leadership capacity across the federation. The executive headteacher provides strong and well-focused coaching to the heads of school. This has enabled the heads of school to appraise strengths and areas for professional development accurately. They have developed a range of skills and competencies, which enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities very effectively.

The school has provided leaders with high quality leadership training in coaching and mentoring. Leadership meetings are video recorded for leaders to analyse and reflect upon their skills and competencies. A leadership continuum has been adapted to provide leaders with a useful framework for evaluating their own performance. This has proved particularly effective in establishing consistency in leadership behaviours across both schools.

Leaders from both schools arrange regular structured 'swap-over-days'. These provide leaders with opportunities to work collaboratively and to moderate standards in each other's schools.

Leaders have implemented strong systems for monitoring and evaluating standards and pupil progress. They use a wide range of first-hand evidence to evaluate standards of learning and teaching. Middle leaders provide regular and timely feedback to senior leaders about their monitoring findings, before sharing these with staff. This is an effective joined-up school improvement process.

Summary of outcomes

- Strong leadership at all levels in both schools has created an aspirational leadership and highly motivated and engaged staff
- Senior leaders have developed a sustainable base of effective leaders at all levels
- All staff have a clear understanding of their roles, are responsible and accountable for their performance and understand the contribution they make to the school's vision
- Governors share a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and hold leaders to account

As a result, pupil standards in most subjects, areas of learning and aspects of wellbeing show a general trend of improvement since federation in both the Foundation Phase and key stage 2.

Next steps on the journey

The school now aims to:

- develop the understanding and skills of middle leaders in evaluating the impact of school improvement initiatives
- provide further opportunities for staff to take responsibility for leading initiatives and aspects of school improvement
- collaborate with staff from other schools to further develop and share good practice
- continue to improve pupils' skills in writing and numeracy
- provide opportunities for pupils who are more able to achieve the higher than expected level in literacy and numeracy

Case study 5

Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Y Friog, Gwynedd

Extending the school's leadership capacity through developing the skills of the governing body

Context

Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Y Friog is in the village of Y Friog in Gwynedd. There are 28 pupils on roll aged between 3 and 11 in two classes. In addition to the headteacher, who is in charge of a class for four days a week, there are two other part-time teachers.

Thirty-four per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is well above the national average of 20%. The school identifies that some pupils have additional learning needs, including a very few who have a statement of special educational needs. The school provides bilingual education. However, no pupils come from homes where Welsh is the first language.

The headteacher took up her post in September 2011.

In October 2013, the school's inspection by Estyn placed it in the category of significant improvement. At the time, standards were unsatisfactory. The inspection team made seven recommendations, which required the school to improve:

- Standards in literacy, numeracy and ICT
- The quality of teaching and assessment and levels of challenge for more able pupils
- Leadership and management, self-evaluation and the skills of the governing body

In December 2014, Estyn inspectors visited the school to monitor progress. The team judged that the school had made very good progress in relation to the seven recommendations in the original inspection report and removed it from further follow-up activity.

The school staff worked diligently under the effective leadership of the headteacher to secure immediate improvements in provision for pupils. They started to make effective use of assessment information in a consistent way, for example to enable them to plan effectively to meet the needs of most learners. This began to help most pupils to make good progress, particularly in developing and applying their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. As a result, pupil outcomes improved in lessons and over time as they moved through the school. The school's staff instigated much of this this improvement. However, they also received valuable support and challenge from the governing body.

The central role of the governing body in a small school's improvement journey

One of the recommendations from the original inspection by Estyn was to 'strengthen the governing body's role as a critical friend'. The governors embraced this challenge and used the recommendation as a stimulus to ensure that the school made very good progress against all of the other recommendations.

The governing body had existed with a small number of members for many years, with a few governors contributing to school life by volunteering. Traditionally, the governing body felt comfortable discussing non-strategic issues and lacked confidence in contributing to conversations about standards and provision.

Over the past three years, governors have worked hard to improve their skills and understanding of pupil outcomes and the quality of provision. This has enabled them to take a more active role in the self-evaluation process. This in turn, has allowed the governing body to develop their role as a critical friend and to contribute effectively to the school's strategic direction.

Strategy

The school needed to improve governors' skills rapidly to ensure that they had the confidence and capability to contribute to self-evaluation and the school's strategic direction. Support and challenge from the governing body were particularly important to help a school with such a small number of staff to make progress against all seven recommendations in a relatively short time. Developing the role of governors would strengthen the school's capacity to improve effectively by increasing overall leadership capacity in close collaboration with the headteacher.

Action

The school worked with governors to identify their strengths based on their existing skills, interests and knowledge. Using this information, the school allocated an area of responsibility to each governor. At all times, the headteacher and governors ensured that these responsibilities related to improving standards and provision within the school, in line with the recommendations.

The headteacher, staff and the school's challenge adviser worked closely with the governors, for example to train them on how to analyse performance data successfully. Nearly all governors received training to enable them to scrutinise

pupils' work effectively and to make accurate judgments on the quality of work. This was important in helping governors to identify strengths and shortcomings in relation to their designated areas of responsibility.

Governors took responsibility for the relevant sections of the post-inspection action plan, which formed the new school development plan. The headteacher and governors established a calendar of monitoring activity to ensure that they evaluated agreed aspects of the school's work on a regular basis. All governors visited the school to take part in a group monitoring and evaluation activity at least once a term. They met regularly with the headteacher and staff to discuss the school's progress. Monitoring and evaluation activities included lesson observations, learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' work, analysis of data and discussions with pupils. The school developed a template for governor monitoring to ensure a clear focus for all monitoring activity. This included a specific protocol for governor visits to ensure that they worked in close collaboration with staff to evaluate standards.

Success criteria for governors' visits and monitoring activities linked directly to the post-inspection action plan. Following each focused activity, governors met with subject co-ordinators and the headteacher. They reported their findings and agreed priorities for further improvement.

As a result of these activities, governors developed a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, allowing them to contribute considerably to the school's overall leadership capacity. During full governing body meetings, members have the confidence to make valuable contributions and ask challenging questions linked to their area of responsibility. The process of establishing and working to a set calendar of monitoring, evaluation and review is now embedded practice at the school. This guides the governors' work effectively.

The headteacher presents reports to the governing body in sections linked to the three key questions of the inspection framework. Many governors make valuable contributions to all three key questions, using their area of responsibility and improved skills as a sound source of evidence to set future priorities for improvement.

Outcomes

The school has improved significantly since Estyn's core inspection in 2013. Estyn conducted a follow-up visited in 2014 and the monitoring report noted the following:

- Writing across the activities of the Foundation Phase in Welsh is of a high standard and shows obvious progress over a short period. In key stage 2, the curriculum includes valuable opportunities for developing literacy skills. As a result, work in pupils' books shows sound progress.
- At the end of the Foundation Phase, most pupils use their numeracy skills successfully across areas of learning. In key stage 2, most pupils apply their numeracy skills successfully across a range of curriculum subjects.
- Most pupils' standard of work in information and communication technology across the school is very good.

- The school provides a wide range of interesting and stimulating experiences that meet the needs of almost all pupils successfully.
- The school's procedures for assessment, reporting and recording are effective and teachers are now more aware of pupils' needs.
- Under the firm leadership of the headteacher, the school's strategic leadership and management are good.
- The school self-evaluation document is a comprehensive and evaluative document that gives a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school makes good use of a wide range of sources of evidence. This includes direct evidence, along with detailed analyses of performance data.
- Teachers and governors observe lessons, scrutinise books regularly and produce comprehensive reports of the findings. These reports are evaluative and pay increasing attention to specific aspects. This provides useful information for identifying priorities for improvement. Leaders share the outcomes of monitoring activity in staff and governors' meetings regularly.

Case study 6

Tonnau Community Primary School, Neath Port Talbot

The journey to becoming a more outward looking school through creating a culture of improvement and raised expectations

Context

Tonnau Primary Community School is on the outskirts of Neath in Neath Port Talbot. Around 13% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is below the national average for Wales of 20%.

There are currently 157 pupils on roll aged 3 to 11 years, including 24 part-time nursery pupils. There are five mixed-age classes in addition to the nursery.

Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and come from homes where English is the main or only language. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language. The school identifies approximately 16% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is below the national average for Wales. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs or are currently looked after by the local authority.

An Estyn inspection in March 2012 placed the school in the significant improvement category. In June 2013, a team of Estyn inspectors visited the school to evaluate progress and removed the school from the statutory category, due to good progress in meeting the recommendations from the 2012 core inspection report.

The current headteacher took up his post in 2007.

The school's improvement journey

Strategic aims

The school had worked in isolation for a long time and the 2012 Estyn inspection outcomes were a shock. In order to improve, the headteacher focused rigorously on

raising standards of pupils' performance. Leaders needed to act quickly to establish a sense of clarity so that all staff understood their roles and responsibilities in improving pupil progress. Furthermore, it was essential for leaders to keep the school's work under review more effectively to ensure that all staff raised their expectations of what pupils could achieve. The headteacher realised that there was a need for wider leadership to involve more staff in leading activities to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. To achieve this, all staff needed to broaden their experience of good practice by working with professionals in other schools and with the local authority.

Actions

Establishing a whole school culture with a focus on raising standards and pupil performance

The outcome of the Estyn inspection of March 2012 brought school staff together with a common desire to improve outcomes for pupils. Direct leadership supported whole staff discussions to re-establish a clear vision and purpose. Staff worked closely with the local authority to evaluate and amend schemes of work to improve pupil engagement. Leaders used the common inspection framework to refresh and improve teachers' understanding of the characteristics of effective teaching. The headteacher and deputy headteacher led meetings that reinforced with all staff the need to use an analysis of pupil outcome data to inform improved classroom practice.

In addition to these starting points, the school took action to:

- establish effective day-to-day routines and systems
- put in place essential leadership systems that focused clearly on improving teaching, learning and pupil wellbeing
- identify key individuals to support improvement and establish a leadership culture of high expectations
- prioritise and implement improvement initiatives successfully across the school

With help from the local authority, the school revisited all schemes of work to ensure that they supported progression and showed a clear link to areas of learning outcomes and subject level descriptors. Leaders reviewed teachers' lesson planning to confirm that it supported and challenged pupils of all abilities effectively. Reports to governors focused on a more detailed analysis of pupil outcomes and governors began to understand the school's arrangements for tracking pupil progress. This improved their understanding of performance data. With effective support from the local authority, the governing body became more confident to challenge the headteacher in relation to the standards that pupils achieved.

All the above played a key role in successfully establishing and delivering the post inspection action plan from 2012 to 2013.

Effective use of pupil data

It was important to maintain a clear link between data and provision. Meetings emphasised to all staff the outcomes of data analysis and the implications it had for

teaching and learning. Data informed provision mapping, which helped to clarify expectations for pupils and the level of challenge and support they would need within the classroom. Lesson observations focused clearly on the link between data and teachers' planning. This evaluation of data, commitment to pupil progress and a better awareness of good quality teaching informed performance management targets. This link helped all staff to work more effectively and efficiently to support improved pupil standards within their classrooms.

Staff began to work collaboratively. For example, joint analysis of data enabled staff to identify priorities for improvement, which informed provision maps. These maps identified clearly the different performance levels of all pupils and enabled staff to match teaching and learning experiences to these levels successfully. This meant that staff improved their professional skills and contributed more effectively to the strategic direction of the school. As staff skills improved, peer lesson observation and book review became standard practice. This process enabled to staff to analyse the quality of teaching and learning by looking at the work in pupils' books, for example by identifying whether individual pupils were making progress in relation to their learning goals. As a result of this process, the school identified that differentiation and challenge for more able pupils were an improving area. A culture of sharing and support is now fundamental to the school's practice.

All staff now have a better understanding of their responsibility for pupil progress. Peer lesson observations and book scrutiny reinforce the link between first-hand evidence and the quality of provision. This is leading to an increasingly secure cycle of assessment and reflection, which influences practice, improvement planning, performance management and professional development. The developing role of the governing body is a vital part of the process, through improved levels of challenge and support.

After Estyn removed the school from significant improvement in 2013, it was vital to sustain and build on the culture of improvement. Key staff led important initiatives and all staff understood their roles and responsibilities within the school's commitment to accelerated pupil progress. Peer lesson observations and book scrutiny supported and ensured progression and an increasing degree of challenge within lessons for all pupils. This further developed staff capacity to evaluate the professional practice of others against consistent criteria.

Becoming an outward looking school

Leaders began to work effectively with external partners, such as the regional consortium, to improve the quality of the school's work. These partnerships enabled the school to:

- improve the effectiveness of vital self-evaluation activities such as lesson observation and the scrutiny of pupils' work
- improve provision for literacy and numeracy across all areas of learning to raise pupil standards
- improve arrangements for teacher assessment

The school has established an expectation that staff work in collaboration with other schools to raise standards. This is evident in the school's development plan. Staff now work with other schools regularly with positive outcomes. Recent examples include the literacy co-ordinator working with a group of local schools to improve provision for extended writing and the numeracy co-ordinator supporting another local school to raise standards in mathematics at key stage 2.

Outcomes

- Most pupils in the Foundation Phase and in key stage 2 make good progress from their individual starting points and achieve at least the levels expected for pupils of their age
- Trends of performance show consistently good performance at the expected levels and outcomes at the end of the Foundation Phase and key stage 2 in most areas of learning.
- The school has effective day-to-day routines and systems that support successful teaching and learning
- The school has an effective leadership structure and arrangements to develop leaders; these support consistently good performance
- The school has been able to prioritise and implement improvement initiatives successfully for the benefit of all pupils
- The school collaborates effectively with other schools to improve outcomes for pupils

These outcomes show the strides that the school has made over the last three years, but senior leaders know that the school must continue with its improvement journey. Leaders have the support of the staff and the governing body to ensure that this continues.

Section 2: Making progress

Case study 7

Deri View Primary School, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire

Context

Deri View Primary School is a community primary school, for pupils aged 3 to 11 years old, in Abergavenny in Monmouthshire. The school has a large catchment area, which takes in the wider area of Abergavenny town and the local housing estates.

The school provides full-time education for 260 pupils and a further 68 attend the nursery on a part-time basis. The school has a specialist resource for pupils with moderate special educational needs, which is open to pupils from across the local authority. There is an integrated children's centre attached to the school, which the local authority manages.

Forty per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is well above the national and local authority averages. The school identifies about 21% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is slightly below the national average. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Nearly all pupils are from homes where English is the main language.

The headteacher took up her post in September 2012. The school was inspected by Estyn in January 2013 and judged to be in need of Estyn monitoring. At the time of the inspection the school had a significant budget deficit of over £171,000 and the headteacher was working tirelessly to agree a budget recovery plan with the local authority in order to bring the school back to a sound financial position. The school was also heavily over staffed, with 72 staff employed to meet the needs of 300 pupils.

Estyn inspectors revisited the school in March 2014 and judged that the school had made good progress against the recommendations of the January 2013 inspection and removed it from Estyn monitoring.

Improvement strategy

Phase 1

On appointment, the headteacher personally undertook a wide range of self-evaluation activities. As a result, the self-evaluation report produced for the inspection was accurate in nearly every respect and identified clearly the areas that the school needed to improve.

The headteacher's initial key areas of focus were:

- improving the leadership skills of senior leaders, including putting in place a rigorous system for performance management
- improving the quality of teaching and the use of assessment
- raising standards in English and mathematics
- reducing the budget deficit

Action

Despite the very challenging budget situation, the headteacher set about improving standards immediately. She was not willing to compromise the quality of education provided for pupils. The headteacher focused in the first instance on building capacity in the senior leadership team. Using an external leadership consultant, she put in place a development programme to improve the senior leadership team's skills in holding themselves, and the staff they line managed, to account for pupils' standards and the quality of teaching. As part of this programme, these staff developed their mentoring and coaching skills, and their ability to manage the performance of other staff.

The headteacher used an additional external consultant to improve the leadership team's skills in carrying out self-evaluation activities. This consultant worked with the team on how to evaluate standards and teaching. The consultant introduced a 'teaching continuum', which enabled a more consistent approach to giving feedback after lesson observations. The continuum also provided a framework for all staff when they talked about teaching and learning and how to bring about the required improvements in the classroom.

Alongside the use of consultants, the headteacher introduced a rigorous calendar of self-evaluation activities linked to the school's improvement priorities. In the first few months, all self-evaluation activities were carried out jointly by the headteacher and a member of her leadership team. The rationale for this joint approach was that the headteacher wanted to ensure consistent judgements and ensure that all of her team had the same high expectations that she held.

The headteacher also strengthened performance management procedures and delegated performance management responsibilities equitably across the senior leadership team. She ensured that all staff targets linked closely to improvement priorities and that all staff were aware of their accountability for the standards achieved by their pupils.

In the first year, the headteacher worked closely with the numeracy team from the regional consortium to develop a programme of intensive support for staff. The numeracy team worked in school regularly with staff to develop their understanding of how best to develop pupils' mathematical skills. The ongoing nature of the training programme encouraged good relationships between staff and the numeracy team and also meant that teachers had a point of contact if they needed additional support.

This model of in-house, intensive support was replicated when upskilling staff to improve their teaching of reading and writing. The headteacher secured the services of an external consultant to work with staff to develop a consistent approach to planning, teaching and developing pupils' literacy skills. The headteacher also developed the skills of learning support assistants to enable them to deliver literacy catch-up programmes as many pupils were not achieving well enough, due to gaps in their literacy skills and knowledge.

The headteacher made the governing body and local authority aware of the seriousness of the deficit budget situation and the need to bring the school back to a

sound financial footing. She worked with the local authority on a budget recovery plan and also ensured that the school stopped paying the costs for the integrated children's centre, which was the local authority's responsibility. As the school was highly over-staffed, the headteacher had to make hard decisions and, as a result, 24 staff in unnecessary learning support positions left the school at the end of the headteacher's first year in charge.

Phase 2

Over the past 18 months, many of the senior leadership team that the headteacher worked with initially have secured promotions in other schools. As a result, the headteacher has needed to continue to develop the leadership skills of all staff to ensure that the school continues on its improvement journey. Since September 2015, the senior leadership structure involves the headteacher, an acting deputy headteacher (seconded from another school), a Foundation Phase leader, a teacher in charge of a specialist learning resource base and a leader for additional learning needs. The senior leadership team is now supported by four teaching and learning responsibility post holders. These middle leaders are responsible for important aspects of the school's work, such as ensuring high quality provision and standards for numeracy, more able learners and thinking skills.

Actions

In order to support the development of middle leaders, the headteacher provided shadowing opportunities so they could learn from other practitioners before taking up their additional teaching and learning responsibilities. These opportunities extended beyond the school as a result of the headteacher undertaking a temporary executive headship, which involved her supporting two other schools within the local authority. Although the temporary leadership arrangements have ended, staff from the three schools continue to learn from each other through peer mentoring, peer reviews and moderation exercises.

The headteacher has secured many additional professional development opportunities for the team of middle leaders, including personally coaching and mentoring them to improve their evaluation skills. She has also worked with a lead practitioner from the regional consortium to construct a two-year professional development programme, which has core modules for all middle leaders and stand-alone elements that link to individual responsibilities and job descriptions. The headteacher has also facilitated and financed, through the performance management procedures, opportunities for staff to study at post-graduate level.

A priority for the headteacher, and senior and middle leaders, was to ensure that all professional development opportunities were communicated effectively at whole school level and followed-up consistently. Prior to the headteacher's appointment, middle leaders reported that training did not impact and that nothing happened after a training event. They also felt that most of the knowledge was held by a very few people at the top of the school and that there was very little sharing of information.

The leadership team put in place an effective communication system. The headteacher purchased laptops for all teachers and higher-level teaching assistants

to ensure their access to an internal email system, a weekly diary and a long-term electronic calendar of events. The electronic system also allows staff to share planning, self-evaluation outcomes and other relevant information. The electronic system is supported by a staff notice board and regular bulletins so that all staff have access to key information and dates.

All senior and middle leaders routinely carry out effective self-evaluation activities. A tight schedule of learning walks, book monitoring, listening to learners and planning evaluations is in place and all staff share the outcomes of this work at a team and whole school level. The school has also put in place a timetable for learning reviews and upskilled the whole staff on monitoring pupil progress, the use of data and setting targets at an individual, group and cohort level. The format the school uses to share the learning review outcomes contains a useful section called, 'Who needs to know?' Senior leaders use this information well to track pupil progress and put in place the support necessary to help pupils improve.

As well as focusing on improving standards in English and mathematics, the headteacher has facilitated the widening of the curriculum on offer to pupils. A member of the middle leadership team has trained as a 'philosophy for children' accredited trainer and she has developed other staff's knowledge of how to deliver philosophy sessions. The school has also invested heavily in improving staff's knowledge of digital technology and digital resources. This knowledge has been used to good effect to produce a 'Deri View Literacy Toolkit', which supports staff to deliver exciting literacy sessions using multimedia, books, philosophy and drama as stimuli.

Outcomes

- In 2015, 87% of Year 6 pupils achieved the expected level in English, a 12 percentage point increase from 2012, and 85% of pupils achieved the expected level or above in mathematics, a 12 percentage point increase from 2012
- Pupils' ability to think for themselves and work independently has improved through the whole school approach to developing literacy through philosophy, multimedia and drama
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and rates of attendance are consistently good
- The school has a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills
- Teachers reflect well on their teaching and assessment strategies using the agreed teaching continuum as a basis for improvement
- There is an appropriate system for assessing and monitoring pupil progress and effective systems to use this information to support under achieving pupils
- The school is led by a team of professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge to bring about improvements
- Information and development opportunities are communicated and shared well across the school
- At the end of the 2014-2015 financial year, the school recorded a budget surplus of £22,000
- The school is now appropriately staffed for the number of pupils on roll

Case study 8

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Rhosafan, Neath Port Talbot

Involving parents in raising standards

Context

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Rhosafan is a Welsh medium school in Aberafan, near Port Talbot. There are 365 pupils on roll, including 60 part-time nursery children. Around 19% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is slightly lower than the national average of 20%. Seventy-nine per cent of pupils come from homes where English is the main language. Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity. The school identifies around 20% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is below the national average. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

The Estyn inspection of June 2013 placed the school in Estyn monitoring. Estyn removed the school from this category in September 2014 after it made good progress in meeting the inspection recommendations.

The headteacher took up her post in January 2009.

The school's improvement journey

Strategic objectives

The main factors contributing to improving standards at the school are:

- a refining and strengthening of self-evaluation procedures to include all members of staff, pupils and parents
- improved accountability by systematically ensuring that all pupils are challenged and provided with opportunities to reach their potential
- introducing and embedding peer lesson observations
- involving parents in the scrutiny of pupils' work

There were many self-evaluation processes already in place before the Estyn inspection in June 2013. However, these were not rigorous enough to identify correctly strengths and areas in need of improvement. Following the Estyn inspection, the headteacher, the senior leadership team, staff and governors were very keen to move quickly to respond to the recommendations and improve the school's performance.

Actions

Strengthened self-evaluation processes

In the summer term of 2013, the school introduced whole-school in-service training for all staff. They work collaboratively to evaluate pupil performance data and to evaluate the impact of the current school improvement plan. Using this information,

staff decide on priorities for the following academic year. Governors have opportunities to discuss the school's performance data and to evaluate jointly the outcomes of the school improvement plan with leaders. Senior leaders use this information effectively to produce a self-evaluation report and a resulting development plan. This ensures that all staff have ownership of the process and a clear understanding of current successes and future priorities.

Teaching staff analyse their new pupils' data in September from the school's electronic system and evaluate their progress during the year in the following summer term. They are responsible for writing a progress report for the headteacher twice a year and, from that analysis, they create a class overview of performance and set realistic targets for each pupil. They also make effective use of this system in order to plan lessons to meet the needs of all pupils and to plan intervention programmes for targeted individuals or groups. Throughout the year, there are ongoing professional conversations with the headteacher to monitor and evaluate progress towards meeting the agreed targets. As a result, staff are much more accountable for the standards their pupils achieve.

Scrutinising books and including parents in the process

Prior to Estyn's core inspection, although the senior management team scrutinised pupils' books, the process was not sufficiently rigorous. In order to address the inspection recommendations and, more importantly, to raise standards for all pupils, leaders involved all staff in this process.

All members of the teaching staff now regularly scrutinise books. For example, they bring books to staff meetings and evaluate them against an agreed focus. Teachers have a discussion with the headteacher following this meeting and receive written feedback. This ensures that teachers have an improved understanding of how to meet the needs of all pupils effectively as they have identified specific aspects of their own practice or within pupils' learning to improve.

Previously, parents received regular updates on their children's progress through traditional parents' evenings three times each year. However, the school identified that parents did not have enough opportunities to see their children's work and they decided to improve systems so that parents became partners in their children's education.

The school developed the innovative idea of inviting parents to the school during the day to scrutinise their children's work alongside the class teacher to identify specific strengths and areas for improvement. This enabled parents to begin to play an active role in improving the achievement and attainment of their children by jointly setting agreed targets for improvement. The school manages this process carefully so that it is not overly time consuming.

Around 60% of parents attended the first session and feedback was constructive. One hundred per cent of those who attended agreed that the session was beneficial and should continue on a twice-yearly basis.

Since September 2014, most parents have attended these sessions twice a year, in November and May. This arrangement has a positive effect on the partnership between parents and the school, and supports improvements in pupil progress effectively. Pupils take an increasing pride in their work and achievements. The targets set by parents and teachers are included in pupils' books. Pupils are very aware of these targets and discuss their progress knowledgably in relation to these. Parents also measure their child's progress more effectively when evaluating targets with the school and their children. This is now an established starting point to the discussion in parents' meetings.

The school has shared this approach with other schools who comment positively about the effectiveness of this strategy on raising attainment and improving partnership working.

Lesson observations

Before the inspection, the school monitored lessons formally. However, these observations had insufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Following Estyn's core inspection, the headteacher arranged training for staff on the features of good and excellent lessons. This ensured that all staff had a clear and consistent understanding of best practice. The staff filmed themselves teaching and evaluated their own practice. Following this, the headteacher discussed the way forward with each teacher to bring about improvements in the quality of their performance. This has been effective in improving the overall quality and consistency of teaching.

Further recent refinements to the system allow teachers to work in groups of three, led by a member of the senior management team. These groups, comprising staff from both key stages, use agreed success criteria to monitor and evaluate lessons. This process has ensured that senior leaders develop valuable leadership skills and contribute effectively to school improvement. The improved professional dialogue, as a result of this team-working, has further improved the quality of teaching and ensures that all teachers are accountable to each other. Due to the effectiveness of this approach, senior leaders introduced a similar system of group working for teaching assistants to bring improved consistency and quality to their work.

These processes now form a natural part of the school's work. They feed into the formal performance management system with agreed targets, linked to the school improvement plan to improve pupil performance. The process also allows all members of staff valuable opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Outcomes

- The school's self-evaluation procedures are effective and include all members of staff, pupils and parents
- There are effective arrangements for peer lesson observations
- The school has strong and purposeful partnerships with parents

- Performance in end of key stage teacher assessments has improved in recent years especially in the Foundation Phase
- In end of Foundation Phase teacher assessments, the school's performance in literacy and mathematical development compares favourably with that of other similar schools at both the expected and higher outcomes in each of the last two years
- In end of key stage 2 teacher assessments, the performance at the higher level has seen a general upward trend for all core subjects
- The focus on improving writing has seen an improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 writing in teacher assessments at the end of key stage 2 in both languages
- Pupil attendance shows an upward trend with a significant decrease in the percentage of persistent absence
- Teaching has improved throughout the school and recent monitoring assesses 100% of teaching as good with aspects of excellent practice

An Estyn monitoring visit in September 2014 corroborated these outcomes. The monitoring report states that:

'Leaders have established regular arrangements for monitoring lessons…They analyse this data appropriately and have started to use these results in order to improve underperformance in the short term.

'There is an appropriate focus placed on pupils' standards as an integral part of monitoring lessons. As a result, there is better consistency in the challenge that teachers provide for more able pupils, that has led to an improvement in the percentage of pupils that achieved the higher levels at the end of key stage 2 in 2014.'

Case study 9

Tavernspite and Templeton Schools, Pembrokeshire

Sharing effective leadership results in improved standards and provision

Context

Tavernspite Community Primary School is in the village of Tavernspite in Pembrokeshire. It serves a large rural catchment area. There were around 209 pupils aged 3 to 11 years in the school in January 2015.

Approximately six per cent of pupils are eligible to free school meals, which is well below the national average. The school identifies around 20% of pupils as having additional learning needs, including a very few pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language and no pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up his post in 2007 and the school's last Estyn inspection took place in 2012. Estyn judged that standards were good. Pupils' wellbeing, the school's care support and guidance for pupils, the learning environment and partnership working were rated as excellent.

Templeton Primary School is a community primary school in the rural village of Templeton in Pembrokeshire. There were 69 pupils on roll in January 2015, between the age of 4 and 11, in three mixed-age classes.

The school identifies around 14.5% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is below the national average. About 5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the Welsh average. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and all come from homes where English is the predominant language. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

The school's last Estyn inspection was in 2009. The outcomes of inspection were positive. The long-standing headteacher of Templeton School retired in the summer of 2014.

The two schools are four miles apart. Originally, both schools had around 130 pupils on roll and were similar in character. However, the two schools have differed considerably in recent years. In Tavernspite School, pupil numbers have increased to around 209. Templeton's roll has declined to approximately 69 pupils and in December 2013, the regional consortium categorised it as a 'school needing to improve aspects of provision and leadership'.

When the headteacher at Templeton School retired in July 2014, the local authority considered a number of options including possible closure. Following several meetings with parents, governors, staff and children, the governing bodies of the two schools agreed to work together in an informal collaborative arrangement for 12 months until the local authority agreed a more permanent solution.

Tavernspite and Templeton Primary Schools established collaborative working in September 2014. The headteacher at Tavernspite became the executive headteacher, overseeing both schools. The local authority is in the process of formalising this arrangement.

Starting the improvement journey

The decision to approve the collaboration of the two schools unsettled many parents at Tavernspite, as the benefits of the proposal to their children's education were unclear. Overall, parents and staff agreed that whilst it was right to support a neighbouring school, they did not want any arrangement to impact negatively on the quality of education provided for pupils at Tavernspite.

All stakeholders at Templeton wanted their school to continue to provide education for local children and to act as a hub for the community as it had done for over a hundred years. Without the collaboration, it was possible that Templeton School would have to close.

Leaders established a parents' forum, involving parents from both schools. This group met each half term to monitor the success of the federation. This was important as it captured parents' view clearly. Leaders shared information from these meetings in regular and detailed newsletters.

The forum provided useful opportunities for parents to voice their thoughts and was an effective way of gaining parents' trust. After the first two meetings, all parents felt that the school's leadership team, and everyone else involved, had managed to make a measurable improvement at Templeton School whilst continuing to secure school improvements at Tavernspite. This reassured parents at Tavernspite and they were then happy to support the collaboration. To date, nearly all parents appear pleased with the success of the collaboration, as evidenced through parent questionnaires sent out by the school.

Strategic aims

Leadership structure for the collaboration

The executive headteacher developed a joint leadership plan for both schools. A key part of this strategy was the development of a leadership structure that would provide a suitable range and balance of skills and expertise to address the new challenge.

Prior to the collaboration, the leadership team assessed that one of the greatest threats to the long-term viability of Templeton School was budgetary pressure. The number of pupils attending the school had fallen steadily over the previous decade, with a notable effect on the budget and the investment in teaching and learning resources at the site.

The leadership model designed by the executive headteacher sought to utilise the skills of the leaders at Tavernspite effectively, recognising that this model would bring greater success than simply splitting his time alone, over the two sites. The model also offered valuable professional development opportunities to all members of the leadership team and to the wider staff as a whole.

A key objective was to create a structure that allowed for the best use of individuals' skills and experiences to assist with the transformational change in Templeton, without compromising the standards at Tavernspite School. The executive headteacher and governing body updated all leaders' job descriptions to reflect the new structure. Allied to this, they focused the performance management objectives of the team on developing and sharing leadership skills, knowledge and values in line with the professional leadership standards.

The executive headteacher from Tavernspite School became accountable for both sites, through overseeing the organisation and running of both schools. He based himself at Templeton for one day a week. He consulted and worked closely with both governing bodies and all stakeholders throughout the change process to set the strategic direction and vision for both schools.

The deputy headteacher, who was the Foundation Phase lead practitioner from Tavernspite School, supported the executive headteacher at both sites with managerial and operational activities. She also based herself at Templeton for one day a week. Her responsibilities included overseeing the work of the Foundation Phase in both schools. Her objective was to work to support the executive headteacher with transformational change at Templeton, as well as to coach, mentor and support the Foundation Phase staff to improve provision and standards.

The key stage 2 leader from Tavernspite School supported the executive headteacher at both sites. He too based himself at Templeton for one day a week during the first year, increasing to a day and a half in the second. His responsibilities included co-ordinating key stage 2 at both sites, and teaching a Year 6 class at Tavernspite. His objective was to support the headteacher to bring about changes at Templeton, as well as coach, mentor, and support the key stage 2 staff to improve provision and standards.

A 'base leader' from Templeton School supported the executive headteacher at the Templeton site with managerial and operational activities. She had worked at Templeton as the Foundation Phase teacher for a number of years and was familiar with the school's processes, community links, culture and context. She was to be a senior manager at the Templeton site and maintain regular contact with the leadership team members.

Starting the federation

One of the initial challenges at the start of the collaboration was to carry out an audit of standards and provision at Templeton School. This involved leaders undertaking an in-depth evaluation to identify strengths and weaknesses. This included analysing pupils' performance data, observations of teaching, scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning, and a thorough examination of the learning environment. Leaders then developed a strategic plan that reflected their findings to move the school forward. Regular strategic consultation by the leadership team, reflecting upon data and other sources of evidence, assisted with ensuring continual purposeful progress.

Once a plan was established, the goal was to implement change at Templeton whilst maintaining the standards at Tavernspite School. The executive headteacher shared his vision with staff, governors and parents by hosting a number of presentation evenings and meetings at both schools to answer the questions of parents and other stakeholders.

From the outset, the leadership team invested significant time and effort revitalising Templeton School and its staff, to create a balance between the old and the new. They organised volunteers to help paint and reorganise the school building, reconfiguring workspaces to be more efficient and giving the strong overall impression that the school was making a new start. Leaders placed a major focus on re-energising the school's culture and winning over the 'hearts and minds' of pupils, staff, governors and the community. The leadership team recognised that they did not want to erase the traditional identity of Templeton School, but they aimed to start a new chapter in its history.

The executive headteacher established new and effective routines and rules. These focused on developing a positive behaviour culture in which staff and pupils shared mutual respect, and through which pupils could take pride in their school. This ethos created a calm, quiet, school where purposeful learning could take place. The headteacher introduced a system of golden rules and an achievement assembly to celebrate pupil success. Within the classrooms, all staff shared the same expectations for appropriate behaviour, ensuring a consistent approach. These changes created a positive and successful learning culture and a happy place for staff, pupils and visitors.

The staff at Templeton School embraced the changes and new structures. Many of the new systems introduced had a strong record of success at Tavernspite School. These changes included:

- improving curriculum planning and assessment processes
- strategies to create a positive learning culture and orderly environment through implementing consistent procedures for managing behaviour
- developing a strong pupil voice
- strengthening the school's community focus

On the first day of the collaboration, the executive headteacher shared his expectations with staff, which outlined clearly what was required in terms of school culture, relationships within the school community and the quality of teaching and learning. His expectation was that everyone would give of their best, to bring about change and move the school forward. He shared models of excellence with staff and pupils, to make it clear what he expected of them at all times.

The leadership team worked hard with the staff to foster values and approaches to bring about positive change through an ethos of high expectation. Leaders established consistent routines, and fostered a calm and productive culture in Templeton.

School leaders and staff recognised that performance management processes at Templeton School were not strong. They introduced more consistent and robust procedures, and brought targets for staff development in line with school priorities and the national standards. Focused lesson observations supported this process, which resulted in improved standards of teaching and learning, as evidenced by outcomes and the quality of pupils' work in books.

At the heart of the change process, leaders built high quality professional relationships, as a catalyst for successful change. They recognised that supporting people in a sensitive manner to evolve their practice takes time, patience and trust. As a result, through coaching, mentoring and professional development, staff began to improve their skills.

Leaders ensured that the school councils were fully involved in the change process. The school councils visited one another's schools to strengthen the partnership between them and began to work closely together. Tavernspite pupils wanted to help Templeton School at a time of need and the Templeton pupils talked excitedly about their 'new school'. The pupils from both school communities worked well together on a range of projects and visits, for example visits to the county council chambers, Skomer Island and Gwersyll yr Urdd, Caerdydd. These were activities that pupils in Templeton had not had previously and supported the curriculum in both schools effectively.

Throughout the year, leaders held a range of events to allow parents and pupils to engage with the revitalised Templeton school. They introduced opportunities for the pupils to share their learning and to perform for their families. They added sports clubs and events to the school's calendar and improved opportunities for the pupils to engage in additional transition activities. This allowed parents and the local community to develop vital links with the school and assisted in shaping a positive perception of the new federation.

Teaching and learning

A major focus for the leadership team was to support the development of teaching and learning at Templeton School. The staff at Templeton were enthusiastic and eager to engage with the new leadership. The deputy headteacher and key stage 2 leader from Tavernspite School provided weekly support and feedback sessions for the staff to help them to improve. These included regular discussions of lessons, pupils' work scrutiny, and opportunities to watch other teachers in action and to share planning that promoted consistency. These weekly sessions, developed in a climate based on mutual respect, openness and trust, promoted the positive tide of change over time.

Following on from these practices, leaders ensured the sharing of models of excellence for lesson delivery and the quality of work in pupils' books. In this way, staff and pupils knew exactly what the expectations were and they had concrete goals to work towards in order to improve. It also allowed leaders to create bespoke plans for individual teachers to continue their journeys of improvement. This had a significant impact on improving standards and provision at the school over time.

Outcomes of the collaborative arrangements for Templeton School

- Attendance rose steadily, moving the school from the bottom 25% of similar schools in 2013 to the higher 50% in 2015
- Standards of pupil attainment, provision and leadership have risen notably in a very short amount of time; the number of pupils on roll has increased from 66 in September 2014 to 90 in January 2016 as a result of the improvement in the school's reputation in the local community and beyond
- Templeton School now has the highest rating for pupil participation and safeguarding in the local authority safeguarding health check
- Coverage of the curriculum is consistent with a notable increase in the volume and quality of pupils' work, as evidenced through self-evaluation activities
- Templeton School has experienced significant investment in much needed ICT equipment for staff and pupils, with laptops and smart boards in every classroom

Outcomes of the collaborative arrangements for Tavernspite School

- Senior staff have enhanced leadership and management responsibilities, which have benefited them in their role as leaders at Tavernspite School
- Other members of staff at Tavernspite School have developed their own leadership roles as a result of the federation through sharing their knowledge and experiences in the change management process
- Many of the training and professional development materials developed for use at Tavernspite School have also supported good quality professional learning at Templeton School
- Standards have continued to rise at Tavernspite throughout the collaboration period: in 2015, pupil performance at the expected outcome at the end of the Foundation Phase has placed the school in the top 25% when compared with similar schools; and at the higher than expected outcomes, performance has placed the school in the top 25% for mathematical development and the higher 50% for literacy
- In key stage 2, pupils' performance in 2015 has placed the school in the top 25% for English, mathematics and science at the expected and higher levels

As with all leadership and management tasks, there have been a number of unforeseen challenges and complexities along the way. Workload and accountability overall increased notably at the outset of the collaboration. However, over time, systems have become more streamlined, and the pace of change has settled to a more sustainable level.

Section 3: Building momentum

Case study 10

Hawarden Village Voluntary Aided Church in Wales Primary School, Flintshire

Effective leadership and governance through amalgamation

Context

Hawarden Village Voluntary Aided Church in Wales Primary School is in the local authority of Flintshire. The school opened in September 2013 following the closure of Hawarden Infants Community Primary School and Rector Drew Voluntary Aided Junior School. Prior to the closures, Rector Drew was affiliated to the Church in Wales. Hawarden Infants did not have a formal church affiliation. The headteacher of the newly established school was formerly the headteacher at the infants school.

The school has 461 pupils aged 3 to 11 years on roll, including 60 pupils who attend the nursery part-time. There are 16 classes. Around 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is well below the national average of 20%.

Nearly all pupils come from homes where English is the main language. A very few pupils speak Welsh as a first language. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity. The school identifies around 27% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is slightly above the national average. A very few have a statement of special educational needs. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

The school's improvement journey

Strategic aims for improvement

The school's leaders had to manage the transition of the two original schools into one successful school. This meant establishing a common vision and core sense of purpose that would retain the strongest features of the original schools whilst forging a new united identity. They decided that the primary focus should be on improving the standards achieved by pupils but also acknowledged that to raise standards there needed to be just as much emphasis on improving the wellbeing of pupils and staff. Leaders needed to establish a staffing structure to support the schools in coming together as one and to drive improvement. An essential component of this was to develop the leadership capacity within the staff. The role of the governing body was integral to the process by providing firm and decisive strategic direction from the outset to support and challenge the school to unite and improve.

Actions

Becoming one school

Prior to closure, the original schools shared a headteacher for four terms. During this period of collaboration, self-evaluation in both schools indicated that the new school

should be moving from good to excellent. The infant school had good Estyn inspection outcomes in 2009. The junior school's previous Estyn inspection in 2007, judged that the school was in need of significant improvement. As a result, it received a follow-up visit by Estyn in 2009 when it was removed from the statutory category, having made good progress.

The vision to create one new excellent school was the driver for all decisions before, and during, the school organisation proposal period.

Governors from both schools worked effectively with the headteacher to make key decisions before opening the new school. There were many spirited discussions about contentious issues, such as church affiliation and physical changes to the school buildings. Establishing a single governing body for the new school from two governing bodies was also a sensitive issue. Leaders, the local authority and diocese also had difficult conversations and decisions over the membership of the new school's governing body. Ultimately, leaders made key decisions based on governors' skills and availability. A few governors graciously withdrew while remaining committed to the school. The process of selecting foundation governors ensured a balanced representation of both original schools.

The head and governors formulated the school vision following consultation with staff, pupils and parents. They were determined that the school organisation proposal should be managed in such a way that all organisational decisions would support high quality outcomes for pupils and not detract from this as the main priority.

During the four terms of collaboration between the two schools, the shared headteacher worked hard to establish good relationships and a culture of trust and mutual respect, where both staff groups felt valued.

Joint training days, staff meetings and briefings began immediately. This was vital in delivering consistent messages and helped to develop the growing sense of being one team. This enabled the new school to move quickly in establishing joint values and a culture in which to share successfully the best practice of the two original schools.

A key early step in the effective establishment of a single school was the building of a senior management team that had the trust and respect of all staff. The new team took key roles in leading and managing the new school with the challenges of two separate buildings. They also had key roles in analysing data, agreeing school priorities and leading on curriculum areas and joint working. This ensured that the school had a successful system of leadership at all levels that enabled it to progress quickly against agreed improvement goals.

Leaders set up professional learning communities for literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. Teams included a representative from each year group in the school. A senior member of staff led each team to model best practice and to coach and mentor team members. These teams were effective in building relationships and sharing good practice. Through their work, there were speedy and notable improvements across the school, including in the learning environment, presentation of work across the school, consistency and progression in guided reading and the

use of mathematics resources. This was very important in providing leadership opportunities for those in positions of responsibility. It enabled leaders to contribute effectively to the school's strategic direction and to model effectively leadership skills for other members of staff.

Effective strategies in moving the new school towards excellence

Governors

The chair of governors introduced 'lead governors' and established a pattern whereby the full governing body met every month during the school day. Each meeting began with a presentation from pupils and included a report from a lead governor, with an analysis of current school performance and practice in their area of responsibility, including recommendations for improvement. Governors set the school challenging performance targets, for example to ensure that 50% of Year 6 pupils attained the higher-than-expected outcome in English, mathematics and science. The headteacher's performance management focused on ensuring that the school met these ambitious performance targets. Rigorous monitoring of progress at individual pupil level was used to inform provision, for example arrangements to stream pupils for mathematics in upper key stage 2. This enabled teachers to match activities to pupils' needs more effectively and secured improved standards. In the year after the establishment of the new school, the targets were achieved.

Governors made effective strategic decisions based on a considered analysis of the school's practice and available funding. For example, they appointed a business manager and site manager to support the work needed on organisational change. They created new systems for the school for dealing with health and safety, site management, staffing, financial management and communication with parents. This enabled the headteacher to focus more effectively on standards of learning and wellbeing.

Leadership

The chair of governors and the headteacher model leadership skills through formal and informal coaching of staff, using the national standards for school leadership as a guide. They have ensured that all staff in other leadership roles have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and know that the school will hold them to account for achieving agreed targets through the performance management system. Deputy headteachers in both buildings have key roles in managing day to day issues and in addressing improvement priorities within their departments. The leadership group meet weekly and have become a supportive and effective team across the new school.

Teaching and learning responsibility post holders and subject leaders took key roles in implementing curriculum change. Subject leaders had time each term to monitor standards and provision ensuring the consistent application of policies across the school. Leaders agreed a focus for assessing standards through data analysis in the autumn term and lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work in the spring and summer terms. Subject leaders for each key stage worked together on monitoring activities and this joint working was a key factor in ensuring progress and continuity across the school in mathematics, language and science.

Performance management targets for standards and provision were the same for all staff, including the headteacher, and linked directly to school improvement targets. The headteacher modelled the school's performance management processes for all staff and undertook all observations of teaching in the first year. Through this process, she was able to coach and mentor other leaders to implement the school's systems from this point onwards.

The school has a beneficial system of peer observations. The headteacher established this system with the full agreement of staff. It is very much a non-threatening, developmental opportunity for all to improve. These arrangements allow teachers time to observe their year group partner teacher, teachers in the year above and below, and teachers in the other key stage. The observations have an agreed focus that relates to school improvement targets. The process has led directly to improved teaching and learning through the sharing of good practice and improved consistency. This has also developed the leadership skills of all staff as they are now skilled observers of teaching and provide effective feedback to support further improvements.

Pupil leadership roles, including pupil governors, are well established. This means that the pupil voice has a real impact on school improvement, as evidenced in the sections on wellbeing and curriculum enrichment below.

Wellbeing

A key focus for the head was to establish one school culture for staff and pupils, and to raise teacher expectations for all pupils. The starting point for raising standards was investment in the wellbeing of staff and pupils, to ensure that learning took place in an environment that was happy, safe, challenging and creative. Staff wellbeing was crucial to the success of the new school. All staff received high quality training to ensure that they understood that their wellbeing and pupil wellbeing were at the heart of the school. Senior leaders agreed on family friendly policies. The principle being that teachers could only look after pupils well if they also looked after themselves. This had an impact on the attitudes of all staff, including lunchtime supervisors and caretakers.

The school adopted the circle time model where a class or group of pupils and adults sit together to share their thoughts, feelings or experiences about various issues. Teachers in all classes used this time to develop a whole school understanding of positive behaviour management, with a focus on Christian values and a set of golden rules. All staff applied the system of rewards and sanctions consistently. This gave all pupils the sense of belonging to one school. Pupils were concerned about fairness in relation to behaviour management. The new strategy addressed the issue particularly well. Weekly circle times linked to assembly themes created a whole school focus on values. Consequently, levels of pupils' wellbeing are now consistently good and standards of behaviour are excellent.

Enriching the curriculum

The schools had always ensured good curriculum coverage prior to the organisation proposals. However, to enrich the curriculum further, pupils identified that the

outdoor provision was in need of improvement. The school generated funding to develop outside areas and held a series of whole school theme days with a focus on improving the outdoors. Pupils set up committees involving members from the Foundation Phase and key stage 2. They collaborated effectively on whole school projects, such as developing habitats in the school grounds. Cross-curricular themes in key stage 2 aided the implementation of the literacy and numeracy framework through effective use of the newly developed outdoor areas. This had a notable impact on developing pupils' writing skills.

Learning and attainment

Careful analysis of trends of performance data over time enabled the headteacher and governors to identify the potential to improve pupils' performance at the higher than expected levels.

A key focus was to raise teacher expectations for more able pupils. In order to raise standards for these pupils, the headteacher focused on improving the quality of assessment and target setting across the school ensuring each year group contributed appropriately to each pupil's progress. The school brought in external advisers and colleague headteachers with inspector training to assess the quality of pupils' work. This gave a very valuable independent verification of standards and identified where there were dips in particular classes or year groups. Senior leaders used this information to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning across the school.

Leaders set ambitious targets for the first year of the new school. The aim was for 50% of pupils to achieve the higher-than-expected outcomes and levels in Year 2 and Year 6, and for 50% of all pupils to make at least two sub-levels of progress in the year in all classes. This would put the school on target for at least 50% attainment at the higher-than-expected outcomes and levels in subsequent years. It would also place the school near family averages in Year 2 and Year 6, and above the mean when compared to similar schools. The consistent application of target setting arrangements in all classes ensured that all teachers were accountable for accelerating rates of pupil progress and subject to increased levels of expectation. This target became the key focus of the development plan and headteacher and teacher performance targets for the year.

The key strategies in the school development plan for achieving these improved standards for the more able were as follows:

- high quality rich tasks to ensure pupil engagement
- skills-based planning with clear targets for individual pupils
- skills ladders and targets accessible to pupils in their writing and mathematics books
- focused marking and feedback
- effective use of computer based tracking system to monitor progress
- the identification and targeting of borderline pupils through specific support
- book scrutiny and feedback in every year group

The new school met its target in the first year after it was established.

Monitoring of progress showed that there was potential for even higher standards, through the consistent use of best practice in target setting, teaching and marking. In year two of the new school, the target was increased to aim for close to 60% of all pupils to achieve the higher-than-expected outcomes and levels.

All staff worked together to agree high quality approaches to marking, target setting and assessment. Leaders at all levels monitored progress, for example through continued regular book scrutiny. This improvement in quality and consistency was the focus of the school development plan in the second year after establishment and moved the school towards its target of 60%. Leaders keep development plans under continuous review. They update plans in the light of the rapid speed of change and improvement. Leaders at all levels in the school contribute effectively to this process.

Outcomes

Strategic planning for the first two years of the new school has successfully raised standards for pupils and established an efficient new organisation with a culture that is caring, creative and high achieving. End of key stage outcomes have improved for two consecutive years and pupil tracking indicates that this trend upwards is due to continue. Strategic planning has had the following impacts on provision and standards:

- There is a higher degree of pupil engagement in learning through rich tasks planned through theme weeks and days
- Well-planned outdoor areas support pupil wellbeing and extend learning outside the classroom
- Behaviour across the school is exemplary
- Whole school circle time and assemblies contribute effectively to pupil wellbeing and the school's Christian ethos
- Better pupil engagement in decisions about school issues, through a wide range of pupil leadership roles, including pupil governors, ensure high levels of engagement
- There is improved pupil involvement in decisions about their learning
- Pupils know their targets and are eager to achieve these and progress
- Effective feedback to improve the quality of writing ensures that standards in writing are very high across the school
- There are high standards in mathematics across the school, especially in Year 6
- In 2014 and 2015, 50% of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 achieved at least outcome 6 or level 5 in all areas of learning or subjects
- In 2015, 60% of Year 2 pupils achieved outcome 6 in all areas of learning
- In 2015, around 63% of Year 6 pupils achieved level 5+ in English, and performance at the higher levels in mathematics and science were 58% and 59% respectively
- The Estyn inspection of April 2015 judged the school's current performance as good and its prospects for improvement as excellent

Sharing best practice

The schools works in partnership with a range of other schools, including other newly established schools and church schools, to share best practice through:

- providing or facilitating wellbeing training for many schools in north Wales over the last three years, most recently facilitating circle time training to support each Foundation Phase partnership group in Flintshire
- supporting others to develop effective forest school practice, for example by hosting visitors to observe sessions
- preparing portfolios of writing at the request of the regional education consortium to share with other schools
- sharing its approach to raising standards in mathematics successfully in Year 6 through challenging teaching

Read the full inspection report here

Case study 11

Parkland Primary School, Swansea

The role of staff development in raising standards and aspirations

Context

Parkland Primary School serves the Sketty area of Swansea, to the west of the city centre. There are 529 pupils on roll aged between 3 and 11 years. The school has 17 classes and a nursery for 120 three and four-year-olds who attend school on a part-time basis. A specialist teaching facility provides full-time education for up to nine pupils who have moderate to severe learning difficulties.

Eleven per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average of 20%. A minority of pupils speak English as an additional language. There are 18 different languages spoken by pupils at home, although no pupils speak Welsh as a first language. The school identifies around 9% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is well below the national average. A very few pupils have statements of special educational needs. There are currently a few pupils who are looked after by the local authority, and a very few who are asylum seekers.

The headteacher took up her post in January 2011.

The school's inspection by Estyn in September 2013, judged both current performance and prospects for improvement as good. The headteacher and senior leaders provide effective leadership and have appropriately high expectations of all stakeholders. There are effective links between self-evaluation and school improvement. The governing body works strategically and acts well as a critical friend to the school.

The school's improvement journey

Strategic aims

The key factors having the biggest impact on improving standards at the school include:

- all stakeholders sharing the same vision
- a focus on developing a whole school pedagogy
- understanding and using pupil data to inform teaching and the composition of intervention groups for pupils requiring additional support
- the effective continuous professional development for all staff
- a thorough cycle of monitoring and evaluating activities
- building capacity within the school through the effective distribution of leadership roles in both key stages

Prior to her appointment, the headteacher analysed the school's performance data, which suggested to her that the school was not doing as well as it could. Upon taking up her appointment, standards in books and lesson observations provided additional evidence to confirm that this was the case. Overall, rates of pupil progress and outcomes were too low as not enough pupils were making the progress of which they were capable.

Teaching staff did not use pupil data or ongoing assessments to inform their planning. This often meant that teaching did not support different groups of pupils effectively enough to make good progress in learning. Teachers worked hard with high levels of commitment but they worked in isolation. There was no collaboration to plan the curriculum or units of work and this limited pupils' progression in learning.

In a majority of classes, teachers' use of assessment for learning strategies was appropriate, but in other classes this was inconsistent and there was no shared understanding of this methodology. As a result, assessment for learning was not effective enough.

The new headteacher also realised that good quality resources to support teaching and learning were at a premium.

The school lacked strategic direction in relation to staff's continuous professional development. As a result, staff training and development did not have sufficient impact on improving standards of teaching and learning.

Upon taking up her appointment, the headteacher planned initially to revisit and revise the school's vision, mission statement and school aims. However, an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats highlighted that staff felt there were other more pressing priorities, for example to address the lack of a planned curriculum. The senior leadership team decided to act on staff concerns and this led to an immediate sense of shared purpose.

Actions

Motivating staff through support and challenge

The headteacher and senior leadership team outlined their expectations explicitly to all staff. Leaders next created additional leadership responsibilities for staff, such as subject co-ordinators. At the same time, teachers began to design a new curriculum during staff meetings. This was a powerful tool in giving all staff a sense of ownership and responsibility to move the school forward.

Senior leaders planned whole school continuing professional development events linked to the outcomes of the school's self-evaluation. As a result, all professional development opportunities supported the school improvement plan effectively. Leaders monitored the impact of professional development on the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils. For example, through the successful use of the school's performance management system, teachers became accountable for implementing specific, agreed approaches to teaching, such as effective assessment for learning techniques.

All staff engaged in regular target setting and moderation meetings. This was a major priority as it helped develop a shared understanding of the standards and skills expected from pupils. Teachers used pupil data and teacher assessment information robustly to identify pupils in need of additional support and more able pupils, who needed greater challenge in their learning. Staff evaluated a variety of intervention techniques and implemented those which were most suitable. They received appropriate training to deliver these programmes successfully. Such measures increased staff involvement in setting the school's overall direction and strategy and proved motivational. Nearly all staff were enthused by these collaborative ventures and their subsequent impact on standards.

The school purchased new and attractive resources to support literacy and numeracy. This had the effect of raising pupils' self-esteem, as they felt valued. The headteacher reinforced the status of learning at every opportunity, for example during assemblies and frequent visits to all classrooms. At the same time, the school invested in improvements to the physical environment. This added greatly to the sense of pride in the school felt by staff and pupils.

Developing a culture of monitoring and evaluation

Teachers became involved actively in monitoring activities and the scrutiny of data to help them to identify improvement actions. Leaders allocated specific roles to appropriate staff for monitoring and evaluating work in their areas of responsibility. The senior leadership team used data consistently and effectively across the school to inform pupil progress meetings and to hold teachers to account for improved pupil outcomes. Class teachers now use data consistently to inform their planning for cohorts, classes, groups and for individuals.

The school uses online self-evaluation questionnaires to collect stakeholder views. For example, the 2011 parents' survey results indicated that only around 64% of respondents felt well informed about their child's progress. As a result, the school

established a 'Meet the Teacher' event in the first week of September to share information about the curriculum, approaches to teaching reading, writing and maths. During these events, parents receive valuable information about the intended learning for the year and have the chance to ask any questions they feel will help them in supporting their child's learning at home.

To develop this partnership work further, the school took the decision to share all test data with parents during the first half term in a consultation meeting to evaluate progress and identify next steps for learning. The subsequent consultation evening focuses on the progress the pupils are making in relation to these next steps and in their work across the curriculum. All teachers follow a structure outlining the essential information and discussion points that must be included in the consultation meetings. In 2013, the percentage of survey respondents who felt informed about their children's learning rose to around 86%, and in 2015, this rose to 90%.

A governor self-evaluation and data group ensures that governors have the knowledge and understanding to challenge the headteacher effectively in relation to school performance.

Self-evaluation involves all staff. For example, teaching assistants monitor and evaluate the progress of pupils in receipt of intervention. The additional learning needs co-ordinator monitors their work and reports outcomes to the senior leadership team and the governors. Leaders ensure that they consider all staff, parent and pupils' views in monitoring and evaluation processes and when identifying priorities for improvement. For example, the school responded to pupils' requests for a wider variety of opportunities to write. They adopted a writers' workshop approach in literacy lessons, where pupils have structured opportunities to write about a subject of their own choice, in their chosen style and genre. This greatly improved the quality of writing and the length at which many pupils, especially boys, wrote. Initially the approach was trialled in one year group. However, the feedback from pupils was so positive that the school decided to adopt this approach across the school, providing opportunities for freedom of choice across all age ranges and leading to an improvement in the quality of writing across the school.

Developing capacity

Senior leaders identify staff strengths and areas for development effectively by evaluating their professional practice. As a result, they plan effective personal and professional development for staff at all levels. This is fundamental to the success of the school because staff develop the skills and professional competencies required to fulfil their roles successfully. This is particularly effective for those staff with leadership aspirations. All teachers are now an integral part of whole school improvement planning through developing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing action plans for their areas of responsibility.

The school's culture encourages staff to take on additional responsibilities when they feel ready, for example by leading training sessions and team working to move forward on agreed priorities. Through this, they develop the skills and knowledge to lead others.

The performance management process focuses on the future aspirations of staff, in addition to school priorities. The school has implemented the ethos of the Welsh Government's 'New Deal for the Education Workforce', for example to identify where staff are on their career path and what opportunities they need to be able to make the next steps. A significant number of staff are now lead practitioners for literacy and numeracy. They have led staff training and mentored and coached teachers in other schools successfully.

Since January 2013, the school has a very good record of developing leaders. Three teachers are now deputy headteachers and another four teachers have phase or key stage leader roles in other schools.

Working with others

The governing body challenges the headteacher consistently and effectively in relation to school performance. All governors take their roles seriously, and focus well on improving standards. Governors are working currently on a new structure to maximise the impact of their strategic role in ensuring continuous improvement through developing closer links with subject co-ordinators.

Initially, the school worked closely with the local authority to develop staff skills as reflective practitioners. Staff then worked collaboratively within school to share effective practice. This led to more consistent approaches to teaching. Staff have joint reflection time built into their weekly working patterns. This enables them to consider the outcomes of their practice collaboratively and to identify possible improvements.

At the beginning of the improvement journey, leaders were very willing to look beyond the school for examples of good practice. Now, having developed its own strong practice, the school frequently hosts teachers from other schools to share the staff skills acquired as a result of its journey.

Outcomes

- The school has an effective vision that supports consistently good standards of teaching and learning
- There is a shared understanding amongst all staff of effective approaches to teaching and they implement these consistently
- Standards in most indicators have risen consistently over the last four years
- Assessment arrangements are effective in moving nearly all pupils on to the next stage in their learning at a good pace
- The school is well placed to move teaching from consistently good to excellent
- There are successful arrangements to support pupils in developing and applying their literacy, numeracy, thinking and ICT skills, for example in well planned rich learning tasks
- There are effective arrangements for the continuous professional development of all staff
- There is effective distribution of leadership throughout the school
- Leadership roles are all related to improving the quality of the school's work, for example through effective self-evaluation activity and the successful use of pupil data

Case study 12

Ystrad Mynach Primary School, Caerphilly

Securing school improvement through excellent leadership

Context

Ystrad Mynach Primary School is on the outskirts of Ystrad Mynach, north of Caerphilly. The school has 435 pupils, including 58 pupils who attend the nursery on a part-time basis. There are 16 single-age classes.

Around 12% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the local and national averages. The school identifies 16% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is below the national average. A very few pupils have statements of special education needs. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority and a very few speak English as an additional language.

The headteacher took up his post in September 2011 and a new deputy took up her post in April 2012. The school's last Estyn inspection was in November 2014.

Background to the case study

The current headteacher originally took over the leadership of the school in a part-time capacity in January 2011. This was after a period of unsettled leadership following the school organisation proposals affecting the infant and junior schools in 2006. In November 2008, the school received an inspection by Estyn, which highlighted key weaknesses in management, standards and teaching. Despite a new school being officially established in 2006, the infant and junior departments continued to work as separate institutions and many staff were resistant to change. Due to these difficulties, the numbers of pupils on roll was falling, there was a deficit budget, staff morale was very low and this led to high levels of staff absence, which placed further strain on the school's budget.

The outcomes of the 2008 Estyn inspection and continued poor performance led the local authority to class the school as a cause for concern. The headteacher took early retirement and, as a result, the local authority seconded a temporary headteacher, who started to instigate the necessary change within the school. After 18 months, this headteacher also left the school.

The school's current headteacher joined the school for a period of two terms, initially on a part-time basis, sharing the headship with a third temporary headteacher. After a term, the current headteacher made the decision to apply for the permanent headship and took up his post full-time in September 2011.

Strategy

During the period of his temporary appointment, the headteacher evaluated the school's position. He quickly identified that other senior leaders were struggling to

fulfil their leadership roles effectively while improving their own classroom performance as teachers. In addition, several other teachers were struggling to be effective in their classrooms and did not work well as part of a team. Many parents were unhappy; there were limited sporting opportunities as part of the curriculum and few after school clubs. Parents were aware that standards had fallen and that the school was struggling.

As the current headteacher was only in post on a part-time and temporary basis, he was firefighting to try and instigate 'quick fixes' to alleviate some of the immediate problems, such as the negative attitudes of parents to the school.

Within the first few months of joining the school permanently, the headteacher carried out a thorough audit of the school. This audit revealed many areas for improvement. The school lacked strategic direction. It did not have a coherent management structure or systems to enable it to move forward. Standards were falling and compared poorly with those of similar schools. Many staff were demoralised and did not feel valued. A few staff had low expectations in relation to the standard of pupils' work. Staff did not work as a team. The budget was in deficit and due to low staff morale and high staff absence, the school had very high supply costs. The governing body was not well informed about the school's work and did not provide challenge. Pupils were compliant and well behaved but they had no love of learning. They did not have a say in, or make any decisions about, how the school was run.

From the outset, the new headteacher and the chair of governors formed a strong partnership, based on a shared vision for improvement, and worked very closely together to instigate the necessary change.

Action

January 2011 to July 2011

To begin building a partnership with parents, the headteacher established a rugby club for pupils and their parents, and introduced several other after school clubs. He also arranged the first of many 'WOW Weeks' with a health and fitness theme, where pupils and parents worked alongside each other on a range of tasks to raise their awareness of healthy lifestyles. To establish friendly communications, the headteacher ensured that he had a very visible presence around the school and on the yard before and after school, when parents were present in large numbers.

During his temporary part-time appointment, the headteacher shared his vision for the school 'Building Blocks for Success' with staff, governors and other stakeholders. He based this on his aspiration to achieve high quality teaching and learning throughout the school.

September 2011 onwards

Initially, the new headteacher was a very hands-on leader in order to exemplify best practice in teaching and to act as a role model for staff. To underpin this, and to begin to support positive change, he introduced a subject leaders' toolkit and an excellent teaching handbook. These useful tools acted as a basis for discussions

with staff and set out clear expectations for them to fulfil their roles. The introduction of a clear timetable for self-evaluation set out when lesson observations and scrutiny of teachers' planning and pupils' books would take place.

The headteacher identified very quickly which members of the teaching staff lacked the necessary skills to teach effectively. Through open and honest dialogue, he discussed issues with staff and over time staff reflected on whether they had the energy, commitment and enthusiasm to work towards meeting the school's agreed vision for high quality teaching and learning. Within the first 12 months, the deputy headteacher relinquished her leadership role but was very committed to the school and remained a valued member of the teaching staff. Several other teachers either resigned or left to take up posts elsewhere, as they did not feel they could adapt successfully to meet the new challenges. These changes were key to removing barriers to improvement but there was still no senior leadership team.

The appointment of a new deputy in April 2012 laid the foundations for the new senior leadership team. In the summer term of 2012, the headteacher and governing body appointed new members of staff to lead the Foundation Phase and key stage 2 and to take on the role of assessment co-ordinator. All became part of the new senior leadership team. The headteacher worked closely with these key members of staff to develop their leadership skills and spread leadership roles quickly and effectively throughout the school.

Developing the role of the governing body

From the time of his appointment in September 2011, the headteacher worked to empower and upskill the governing body with strong support from its chair. He introduced governor coffee mornings, which included learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' work, developing an understanding of effective classroom environments, listening to learners and looking at data analysis. Through these regular events, governors became involved fully in the school's rigorous self-evaluation processes. Governors joined curriculum teams, which further developed their understanding of the school and the standards it aspired to achieve.

All the information from formal and informal governor activities is stored on the governors' section of the school's ICT network. The governing body meet six times a year. Each term one meeting is dedicated to the fulfilment of all statutory responsibilities and the other concentrates on reviewing the progress of school-based initiatives. This enables governors to be involved fully in the formulation and agreement of school priorities.

Developing teaching

The relationship between the headteacher, the new senior leadership team and the staff was the biggest driving force in improving teaching and learning. The changes to the senior leadership and staffing structure were carried out with honesty and integrity, and re-engaged staffs' pride and commitment to improving teaching and learning. The re-engagement of the passion for teaching, aligned with giving the professionalism and creativity back to the teachers, was of utmost importance. Leaders created an environment where risk taking was encouraged and staff had the confidence to try things out and to be creative in their thinking.

The basis of this process was a framework for excellent teaching, developed in conjunction with the regional consortium, a private company and seven other consortium schools, including Ystrad Mynach. Its basis was the Welsh Government 'Leadership Standards'. The framework encourages teachers to reflect on their own practice through the exemplification of good teaching, learning and learning environments. The process included changing the way the school planned its curriculum through the introduction of a thematic approach based on structured skills development. The school made strides forward in small but carefully planned steps, which leaders reviewed and evaluated regularly. The agreed initial focus was on literacy through initiatives such as whole school training on best practice in developing writing skills.

The new leadership team continued to develop their skills through a two-day leadership training programme. This focused on the components of effective leadership and different leadership styles. Through the headteacher's effective coaching and mentoring, they developed the confidence to lead the rest of the school in line with their agreed roles and responsibilities. Initially, this was through shared monitoring of standards of teaching and learning in joint lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, using the framework for excellent teaching, in conjunction with the headteacher. To upskill other teachers in sharing and developing best practice, leaders introduced lesson observation 'triads' and teaching assistants also observed each other to develop and share good practice.

The process continued to develop and all senior leaders now work with individual members of staff to review groups of pupils' progress on a termly basis, for example the progress of more able pupils, those eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs. This process of 'Monitor, Challenge, Support and Intervention' feeds effectively into the setting of performance management targets.

The process has ensured that the school has clear systems that align closely the cycle of self-evaluation, performance management and school development planning. Leadership is spread well across the school and staff take on additional responsibilities when they are ready, to equip themselves as future leaders.

Outcomes

The school's Estyn inspection report from November 2014 stated that:

'The school's current performance is good because:

- Most pupils achieve high standards in writing and good standards in other areas of learning and subjects across the curriculum
- More able pupils achieve particularly well by the end of key stage 2
- Pupils have a strong voice in the running of the school
- All teachers plan a range of interesting and stimulating activities, which engage and enthuse pupils
- The standard of teaching is good and, in a few classes, it is excellent
- Nearly all pupils achieve high levels of wellbeing due to the effective care, support and guidance that the school provides
- The learning environment is vibrant and supports teaching and learning well

'The school's prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- The headteacher is very effective in his role as a leader and he inspires staff and pupils to achieve their best
- The headteacher, with the support of the governing body and the deputy headteacher, has taken decisive measures to strengthen the quality of teaching and to develop leadership roles and staff responsibilities throughout the school
- The very good use of coaching and mentoring by senior leaders is developing a consistent approach to teaching and learning in nearly all classes
- All staff work as a highly effective and cohesive team towards achieving agreed priorities
- Performance management is robust and challenging and it has a positive effect on pupils' achievements and wellbeing, for example through developing the role of support staff to raise standards in reading
- The governing body has a strong voice and its role as a critical friend is very well developed to bring about effective improvements in many aspects of school life
- Accurate self-evaluation is based on a wide range of first hand evidence and the outcomes link closely to the school's current priorities, which focus well on raising standards, for example in spelling
- Partnership working is highly effective and helps to ensure a wide range of stimulating opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence and self-esteem and to achieve their full potential
- The partnership with parents is a particularly strong feature of school life and benefits pupils' levels of achievement and their wellbeing'

Further progress as of November 2015

Estyn inspectors visited the school again in November 2015 as a part of this thematic survey. They identified that the school had continued to make improvements, most notably in the following areas.

Numeracy

The whole school undertook numeracy training through the regional consortium with a focus on numeracy across the curriculum. Teachers now plan numeracy across the curriculum carefully. They ensure that lessons include many meaningful experiences for pupils that relate well to real life situations. The school uses innovative approaches such as entrepreneur weeks where pupils have a sum of money to produce an item to sell at a profit. Parents were invited to watch 'teaching episodes' and were involved in suitable home learning tasks to help improve their understanding of numeracy and how the school teaches it.

Attendance

Attendance has improved over a four-year period and currently stands at nearly 95%. Working with a new attendance policy and education welfare officer means that procedures rigorously monitor and evaluate the impact of absence. All attendance data shows an improving trend. As a result of working with all elements of the school community, the need for good attendance has been highlighted as vitally important to all pupils' learning. The school continually informs parents of its high expectations for their child's good attendance and this is helping to change attitudes.

Target setting and peer assessment

Scrutiny of pupils' work confirms that the quality of many pupils' writing in all year groups is excellent. Pupils plan, draft and re-draft their writing very effectively to improve the quality. In key stage 2, pupils use self and peer-assessment confidently to further refine and improve the quality of their work in English and in literacy across the curriculum. The pupils set themselves targets at the beginning of each term and evaluate their own progress against these. This has been a powerful assessment for learning tool and ensures that pupils lead their own learning and know their own strengths and areas for development. Peer-assessment ensures that the whole class is involved in the learning process. Teachers monitor pupils' progress against targets regularly. They work with the pupils to co-construct new targets to maintain strong rates of progress.

How the school shares its best practice

The school is a 'Pioneer School' and is part of the regional consortium 'Excellent Teaching programme'. The deputy headteacher and senior leadership team run a six week bespoke programme for teachers from other schools. This includes sharing different aspects of best practice, for example closing the attainment gap for pupils eligible for free school meals, effective learning environments and securing good and aiming for excellent.

The school continues to extend its excellent links with local businesses through the digital leaders' initiative. The school is a lead partner and delivers training to staff and pupils from other schools in the regional education consortium. This helps to raise standards in literacy and information communication technology and equips pupils well for the future.

A teaching assistant promotes school-to-school working through the 'Numeracy on the Move' initiative. This develops pupils' ability to successfully apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum and staff from other schools visit to observe the work and to learn from this good practice.

The leadership group is beginning to work with leaders from other schools to peer-assess each other's practice and to share ideas and innovations.

The headteacher acts as a part-time challenge adviser for the regional consortium and this enables other schools to benefit from his excellent leadership skills.

The school bases its curriculum planning on themes that support the progressive development of pupils' skills. This means that the school is in a strong position to meet the recommendations set out in the recent review of the curriculum by Professor Graham Donaldson for the Welsh Government.

Read the full inspection report here

Case study 13

High Cross Primary School, Newport

Creating a learning culture

Context

High Cross Primary School is in the Bassaleg area, just north of Newport. It is a maintained primary school for 272 pupils aged 3 to 11 years. There are nine classes and all are single-age. These include a part-time nursery, established in September 2014.

Currently, about 16% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is slightly below the average for primary schools in Newport and Wales. The school identifies around 23% of pupils as having additional learning needs, including a very few who have statements of special educational needs.

Pupils' ethnicity is largely white British and the remainder are mostly of mixed or Asian ethnicity. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language at home.

An Estyn inspection in December 2007 identified the school as good overall. The current headteacher took up his post three months before this inspection. A further inspection by Estyn in November 2013 judged the school's current performance and prospects for improvement as excellent.

Strategy

The school has a well-established senior leadership team, which comprises of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and leaders of the Foundation Phase and key stage 2. All have clear roles and responsibilities and they work closely together as a strong unit with shared goals. Senior leaders meet regularly to set priorities and review and evaluate progress against these. There is a strong focus on analysing the progress of each individual pupil through careful tracking. This enables the rigorous targeting of provision to ensure all pupils achieve to their potential both socially, emotionally and academically.

The school has embedded a learning culture amongst all staff. To ensure the best outcomes for all pupils, teachers also use their many professional development opportunities effectively to improve the quality of learning for pupils. They have regular opportunities to further their own knowledge, share information and refine processes at a whole school and individual class level in order to improve provision for specific pupils as the need arises. Senior leaders support this process very well through coaching, mentoring and modelling best practice. Creating a learning culture is the cornerstone of the school's approach to ensuring the engagement of all pupils in their learning.

Action

The school believes that professional development is fundamental to achieving excellence, but is much more than briefing teachers about what is current or

fashionable. It is about improving their professional skills, knowledge and understanding and, importantly, it is about developing staff confidence to take actions that they believe will improve their practice and outcomes for pupils.

To create this culture, the school has two basic principles. The first is to emphasise constantly the school's core belief that every priority or initiative should focus on improving the quality of learning for its pupils. The second is that all staff should enjoy the freedom and trust needed to discover and develop new learning opportunities for pupils.

A good example of this is the establishment of the new nursery in September 2014. Prior to the opening, senior staff visited an outstanding setting to develop their understanding of best practice in nursery provision. In line with these principles, the nursery was created as an uncluttered space, with white walls, simple wooden furniture and no displays. This provided a peaceful environment with nothing to distract pupils from their learning. They ensured that these principles were central to the school's early years practice when the new nursery opened. In addition, these principles are embedded and developed throughout the school's other Foundation Phase classes. The school is now a training centre for other professionals from across the consortium to help to develop effective Foundation Phase practice more widely.

The school plans thoroughly to ensure it responds to national and local initiatives and to identify other priorities through its own self-evaluation systems. Self-evaluation is a rigorous and ongoing process. This includes:

- careful tracking of pupils as they move through the school, to provide interventions based on the needs of each individual
- maintaining an annual focus on literacy and numeracy, evaluating the impact of strategies and adjusting the approach as necessary
- the development of an online system for the scrutiny of teachers' planning that enables continual reflection on practice by senior leaders and staff, ensuring that learning is evaluated and built upon in future work
- talking to pupils and evaluating the quality of their work on a regular basis through book scrutiny, class portfolios and moderation activities
- observing lessons using shared criteria that recognise areas of strength but that also set clear areas for improvement, this in turn helping to provide the necessary support, when needed, to allow teachers to improve and build upon their current practice
- a focus on pedagogy during meetings from a senior management level through to phase team level, allowing ongoing evaluation of successes and challenges that help staff to refocus their direction of travel and learn from each other's experiences

The above systems ensure that leaders use a range of information to develop an effective school improvement plan that works on three levels: 'Introduce, Develop and Embed' and at times 'Drop' if necessary. Senior leaders meet regularly to clarify and review the main priorities identified through self-evaluation and they discuss and agree these with staff as an ongoing process.

Foundation Phase and key stage teams then develop their understanding of the implications for teaching and learning. They trial agreed initiatives and then embed what works in the classroom. Staff learn as they move through these levels and adjust time, resources and priorities as the journey unfolds. Leaders modify and adjust the improvement plan continually in the light of experience. This happens as staff try new things and develop new practice, with the aim of achieving the overall goals.

This approach ensures that teachers are not there merely to implement plans but that the planning serves the teaching and learning. These plans all focus on improving pupil achievement. The school monitors outcomes rigorously, including through the effective and detailed analysis of data at individual, year group and whole school level. The whole process provides further opportunities for exploration and action.

To support the process, curriculum planning centres on the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy, ICT and thinking skills. Planning activities stem from these skills and incorporate a range of interesting and engaging themes and activities, including the use of the outdoor environment. Staff track the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through an evolving system, which has usability and effectiveness as its priority. This system allows pupils to build on their skills in a structured and progressive way as they move through the school and is aligned closely to the principles in the recent review of the curriculum by Professor Graham Donaldson for the Welsh Government.

This process links directly with the school's performance management systems. Performance management targets focus on individual pupil progress and priorities in the school improvement plan. Performance management also allows for personal development, where staff self-assesses their practice through an agreed continua of skills. The analysis of this provides a focus for both personal development and whole school themes for further research and development. Through this process, staff have a clarity of understanding as they know where they are in terms of professional skills and where they need to improve, to become more effective practitioners.

Impact on provision and learners' standards

Outcomes

- Over the last five years, the school has met nearly all its challenging targets in literacy and numeracy, based on teacher assessments and Fischer Family Trust data at a whole school and individual pupil level
- The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is normally as good as that of other pupils in key stage 2
- Pupils with additional learning needs perform extremely well, with most achieving level 4 or above over the last three years
- Boys' performance has improved significantly over a number of years and, taking into consideration pupils with significant additional learning needs, there is rarely a 'negative' gap in any core area between boys' attainment at level 4 or above and that of the girls in key stage 2
- The school is currently in the second year of a project to close the gap in mathematics between pupils who are eligible for free school meals and their

peers; data confirms that the average percentage point increase in mathematical reasoning skills is improving for many of these pupils

- Attendance now places the school in the top 25% of similar schools after placing it in the bottom 25% in 2012

The school builds a culture that helps teachers to seize opportunities when they arise, to try new things, to work with others and to learn about how children best learn. Some of the outcomes emerging from the school's approach are more difficult to measure in hard terms. However, through ongoing self-evaluation activity, the school identifies the following successes:

- The innovative use of tablet computers by older pupils to extend their literacy and numeracy skills. This project is building effective transition links with the local high school. The current focus is on improving pupils' mathematical reasoning skills and independent learning skills using ICT. Pupils decide for themselves when to use the tablet computers and independently choose the most appropriate application for the task they are engaged on.
- A school toolkit based on visual stimulus ideas supports the development of oracy, writing and numeracy skills. This has ensured the enhancement of pupils' writing and improvements in their mathematical reasoning skills.
- Systems for tracking literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum have been improved and refined, by developing systems adapted from best practice gathered from a partner school.
- The pupil voice has been developed through a pupil school improvement group, who carried out research into the effectiveness of outdoor learning.
- New and very effective specific provision has been developed for pupils with dyscalculia, for those with social and emotional difficulties, and for pupils on the autistic spectrum, which enables them to fulfil their potential.
- The new nursery acts as a centre of excellence for the consortium and the school also exemplifies best practice in effective transition from Year 2 to Year 3.
- Adjustments to the performance management cycle allow staff to meet the immediate needs of individual pupils more effectively but also allow time for more reflection that aligns their practice to the school's approach of 'introduce, develop and embed'.
- The school is in a strong position to implement the recommendations of the Donaldson curriculum review because of its skills-based approach to pupils' learning in both key stages.

For this school, developing a learning culture is all about action; being ready to act, and to react, so that it can focus its efforts in the light of learning about what things really work for its pupils. This approach has worked. The local authority, the regional consortium and Estyn have recognised the school's approach as excellent practice.

However, more importantly, the school has developed the capacity to cope with the rapid pace of change within the current education climate and the increasingly demanding needs of its pupils to ensure that each one fulfils their potential.

Read the full inspection report here

Case study 14

Ysgol Gynradd Dolau, Llanharan

Tiered leadership and succession planning

Context

Ysgol Gynradd Dolau Primary School is a bi lingual school in the village of Llanharan, in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Currently, 477 pupils between the age of 3 and 11 years attend the school. This figure includes 66 pupils who attend the nursery part-time. Around 12% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average. There are 17 classes and all but one are single-age.

The school provides education through the medium of Welsh and English, and pupils from both departments integrate on a regular basis. Although approximately half of the school's pupils attend the Welsh department, only a very few speak Welsh at home. A very few pupils come from an ethnic minority background.

The school identifies 22% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is slightly lower than the average for primary schools in Wales.

The present headteacher was appointed in 1997 and was in post when the school was inspected by Estyn in both February 2012 and more recently in July 2015.

Strategy

Identifying potential leaders and providing them with opportunities to successfully develop their capacity to lead school improvement initiatives.

Action

The early identification of potential leadership skills at the interview stage, and throughout their early professional development, assists the school in developing future leaders. The headteacher and governing body work in partnership to ensure the application process concentrates on leadership skills and qualities, as well as the teaching capability of potential staff. They do this by:

- careful scrutiny of the application form to identify involvement in groups, activities where a candidate has assumed responsibility, demonstrated leadership qualities or has received recognition for their achievements
- general observation of staff in whole school situations or in meetings to assess their contribution and commitment
- identifying staff who are proactive and who show a natural ability to lead others

The development of a structured leadership programme to support the progression of all potential leaders

In 2000, following a successful Estyn inspection, the school identified the need to develop a coherent leadership development system. This was as a result of the

promotion of all senior leaders, except the headteacher, to senior positions in other schools. A similar situation occurred in 2006, when again, the majority of the senior leadership team gained external promotions.

Initially in 2000, the school established a new senior leadership team consisting of a mixture of existing staff and appointments from outside of the school. This was a three tiered management structure to assist continuity of leadership. The first tier of leadership takes responsibility for aspects of curriculum and subject leadership development. The second tier is responsible for whole school and national initiatives. This enables staff to gain experience and develop the skills required for working with the whole school community and external assessors. Staff in these positions have responsibility for the successful implementation of initiatives and for achieving external accreditation in important aspects of the school's work. Examples of this include:

- Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes National Quality Award
- British Educational Communications and Technology Agency accreditation for work with ICT
- mentoring students and newly qualified teachers

The third tier consists of staff on the senior management team and those with teaching and learning responsibility posts. When they develop leadership skills at the first and second stage, staff progress to strategic positions on the senior management team. Senior leaders take responsibility for key areas of learning, such as monitoring provision, standards and pupil progress. All staff are expected to undertake middle management and aspiring leaders training, offered by the local authority and regional consortium.

The school's last two senior management teams have all progressed through this system, with many, over the last 15 years, going on to gain senior leadership posts in other schools.

Priorities for staff development at all levels revolve around national priorities and performance management targets always mirror these.

Members of the senior management team are responsible for:

- the analysis of pupil performance data
- producing detailed action plans for the school development plan
- providing interim and final reports to evaluate the impact of their action plans
- reporting to governors and staff as well as participating in the annual performance review with the consortium challenge adviser
- overseeing developments within their area of responsibility and monitoring standards through lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work

Impact

The impact of this type of succession planning is evident through:

- the quality, continuity and consistency of leadership
- the standards that pupils achieve

The introduction of the three-tier system has had a very positive impact on the development of future leaders. By equipping first and second tier staff with the skills necessary for successful leadership, the school prepares staff for senior roles effectively. Staff show increasing confidence when leading initiatives and they quickly realise the importance of working with all sections of the school community. With many initiatives resulting in external accreditation, staff provide detailed action plans and evaluations in readiness for assessments by external agencies. All staff appointed to senior roles within the school or to other schools, develop a wide range of leadership skills through this process and they transfer these skills successfully to other areas of responsibility.

Senior leaders, for example, identified the need for a data and assessment leader to develop a comprehensive school data analysis toolkit. Once in post, this person trained other staff in the analysis of data and the setting of ambitious targets for pupils using an agreed whole school system. The system provides high quality information on standards for the senior leadership team. It also enables the additional learning needs co-ordinator to identify and target pupils accurately for intervention strategies.

The development of good analytical skills by leaders, along with their ability to mentor and coach younger, inexperienced staff, has ensured improved standards of teaching and the maintenance of high standards over a number of years.

Providing staff with the opportunity to progress from an early stage ensures that there is a continuous cycle of improvement and development.

This process also supports the effective development of support staff skills, with these staff receiving specific training to lead agreed initiatives. An example of this is the development of the role of a support assistant for emotional literacy with responsibility for improving pupils' wellbeing. This member of staff takes the lead in identifying and supporting pupils in need of emotional support. She provides advice and guidance to her team of four, who provide high quality support for pupils to help them make significant gains in their learning. She also trains staff across the consortium to help them gain 'Emotional Literacy Support Assistant' accreditation.

Younger members of staff are motivated by the success of colleagues and are keen to pursue actively their own career development. They are able to replicate the leadership skills they see in other members of staff and quickly realise that by becoming focused on continual improvement in all areas of their professional duties, this can lead to promotion to senior positions, either within the school or externally. They also understand that developing their own professional practice will lead to improved standards for pupils.

Standards in the Foundation Phase and key stage 2 have improved steadily and much of this can be attributed to the quality of leadership at all levels. This ensures that pupils have high quality learning experiences and are challenged to improve on their previous performance.

Outcomes of the July 2015 Estyn inspection

'The headteacher has established a robust three-tiered management and leadership structure. This provides inexperienced leaders with worthwhile opportunities to lead curriculum based initiatives when senior members of staff receive promotion to other posts in different schools. This very well-organised leadership framework develops future leaders successfully.

'The school's current performance is good because:

- Nearly all pupils work conscientiously and develop into confident learners who make good progress from their staring points
- Most pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are good
- Pupils engage naturally with each other in Welsh; a particular strength of the school is the support that pupils from the Welsh department provide for their contemporaries in the English department to help them develop their Welsh language skills effectively
- Nearly all pupils behave well
- Nearly all pupils display concern and respect for each other and take exceptional pride in caring for those who are less fortunate than themselves
- Staff work collaboratively to ensure that teaching is consistently good across both departments, with pupils taking an active part in their learning
- The quality of assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is highly effective
- Staff identify pupils who require additional support early and provide them with well-targeted interventions to ensure they make good progress
- The physical environment of the school is outstanding and staff use this extensively to provide pupils with high quality, sustained opportunities for attractive and exciting learning

'Prospects for improvement are good because:

- The headteacher's high expectations provide a clear strategic direction that supports staff well in meeting the ambitious targets he sets
- The robust leadership structure ensures that members of the senior management team work very well together and contribute effectively to the school's shared vision
- The school has honest and robust processes for self-evaluation that secure continuous improvements in standards, pupils' wellbeing, and attendance
- The governing body is very knowledgeable about pupils' performance and uses this information effectively to support and challenge the school
- The comprehensive system for data analysis, which informs self-evaluation and planning for improvement, is a strong feature in pupils' progress
- The school's development plan is a useful document with a clear focus and challenging targets for improvement
- Staff engage well with parents and other partners
- The school makes good use of the pupil deprivation grant to support the emotional and educational development of pupils eligible for free school meals'

Read the full inspection report here

Section 4: Sustaining high standards

A few schools have sustained high levels of performance over extended periods of time. In these schools, there is nearly always consistent and highly effective leadership from headteachers and those in other leadership positions. A common feature in the most successful schools is their ability to have a positive impact on education across the primary sector, whilst retaining high standards of teaching, learning and wellbeing themselves. A key feature in sustaining high performance in these schools is often the way in which they develop effectively agreed whole school systems and leaders of the future. This means that the school can continue to operate at a high level even when there are changes to staffing.

Case study 15

Glasllwch Primary School, Newport

Empowering leaders to maintain excellent standards

Context

Glasllwch Community Primary School is in a residential area on the north side of the city of Newport. There are 206 pupils aged 3 to 11 years at the school, in seven single age classes and a nursery.

Around 1% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is well below the average for primary schools in the local authority and in Wales. The school identifies 18% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is below the average for primary schools in Wales.

Most pupils come from English-speaking homes. No pupils speak Welsh at home. Very few are from a minority ethnic background or learn English as an additional language.

The last inspection by Estyn was in March 2014. The headteacher took up her post in September 2002.

An Estyn inspection in March 2008 recognised that the school was good with outstanding features in all areas. The school's latest Estyn inspection, in March 2014, judged both the school's current performance and prospects for improvements as excellent.

Strategic aims

In order to maintain high standards, the headteacher has focused on developing a staffing structure that is organised to build leadership capacity across the school, empower all staff to become leaders and meet the needs of all pupils effectively.

The headteacher recognises that effective leadership is essential to drive change, and to maintain and improve the school's already high standards. To this end, leaders focus on identifying and nurturing leadership potential in all staff.

Actions

Ensuring a learning culture with a strong, collaborative approach to leadership

The headteacher ensures that all members of school staff have clear job descriptions that focus on raising standards of pupils' attainment and wellbeing. This allows all staff, including senior leaders, to have a shared understanding of their strategic responsibilities and accountability. School leaders review all staff roles and responsibilities regularly in order to ensure a relentless focus on improving and maintaining standards. An example of this was the appointment of a leader with responsibility for improving pupils' key skills of communication, numeracy and information and communication technology, in response to a recommendation in the 2008 Estyn inspection report. This post holder worked with all staff on a review of the curriculum, carrying out training and supporting teachers in writing schemes of work that focus on developing pupils' key skills. The schemes form the basis of the school's planning and contributed measurably to the judgement of standards as excellent in the 2014 Estyn inspection.

The school has shared this planning with schools throughout its regional consortium. All staff, including teaching assistants, are encouraged and empowered to take on leadership roles throughout the school. To support this, leaders ensure that all staff receive appropriate professional development and training in order to implement new initiatives to meet improvement priorities. For example, training for teaching assistants and pupils by the 'Bullies Out' charity has empowered them to implement innovative playground activities. Pupils who are 'playground pals' support other pupils, resolve minor disputes and help others to develop friendships. Teaching assistants lead this initiative, which contributes to the excellent behaviour in the school.

In order to establish a collaborative culture of self-improvement, all staff and governors are organised into teams to monitor and evaluate standards of teaching and learning to a very high standard. Leaders have grouped curriculum subjects to form three teams:

- communication and culture
- innovation and problem solving
- exploration and enquiry

The headteacher allocates all staff and governors to one of these teams linked to their roles and responsibilities, their expertise and areas of interest. Within these teams, individual staff lead on specific areas. Team leaders allocate roles and responsibilities within the teams according to the aspect of self-evaluation they are undertaking. School leaders plan detailed self-evaluation timetables and activities that match closely to the priorities and actions identified in the school's improvement plan. Within the teams, an experienced member of staff works alongside a newly qualified teacher, teaching assistant or school governor. They support and train

them in aspects of self-evaluation, such as scrutinising books or listening to learners. This collegiate approach ensures a whole school focus on school improvement and gives all staff and members of the governing body the responsibility for maintaining and driving up standards. It also provides opportunities for less experienced team members to receive training and allows all staff to join in leading the ongoing evaluation of the school.

The school's approach to shared leadership

The school's staffing structure includes a team of well-qualified and experienced teaching assistants. Three of these are qualified as higher-level teaching assistants and they release teachers to undertake leadership responsibilities, professional development opportunities and planning, preparation and assessment time. This ensures a continuity in approach to teaching and learning and has a positive effect on pupil wellbeing and standards. As a continuation of empowering leaders, the higher-level teaching assistants have leadership responsibilities for Welsh as a second language, intervention programmes and support for pupils with additional learning needs. This distribution of leadership responsibility made a significant contribution to many of these areas being recognised as excellent in the school's last inspection by Estyn.

The headteacher ensures that all staff benefit from a comprehensive training schedule that ensures that they understand the school's priorities well and have effective professional development according to the needs of the school. Early identification of teachers' potential to move into middle leadership ensures the sustainability of effective distributed leadership. For example, the school has identified the potential of two teachers in their second and third year of teaching. The headteacher is organising comprehensive, ongoing training for these teachers as newly appointed literacy and numeracy co-ordinators. They have opportunities to attend senior leadership team meetings when appropriate, and lead staff meetings and training within the school. As a result, both teachers have also contributed to raising standards in other schools across the regional consortium. For example, the numeracy leader worked with the consortium to develop numeracy based projects. She has shared her project on 'chocolate' with other schools to help them develop numeracy across the curriculum.

In order to develop more senior leaders, when the deputy headteacher was on maternity leave, the headteacher supported and trained a teacher with teaching and learning responsibilities to step into this role on a temporary basis. This developed the teacher's leadership skills effectively. As a result, when the deputy headteacher reduced her work time, this post holder was able to assume the deputy's role on a part-time basis. This arrangement ensures consistency and continuity, as well as developing leadership capacity.

Foundation Phase and key stage 2 leaders meet regularly with all staff to ensure that they are implementing improvement initiatives effectively, with positive outcomes. These teams work together to reflect on the school's practices and amend or improve them in order to maintain high standards of teaching and learning.

To develop leaders and drive up standards, school leaders have embedded a culture of sharing and reflection into all of the school's practices. The sharing of best practice through classroom observations, professional dialogue and team working creates a supportive climate based on openness and honesty.

Developing the role of governors as leaders

The governing body is highly effective in working with the school's leadership team and holding the school to account. Governors have an excellent understanding of provision and standards across school and are persistent in identifying when improvement is needed in standards and quality. To help them lead the school more effectively, the governing body has developed, and makes excellent use of its own, innovative, online document management and information system. This provides governors with quick access to a wide range of school documentation. As a result, they are able to collaborate on working documents when away from school, which promotes broader participation and leadership, and increases their efficiency. The governing body has shared these pioneering practices with other schools across the regional consortium.

All members of the governing body are involved in helping to lead self-evaluation and planning for improvement through a designated annual training day, in May each year. This involves all staff and governors working together to evaluate the previous year's action plans and identify strengths and areas for development across school. As a result of their work on the curriculum teams, school governors approach this day with a high degree of understanding of the school's strengths and they use this information effectively to make valuable contributions to leading self-evaluation and improvement planning. This day enables the school to identify priorities for improvement accurately and to draw up comprehensive development plans.

The involvement of all staff and governors working together throughout allows for an effective and transparent process.

Pupils as leaders

Pupils are encouraged to be leaders at the school and have frequent opportunities to undertake leadership roles within the classroom and across school. The school plans regular activities into the curriculum to give pupils a say in what, and how they learn and how they want to record their findings. This has a positive effect on pupils' engagement, their wellbeing and standards.

Developing pupils as leaders extends into all aspects of school life. Whole school consultation activities have included asking pupils about the school premises; what they think should be in the curriculum; and generating model descriptions of what 'excellent' pupils and teachers should be. Seeing pupils as leaders and creating opportunities for staff and pupils to share the outcomes of the consultation activities have been fundamental in ensuring that the findings have an impact on improving pupils' experiences in school.

The school has also developed a 'Learning Squad' with the aim of allowing pupils to help to lead the improvement of learning throughout the school. Initially, a group of

pupils in Year 5 and 6 undertook a tour of the school building, commenting on how different areas of the school were conducive to learning. As a result, they put together a comic for parents about the school learning environment and the pupils' observations became a starting point to inspire further research projects. Since then, the 'Learning Squad' pupils have met regularly with the deputy headteacher. During this time, they have explored issues raised by pupils across the school and identified aspects of school life they would like to research and improve. Some of these include:

- How could we improve children's concentration in lessons?
- Does having breakfast affect how we learn?
- How could we improve hygiene and health in our school?
- How can we improve children's talents?
- How can we improve reading in our school?

Over a number of years, the 'Learning Squad' has developed to become a well-organised, highly skilled and innovative group of pupils with a strong focus on positive change as a result of their research projects. They are involved actively in school improvement, taking responsibility for writing action plans that form part of the school development plan and sharing their research findings with pupils, teaching staff, the headteacher, governors and other Newport schools. As a result, they have contributed materially to the improvement of the school's learning environment. Their research into pupils' breakfast habits, and how they affect learning and concentration, is supporting the development of pupils' wellbeing effectively.

Outcomes

In March 2014, the school received a core Estyn inspection. This confirmed that the current performance of the school is excellent because:

- Nearly all pupils make good progress and achieve well and many make outstanding progress particularly in developing their literacy skills
- There is a consistent track record of high performance by pupils at the end of key stage 2 when compared with that in similar schools
- Nearly all pupils are very articulate and confident learners and can identify effectively how well they have completed tasks and what they need to do to improve their work
- The impact of the pupils' voice initiatives is considerable in promoting pupils' confidence, enjoyment of school and their enthusiasm for learning
- Rich learning experiences and highly effective teaching in all classes ensure that nearly all pupils are motivated and engaged
- The quality of assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is outstanding

The school's prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and direction for the school
- She has communicated a clear vision to staff, governors and parents about high expectations, which ensures that a relentless drive for improvement is firmly embedded into school life

- There is a strong collaborative approach to leadership throughout the school, supported by robust management structures
- There is a strong, professional learning culture among staff and the level of team-working in school improvement activities is very high
- The governing body plans strategically and supports and challenges the school very effectively

Read the full inspection report here

Case study 16

Ysgol Glan Gele, Abergele

Maintaining high standards and supporting improvement in other schools

Context

Ysgol Glan Gele is an infant school in Abergele on the north Wales coast. There are 299 pupils on roll, including 78 who attend the nursery part-time. The school has 11 classes. Approximately 33% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is well above the national average of 20%. The local authority looks after a very few pupils. The school identifies around 36% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is well above the national average. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home and a very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

Baseline assessments indicate that for a significant number of pupils, attainment upon entry is below average. However, for the last three years performance has placed the school in the top 25% of similar schools in literacy, mathematical development and personal and social development.

Estyn inspected the school in 2015 and judged its current performance and prospects for improvement as excellent. This built upon the excellent outcomes of the 2009 inspection when Estyn awarded the school grade 1 judgment in each of the seven key questions. These outcomes demonstrate that the school has maintained high standards over an extended period.

The school's improvement journey

Strategy

During the last six years, the school has concentrated on becoming a self-improving organisation by empowering staff and working as a team. It has created and achieved its vision of high expectation and standards through a culture of continuous self-improvement. Leaders have achieved this through effective and well-planned staff development and collaboration to ensure strong pedagogy and a culture of reflective practice.

In order to sustain high levels of performance, senior leaders focus on continuing to develop staff at all levels. This has ensured consistent excellent outcomes for pupils.

In addition, the school has extended its role and professional effectiveness by supporting colleagues from other schools. As a result, the quality of leadership at all levels has improved in partner schools. Leaders have also established collaborative approaches to professional learning, for example by setting up joint teaching observations with other schools. This has improved the skills of the education workforce within and beyond the school.

There is a well-established culture of visiting other schools in both Wales and England to view good practice. This is a key element of the continuous professional development of staff and has enabled the school to become a more reflective organisation. Staff collaborate with, and learn from others, regularly. All staff take part in peer observations and this helps to develop their professional skills, commitment and accountability.

Actions

From 2010 onwards, Ysgol Glan Gele received many visitors from across north Wales and beyond. The school supported other schools by:

- sharing and modelling strong pedagogical practice through the delivery of lessons for peer observation inside the classroom and in its forest and beach school outside lessons
- sharing planning models
- disseminating effective practice in classroom organisation
- providing session observations for newly qualified teachers and final year teaching students from the local university
- using learning walks inside the school and in the outdoor learning environments to share best practice
- demonstrating how to track pupils effectively to measure value added progress
- sharing good practice in book and floor book scrutiny
- disseminating best practice in nurture and pastoral support
- sharing the role and work of the area or subject leader
- professional dialogue about specific issues such as phonological development, the implementation of the literacy and numeracy framework and outdoor learning
- sharing leadership strategies with new headteachers

In 2013, the school became engaged in phase one of the Welsh Government 'Pathfinder Lead and Emerging Practitioner' project. This involved supporting a school that Estyn judged in need of special measures. This school became an 'emerging school' whilst Ysgol Glan Gele became the 'lead school'.

Initially, the headteacher from Ysgol Glan Gele spent a great deal of time at the 'emerging school' providing day-to-day leadership support and identifying areas for improvement, especially around teaching and learning. Leaders at all levels from the 'lead school' visited the 'emerging school' regularly to provide help and support for colleagues to promote better quality teaching. Staff involved included the additional learning needs co-ordinator, nursery leader, reading manager and first stage leaders, such as the higher level teaching assistants and the family liaison assistant, as well as the members of the senior leadership team. During this process staff at all levels, but especially middle leaders, developed valuable coaching and mentoring skills.

'The staff worked very closely together and a 'no holds barred' ethos was quickly established. Teachers were able to trust each other and share their strengths but more importantly, their weaknesses. The overriding effect was one of teamwork 'we're in it together'; teachers felt secure in sharing information and that they were working very much on a level playing field. The impact of this affected the professional performance of teachers in both schools and we all agreed that we had become more reflective as practitioners.' Nursery and Transition Manager from the lead school, December 2014.

The head of Ysgol Glan Gele and the commissioned head at the emerging school worked together to promote a common purpose and an understanding of the need for change amongst staff. They established trust between practitioners at both schools by investing time in the process. The collaborative skills of both headteachers improved as a result of this work and benefited both schools.

The headteachers then initiated a discussion and professional dialogue about practice, performance, outcomes, and attainment. At the same time, they involved governors to ensure that they were part of the work and understood what was happening and why another school was involved. Governors from the 'emerging school' attended governors' meetings at the 'lead school'.

Leaders from Ysgol Glan Gele undertook a programme of lesson observation at the 'emerging school'. They introduced peer observations and team teaching. This allowed them to identify priorities for improvement such as improving lesson planning, targeting interventions to meet pupils' individual needs, provision for pupils with additional learning needs and the need for a more strategic approach to address issues such as the under-performance of boys.

A robust professional dialogue with staff to evaluate the impact of professional practice on pupil outcomes and to set targets to improve their practice followed. Both headteachers convinced staff that the process was about learning together. They dealt with sensitive issues around underperformance firmly but with tact.

Impact

Leaders at both schools identified that expectations of staff and pupils had changed and that staff were more aspirational in the targets they set for themselves and for pupils. Leaders at all levels, including teaching assistants, higher-level teaching assistants and governors, developed their coaching, mentoring and collaborative skills

'Supporting another school has enhanced my knowledge and improved my pedagogical skills by ensuring that I evaluate my own teaching and develop the appropriate skills to support others. It is important that I was committed and adaptable when supporting other colleagues; I gave regular constructive feedback and often taught elements of a lesson to demonstrate a variety of strategies that can be applied to support the children's learning. I quickly established how important, honest and open professional conversations and dialogues were to improving the quality of teaching. What's more, acting as a mentor and coach increased my job satisfaction, although at times it was demanding.' Phonic Leader, December 2014.

'Being able to step outside the box and analyse each other's performance, as a teacher and leader, and having the time to discuss this with a professional colleague, impacted directly on our practice.' Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator, January 2015.

Staff within the 'lead school', especially middle leaders, became more confident and clear about moving forward. By developing their coaching skills, they made an important step on their professional journey towards leadership. Senior leaders within the 'lead school' developed their problem solving and reflective practice skills and harnessed the power of research to support their ideas thus ensuring their own practice was current and relevant. Staff from the 'lead school' developed valuable skills in feeding back to colleagues and became confident in talking about educational practice.

The expertise of the 'lead school' supported the 'emerging school' to create a leadership structure that was effective and efficient. The new senior leadership team included the headteacher, deputy headteacher and a post holder with specific responsibility for leading the implementation of the literacy and numeracy framework. This broadened the leadership base at the school and established clear lines of accountability for leaders. The senior leadership team began to work in a different way. It held regular, formal meetings to focus on key aspects of school improvement, for example to develop tracking arrangements and to develop a consistent approach to marking.

Within the leadership team of the 'emerging school', there was a clearer understanding of who was responsible for delivering key aspects of the school's work, how to monitor progress more effectively, and how to hold staff accountable for the quality of their work. Leaders worked towards meeting agreed priorities within set timescales and success criteria for improving teaching and learning.

Staff from both schools shared good practice through demonstration lessons by staff at Ysgol Glan Gele and joint development days. These evolved into team teaching lessons and collaborative coaching sessions. This work was supported further by visits to schools in Cardiff, which had excellence in teaching and learning, as judged in their Estyn Inspections.

'Having time to sit down and talk about areas of concern or areas needing development was key to the success of the programme. It was important that we were seen to be there to support staff in a non-threatening way but that we were also there to learn and develop our own skills and practices. As a senior leader, I could sense my own leadership skills developing as a coach and mentor. It helped me to analyse why my own school was effective and this clarified many things for me which I know I will put to good use when I become a head teacher myself.' Deputy headteacher, December 2014.

Joint working led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Staff had higher expectations of pupil outcomes and pupils developed a better understanding of what they had achieved and they acquired a sense of ownership of their learning.

Reflection: why it worked

- There were open and honest conversations between both headteachers and staff about the low standards that pupils achieved in the 'emerging school' and how to improve outcomes
- Staff developed a shared understanding of what constituted effective professional practice through regular and clear communication
- The partnership ensured durable change and sustainable improvement, rather than short term solutions to immediate problems
- The 'lead school' modelled good practice and enabled staff at the 'emerging school' to see how other schools worked effectively to raise standards for pupils
- Leaders analysed when and why pupils were underperforming and in which areas of the curriculum and worked together to develop effective responses
- The 'emerging school' became more systematic in the way it set, monitored and evaluated more challenging pupil performance targets
- A more robust leadership structure with clear expectations and lines of responsibility in the 'emerging school' enabled leadership roles and responsibilities to be spread more effectively

The partnership brought benefits to both schools. Standards in the 'emerging school' rose through improvements in teaching and leadership and Estyn removed the school from special measures. The schools sustained the partnership beyond the end of the project.

In the 'lead school', leadership at all levels became more effective. Through coaching and mentoring, they grew professionally and personally. By helping and supporting colleagues, leaders at all levels felt that they too had received high quality professional development that increased their knowledge of best practice.

By reflecting on the practice of others, other staff improved their own practice and the quality of their work as practitioners.

Read the full inspection report [here](#)

Case study 17

Ysgol Gynradd Brynaman, Brynaman

Sustaining high performance through inspiring leaders at all levels to be accountable for their responsibilities

Context

Ysgol Gynradd Brynaman is in the village of Brynaman, Carmarthenshire. It has 282 pupils on roll, including 48 full-time nursery children. About 57% of pupils speak Welsh at home. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 21% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is slightly above the national average for Wales.

Estyn has inspected the school twice since 2009. It was judged as 'outstanding' in all of the seven key questions in 2009. The school has maintained its very high standards, as reflected in its most recent inspection of June 2015, where it was judged as 'excellent' in all areas.

The school's journey to sustain high performance

Strategic aims

Following the school's outstanding Estyn inspection in 2009, the leadership team were tasked with maintaining the high standards achieved. Focusing on the quality of the teachers and the learning they provide was central to the school's success. The positive steps taken by the headteacher to attract, appoint, develop, support and retain good leaders and teachers are central to the school's strategic vision and integral to the effective learning within the whole school community.

The school's strategic aims are based on:

- leaders and staff managing the high quality provision successfully, so that all pupils achieve to the best of their ability
- maintaining excellent leadership and ensuring that the school's work is at the forefront of best practice
- ensuring that leadership throughout the school is effective and has a positive effect on all aspects of provision, but especially the quality of teaching
- sharing the school's excellent practice with other schools across the regional consortium and Wales

Actions

The school's leadership structure makes all staff accountable within the school community. All leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They perform their duties particularly well to ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils at all times. Leaders ensure that changes in local and national initiatives, strategies, methodology and philosophy do not hinder or affect the effectiveness of everyday teaching and learning. The school introduces changes sensibly so that they do not burden teachers with any additional workload. Leaders streamline current practices successfully to accommodate changes, rather than add to these practices and routines, which might deflect teachers from their main purpose of raising pupils' standards through high quality and consistent teaching.

All staff roles have clear links to leadership levels, which promotes effective communication and staff engagement through collaborative working and accountability. All staff have a voice as leaders and can negotiate and influence improvements at all levels within the school community. The clear communication between staff creates a positive, open and vibrant community where all staff are valued, are responsible for their actions and are accountable to each other.

Leaders set very clear and high expectations for all staff. This ensures that all staff collaborate well to ensure that maintaining high quality teaching is central to the school's ethos. All staff understand that teaching must be consistent and effective in

order to have a maximum effect on pupils' standards and progress. In-house continuous professional development and mentoring, filming each other teach and maintaining an open dialogue regarding teaching and learning allows teachers to reflect regularly on their practice and to discuss strengths and areas for development objectively. The process ensures the effective sharing and reflection on best practice in attaining high pupil outcomes.

There is a clear self-evaluation system where everyone has a voice on school improvement. Pupils contribute regularly to the improvement process, for example through the opportunity of submitting daily views to the headteacher in the pupil evaluation area in the school foyer. All staff ensure that there is a continuous evaluation of progress against development plans. This includes detailed, regular analysis of pupil performance data, successful observations on the impact of teaching on learning, purposeful scrutiny of pupils' work by school staff and governors and reliable evaluations of curriculum planning and assessment. This evaluative process ensures accurate moderations of teacher assessments. The school takes good account of the views of parents and carers through daily opportunities for discussions and feedback between parents and staff.

Structured plans address areas for improvement selectively, in small stages, with clear objectives, success criteria and realistic timescales. This ensures that leaders and staff have the capacity to implement plans very successfully.

Leaders ensure that the personal and professional development of staff is a priority. This includes developing leaders at different levels to carry out effective classroom observations and evaluating their own work and that of others. This creates a sustainable culture of improvement, through sharing responsibilities and accountability and develops teachers' skills effectively. Leaders recognise success amongst staff and effort is encouraged and acknowledged. Leadership tasks match staff's specific strengths. This sustains motivation and has a positive effect on pupil outcomes. The focus is always on involving staff members to improve the quality of provision to ensure that all pupils are stimulated and challenged significantly both inside the school and in the outdoor environment.

Leadership tasks include, for example, improving pupils' learning experiences, developing their self-assessment and peer assessment practices, promoting pupils' understanding of their own and others' care and wellbeing and the development of an imaginative learning environment. Such tasks support pupils to achieve highly across the school. Leaders praise enterprise constantly and encourage innovation from all staff. They ensure that new initiatives do not overburden teachers and affect the quality and impact of their teaching. New initiatives take the place of existing aspects of the school's practice, rather than adding to them. This leadership style ensures that teaching is the core element of the school's daily activities.

Leaders enable everyone involved in school life to identify, monitor and evaluate the school's performance successfully. As a result, the school has a particularly well developed understanding of its many strengths and the areas it would like to improve further. Leaders and staff work positively to develop an ethos of sharing and taking joint responsibility, using individual strengths and competencies to ensure the greatest effect. For example, ICT responsibilities have changed regularly over the

last few areas as staff changes have ensured better expertise. The school has developed a worthwhile staff charter that sets a useful guideline and robust structure in order to ensure that systems place a definite focus on improving pupils' wellbeing and standards, by managing staff time very efficiently. As a result, leaders, staff and governors have very high expectations of themselves, each other and of pupils' standards of achievement.

Impact

The use of focus groups to target pupils according to their current abilities has improved the numbers of pupils attaining outcome 5 and 6 in the Foundation Phase. The proportion of pupils attaining outcome 6 usually compares favourably in comparison with levels in other similar schools.

In key stage 2, the leaders' insistence on funding additional teachers to sustain the focus group provision in the core subjects has improved pupils' end of key stage results considerably over time. As a result, the school's performance is normally very good in comparison with that in other similar schools.

Implementing school-to-school working to raise expectations

The school shares its highly effective practice with schools and other organisations across Wales. This includes the work of the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and governors. Examples include:

- the dissemination of pupils' work and methods of assessing their own learning to other schools as models of excellent practice
- the effectiveness of corporate teaching strategies that provide maximum levels of value added performance from pupils' starting points
- structured and skill led curriculum planning that challenges all pupils significantly and supports them to make very good progress overall
- the innovative self-evaluation systems that improve the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes consistently
- the effectiveness of the governing body in challenging leaders to secure high standards in teaching and learning consistently
- the school's arrangements to manage teachers' workloads whilst improving the impact of teaching on pupil outcomes

Inspection outcomes

The school's inspection by Estyn in June 2015 confirmed that:

'The school's current performance is excellent because:

- Most pupils make very good progress from their starting point and recall previous learning and acquire new information, understanding and skills successfully
- Most pupils' speaking and listening skills are excellent
- Nearly all pupils show pride in their written work and, almost without exception, present their work neatly, with mature handwriting and polished presentation

- Most pupils write for a range of purposes very effectively and write in various forms across the curriculum successfully
- Nearly all pupils with additional learning needs make good progress in relation to their targets in their individual education plan, and many of them make progress above that which is expected
- Most pupils of higher ability attain very high standards in their literacy and numeracy skills
- Nearly all pupils apply themselves fully to their tasks by showing exceptional enthusiasm, and co-operate harmoniously and very maturely and keep diligently to the task over extended periods
- There are excellent standards of behaviour and self-discipline in lessons and around the school, which makes a considerable contribution to creating a desirable ethos that promotes effective learning
- Teachers and assistants co-operate successfully in order to plan flexible, responsive and innovative learning programmes that ensure that pupils receive an especially good range of high quality learning experiences
- The quality of learning is consistently high across the school

'Prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- The school's leadership is innovative and ensures very effective provision and a consistent culture of raising standards
- There is strong leadership, which focuses robustly on ensuring teaching of a high standard, which has an obvious and positive effect on pupils' outcomes
- Leaders, staff and governors have very high expectations of themselves, each other and of pupils' standards of achievement
- There is very effective co-operation among staff, and they work positively to develop an ethos of sharing and taking joint responsibility
- Leaders use individual members of staff's strengths and competencies to ensure the greatest effect
- The school's self-evaluation processes are very effective, which enables the school to identify, monitor and evaluate its performance extremely successfully, and, as a result, the school knows itself thoroughly
- Leaders identify priorities for improvement that are wholly suitable for the school's needs, and pay the utmost attention to pupils' outcomes
- The capacity and ability of leaders and staff to make improvements and implement plans are especially good
- Leaders make very effective use of money from other sources to improve provision'

Read the full inspection report here

Appendix: Evidence base

This thematic survey draws on visits to 27 primary schools across Wales that have improved from very different starting points, including schools that have required follow-up after a full Estyn inspection, and schools that have sustained good or excellent performance over time. The school visits took place in the autumn term 2015. In these visits to schools, inspectors:

- interviewed senior leaders, middle leaders, class teachers, learning support staff and pupils to capture all aspects of the school's unique improvement journey
- scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, staffing structure, job descriptions, and continuous professional development records
- scrutinised samples of pupils' work and analysed school performance data

Additional evidence was drawn from:

- primary school inspections from September 2010 to July 2015

List of schools visited

Deighton Primary School, Blaenau Gwent
Wat's Dyke Community Primary School, Wrexham
Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Y Friog, Gwynedd
Tonnau Community Primary School, Neath Port Talbot
St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Cardiff
Maes-Y-Coed Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Deri View Primary School, Monmouthshire
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Rhos Afan, Neath Port Talbot
Ysgol Dyffryn Iâl, Denbighshire
Ystrad Mynach Primary School, Caerphilly
Hawarden Village Voluntary Aided Church in Wales Primary School, Flintshire
Craig Yr Hesg Primary School, Glyncoch, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Tavernspite School, Pembrokeshire
Templeton School, Pembrokeshire
Parkland Primary School, Swansea
High Cross Primary School, Newport
Ysgol Gynradd Dolau, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Glasllwch Primary School, Newport
Ysgol Glan Gele, Conwy
Ysgol Gynradd Brynaman, Carmarthenshire
Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School, Torfaen
Treowen Community Primary School, Powys
Gladstone Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan
Cilgerran Church In Wales VC, Pembrokeshire
Ysgol Gynradd Chwilog, Gwynedd
Ysgol Yr Hendre, Gwynedd
Ysgol Min Y Ddôl, Wrexham

Explanation of words and phrases used to describe our evaluations

Nearly all	With very few exceptions
Most	**90% or more**
Many	**70% or more**
A majority	**Over 60%**
Around a half	**Close to 50%**
A minority	**Below 40%**
Few	**Below 20%**
Very few	**Below 10%**

References

Estyn (2013) *Twelve secondary school improvement journeys.* Cardiff: Estyn. [Online]. Available from: http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/twelve-secondary-school-improvement-journeys-december-2013 [Accessed 29 March 2016]

Estyn (2015) *Best practice in leadership development in schools.* Cardiff: Estyn. [Online]. Available from: http://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Best%20practice%20in%20leadership%20development%20in%20schools.pdf [Accessed 29 March 2016]

Great Britain (2005) *Education Act 2005.* Section 44. London: The Stationery Office Ltd. [Online]. Available from: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/pdfs/ukpga_20050018_en.pdf [Accessed 29 March 2016]