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# Evaluation of Recruit, Recover, and Raise Standards & Early Years Programmes

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Evaluation of Recruit, Recover, and Raise Standards & Early  
Years Programmes  
Final Report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## Glossary

Key Word	Definition
Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	<p>(1) A person has additional learning needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability (whether the learning difficulty or disability arises from a medical condition or otherwise) which calls for additional learning provision.</p> <p>(2) A child of compulsory school age or person over that age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she—</p> <p>(a) has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or</p> <p>(b) has a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities for education or training of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream maintained schools or mainstream institutions in the further education sector.</p> <p>(3) A child under compulsory school age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she is, or would be if no additional learning provision were made, likely to be within subsection (2) when of compulsory school age.</p> <p>(4) A person does not have a learning difficulty or disability solely because the language (or form of language) in which he or she is or will be taught is different from a language (or form of language) which is or has been used at home.</p>
Care Inspectorate Wales (CiW)	A Welsh Government agency responsible for registering and inspecting childcare settings and other services in Wales.
Children Looked After (CLA)	'Children looked after' or 'looked after children' refers to children who are looked after by local authorities in Wales.

	<p>A child is a person who is aged under 18. Section 74 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act states that a child who is looked after by a local authority is a child who is in its care; or provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, by the authority in the exercise of any functions which are social services functions, apart from functions under section 15, Part 4, or section 109, 114 or 115.</p>
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	<p>Training and other activities undertaken over the course of one's professional career.</p>
Education Improvement Grant (EIG)	<p>EIG is a funding programme designed to help Welsh schools and funded non-maintained nursery settings* in fulfilling requirements related to staff-to-learner ratios for 3-7 year olds, Covid-19 distancing requirements, and the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.</p> <p>*the additional funding, extended it to childcare setting, for only year only</p>
Education other than at school (EOTAS)	<p>EOTAS is education provision to meet specific needs of pupils who, for whatever reason, cannot attend a mainstream or special school. In law, local authorities are responsible for providing these services.</p>
Education Workforce Council (EWC)	<p>An independent body responsible for regulating teachers and learning support staff in Welsh schools and further education institutions.</p>
Early years (EY) sector	<p>Supports children from birth to seven years old. The early years sector encompasses a range of services for young children, including education, health, and social care.</p>
Early Years Wales (EYW)	<p>A large, membership-based umbrella organisation support the early years sector in Wales.</p>
Foundation Phase Nursery (FPN)	<p>The Foundation Phase was the developmental curriculum for three- to seven-year-olds in Wales. With the introduction of Curriculum for Wales in the 2022/23 school year, Foundation Phase has been phased out and is referred to as "foundation</p>

	learning.” FPN referred to learners aged 3-4 years old.
Free School Meals (FSM)	Up until September 2022, certain learners in Wales, including those whose parents receive various support payments such as Universal Credit, qualified to receive FSM. Wales has since begun a gradual rollout of Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) to all primary school learners, to be completed by 2024. FSM eligibility is often used as a proxy indicator for poverty.
Full-time equivalent (FTE)	Staff who are employed part-time can be expressed as a full-time equivalent for data and comparison purposes. This is calculated by dividing an employee’s number of weekly work hours by the number of hours in a full-time week for that employer.
Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA)	HLTA status allows a teaching assistant to take on responsibilities beyond a teaching assistant’s normal work. They “complement the professional work of teachers for agreed learning activities under an agreed system of supervision. This may involve planning, preparing and delivering learning activities for individuals/groups or short term for whole class.” <sup>1</sup>
General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)	A qualification undertaken by students between 14 and 16 years old in the UK.
Key stage (KS)	Wales’ national curriculum is divided into key stages based on a learner’s age. KS1 spans ages five to seven, KS2 from ages seven to 11, KS3 from 11 to 14, and KS4 from 14 to 16 years of age.
Maintained sector	Schools that are funded and controlled by the local education authority.
Childcare sector	Childcare settings are independent from the local authority, requiring families to pay fees separately. Childcare settings can be funded and approved to provide nursery education (funded non-maintained nursery settings), or non-funded. Non-funded

<sup>1</sup> [School support staff, Hwb Website](#)



	settings do not provide nursery education, though they must align with its pedagogical principles in line with National Minimum Standards.
Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT)	A teacher who has finished their initial teacher training and is in their first year of teaching. NQTs complete further training in tandem with their teaching responsibilities before receiving their full qualification.
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	A forum for collaboration between 37 democratic countries with market-based economies.
Pupil Development Grant (PDG)	An annual Welsh Government grant for pupils whose families have lower-incomes, or who are looked after by the local authority, or in education other than at school (EOTAS).
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	A type of alternative educational setting catering to learners who cannot attend mainstream schools for a number of reasons, including permanent exclusion due to behavioural or emotional difficulties, school refusal, or specific types of additional learning needs.
Regional Consortia/partnerships	Wales has five regional education Consortia/partnerships which act on behalf of groups of local authorities to coordinate cross-regional projects related to education.
Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS)	A Welsh Government funding programme launched in August 2020 to support schools and settings in response to the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic by increasing staff capacity. This additional capacity was designed to provide additional temporary support for priority learners to enable them to re-engage with the school system, achieve the progression that they are entitled to, and rebuild confidence and learning capability.
<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>Definition</b>
DfE	Department for Education, England
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
SLC	Speech, Language, and Communication
TA	Teaching Assistant

ToC	Theory of Change
WG	Welsh Government

# **1. Introduction/Background**

## **1.1 Background**

1.1.1 Since March 2020 education in Wales has faced major upheaval as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Learners in schools and childcare settings have had their education and development, disrupted by lockdowns, the adoption of new ways of working, and social distancing. Staff in schools and funded childcare settings have faced incredible pressures whilst attempting to deliver education to the necessary standards. Absences from education settings as a direct result of Covid-19 continue to affect the sector adding to the impact of lockdowns on learner and staff wellbeing and academic progress.

## **1.2 RRRS**

1.2.1 The Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS<sup>2</sup>) Programme was launched in August 2020 to support schools by increasing staff capacity. This additional capacity was designed to provide additional temporary support for priority learners to enable them to reengage with the school system, achieve the progression that they are entitled to, and rebuild confidence and learning capability. In the 2020/21 financial year £59.1m, including £3m for childcare settings delivering early education, was distributed followed by £68.9m in 2021/22 (£4.9m of which for childcare settings). By July 2022, a total of £165.5m had been distributed to schools and non-funded nursery settings.

1.2.2 Fifty per cent of a school's allocation of RRRS is based on the total number of pupils and fifty per cent is based on specific priority groups. The definition of priority groups for RRRS has evolved in an evidence-

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout RRRS is used to refer to the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards Programme. EY funding refers to the additional grant for Early Years education administered through the EIG. RRRS&EY refers to both programmes together.

based way since the initial grant allocation, and has included at different points:

- learners in year 1; learners in year 7; learners in year 11;
- learners in Welsh medium education;
- learners with LA statements of Additional Learning Needs;
- number of children eligible for free school meals (eFSM);
- number of pupils from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities,
- number of Gypsy Roma & traveller children in the school

1.2.3 In the 2020/21 academic year the maximum allocation per school was capped at £150,000. In 2021/22 and 2022/23 this cap was £125,000.

### **1.3 Early Education**

1.3.1 To provide further support to learners in early education (ages 3-7 years) an additional grant of £13m was made available and administered through the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) in the 2021/22 academic year.<sup>3</sup> £10m of this funding was available to maintained settings (schools with classes for Nursery to Year 2) and funded non-maintained nursery settings (childcare settings that are funded, by the local authority, to provide nursery education). £3m was available to wider childcare settings, including childminders, that do not provide nursery education but are expected (as outlined in the National Minimum Standards<sup>4</sup>) to understand and apply the pedagogical principles of early education in their provision.

### **1.4 Evaluation rationale**

1.4.1 The overarching aim of this evaluation was to provide evidence to inform decisions about the ongoing response of the Welsh

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<sup>3</sup> Since September 2022, the Foundation Phase has been replaced by the Curriculum for Wales which has a continuum of learning ages 3-16. This report refers to early education for learners aged 3-7 years

<sup>4</sup> [National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare | GOV.WALES](#)

Government in supporting schools and childcare settings to recover from the disruptive impacts of COVID-19 on learning and wellbeing. Specifically, this includes providing insight into the implementation of the programmes to:

- identify the different approaches adopted by schools/childcare settings/LAs/regions/partnerships
- assess the approaches that are/were most effective in their relative contexts
- demonstrate the value of the programme and investment
- Provide evidence on the impact of funding on learners, enabling future bids to be focused more directly at areas of needs and/or approaches that are most effective.

## **1.5 Report structure**

1.5.1 This report is the main output of the evaluation of the RRRS&EY programmes. The report is centred around the evaluation aims outlined by Welsh Government in the tender specification and is structured as follows:

- Section 2 presents the key findings and recommendations.
- Section 3 outlines the methodological approach undertaken throughout the course of the evaluation.
- Section 4 explores what is known to work with regards to supporting education from relevant literature, and describes approaches taken in other nations to dealing with the challenges of Covid-19.
- Section 5 sets out the Theory of Change underpinning the RRRS&EY.
- Section 6 describes and assesses the implementation of the grants.
- Section 7 contains lessons learned for future delivery.

## 2. Key findings and recommendations

2.1.1 From a review of international literature, the most effective ways of supporting learners, children and young people, focus on four areas:

- Learning
  - Effective practice is to focus learning interventions on small groups and tutoring. For content, learner progression is best achieved by filling specific gaps so that learners can continue to learn age-appropriate materials rather than “re-teaching” missed topics in their entirety.
- Holistic approaches
  - Inclusion of all learners requires targeting support deliberately for specific learning and socio-emotional needs, with attention to equity. Wellbeing and readiness to learn are fundamental areas.
- Equity
  - Focused funding and resources on more vulnerable groups of students. There is some evidence for overall effectiveness of spending at early education (but not necessarily in a short-term/pandemic context).
- Workforce
  - Encouraging practitioners, schools and childcare settings to collaborate and share best practice/resources with other schools, childcare settings, government departments of all levels, and organisations. Investing in education workforce is important to the development and resilience of education systems through growing, retaining, and the provision of ongoing training for the workforce.

2.1.2 Monitoring survey data from 993 schools in Wales indicates RRRS&EY has increased staff capacity, with an estimated **2,452 FTE**<sup>5</sup> increase across all schools in Wales to January 2022. Of the

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<sup>5</sup> See section 6.6.1

increased capacity, 62.2 percent are support staff and 29.9 per cent are teachers. On average each school who responded had gained 1.05 FTE support staff member, and a 0.5 FTE teacher. Welsh medium schools are slightly more likely to spend on teachers' hours (1 FTE teacher per 1.5 FTE support staff) than English medium schools (1 FTE teacher per 2.4 FTE support staff). Data are for schools only as childcare settings were not included in the monitoring exercise.

- 2.1.3 The most common interventions delivered to learners in schools have focused on literacy (91.2 per cent of schools) and wellbeing (85.9 per cent of schools).
- 2.1.4 There is not yet any consistent data on the impact of RRRS&EY on literacy, numeracy & digital competence and the development of independent learning skills. Qualitative feedback suggests that wellbeing support has been the most effective and the most useful in tackling the issues in learning caused by Covid-19.
- 2.1.5 Schools and childcare settings reported that learner's Welsh language skills have been particularly affected and is often a secondary issue to address as priority focus was given to addressing fundamental learning behaviours.
- 2.1.6 Pupil referral units (PRUs) and special schools have reported the lowest levels of disruption to learner development and progress compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- 2.1.7 According to interviews with schools and childcare settings children in early education (3-7 year olds) have shown lower levels of speech, language and communication (SLC) ability when entering both maintained (schools and nurseries) and non-maintained (childcare, including childminders) settings compared to pre-pandemic capabilities.
- 2.1.8 Despite encouragement in WG guidance, collaboration amongst schools and amongst childcare settings up to the start of the 2022/23 academic year has been limited due to social distancing restrictions.

There is no universal approach to strategic collaboration involving local authorities (LAs), Regional Consortia/partnerships, and other education partners. Amounts of collaboration varied across Wales.

2.1.9 Key factors found to maximise the impact of RRRS&EY funding are:

- A deliberate focus wellbeing support.
- A clear vision in the school, childcare setting, or LA at the outset for the aim of the additional capacity.
- Targeting support and understanding to specific groups.
- Delivering interventions to groups of a single class size or smaller.
- Working to increase capacity of staff compared to upskilling existing staff.

2.1.10 School size plays the largest role in determining the amount of funding received with the smallest settings limited in options available with their grant amounts. For this reason, schools and childcare settings in urban areas are more likely to receive larger amounts. Rural settings are both smaller, and so receive smaller amounts, and are more geographically spread, creating barriers to cluster working.

2.1.11 The difference in availability of additional staff between urban (more available) and rural areas (less available) is more of a concern to LA stakeholders, schools, and childcare settings, than funding amounts.

2.1.12 For all types of setting across Wales, staff who can teach in the medium of Welsh, and teachers of Welsh as a subject in English medium schools are more difficult to recruit. This is leading to concern amongst LA stakeholders around teaching quality for Welsh language in English medium schools, and across subject areas in Welsh medium schools.

2.1.13 The guidance for RRRS&EY has been well received by stakeholders. Stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation reported it has been consistently clear, setting out the purpose for the grants and the boundaries for spending. The flexibility the guidance allowed at local



levels has enabled schools, settings and LAs to address their needs with the resources they have available.

**Table 2.1: Recommendations**

<b>1</b>	Continue to focus on addressing need, as defined at a school and childcare setting level in combination with national level priorities.
<b>2</b>	Continue to adopt holistic approaches and maximising use of multi-agency approaches to fully meet the needs of 3-7 year olds.
<b>3</b>	Continue support for early education and childcare outside of schools, including non-funded, non-maintained childcare settings.
<b>4</b>	Continue to allow flexible delivery at the school and childcare setting level to address needs in the effective way with the additional capacity available.
<b>5</b>	Continue to use the clear style of guidance.
<b>6</b>	Provide schools and childcare settings with more information in advance of receiving the funding to enable them to plan longer term.
<b>7</b>	Specify any training provided by the grants is to increase staff capacity with learners, not just upskill the existing workforce
<b>8</b>	Link more closely with other initiatives to increase staff numbers. For example, programmes that support entry into the workforces of the childcare and school sectors.
<b>9</b>	WG and LA to encourage collaboration and cluster working at school and childcare levels.
<b>10</b>	Explore the possibility of establishing a minimum grant allocation.
<b>11</b>	Consider additional weighting on grant calculations for the rurality of settings.
<b>12</b>	Consider using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation instead of FSM eligibility as a measure of need.
<b>13</b>	Establish a national tool for consistent measurement of local needs outside of the priority cohorts so that grant allocations can support all needs effectively.
<b>14</b>	Ensure robust data collection by introducing universal monitoring for schools and childcare settings of the amount of additional capacity, recorded as FTE, number of staff, and area of learning they are deployed to.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Approach**

3.1.1 Welsh Government set out five aims for the evaluations of both RRRS and EY grants. These aims were:

- Carry out a literature review, building on recently published reviews, to set out what is known about what works in recovery and dependencies with other school/childcare support packages.
- Articulate evidence-based expectations about how the RRRS&EY Programmes will support schools/childcare settings & learners to recover and the assumptions (including barriers and facilitators) that underpin these to aid future monitoring and evaluation and recovery planning.
- Learn from the implementation of the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards Programme and early evidence about its reach and effectiveness.
- Understand what further support is required.
- Understand the critical elements that a future monitoring and evaluation approach needs to include.

3.1.2 These aims were further broken down into a total of 45 research questions (see Annex B). To fulfil these aims, the evaluation pursued a two-phase approach. Phase One constituted an extensive scoping exercise, engaging with many of the relevant stakeholder groups to gain a high-level understanding of RRRS&EY, its context, and key themes. This resulted in the development of the Theory of Change, evaluation and sampling frameworks, and the research materials for Phase Two. Phase One concluded with an internal interim report for the steering group.

3.1.3 Phase Two contained the majority of the fieldwork for the evaluation, consisting of in-depth qualitative interviews with stakeholders. In total 100 stakeholders were contacted in Wales and six stakeholders

across government bodies in England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Welsh stakeholders were:

- 51 x schools and childcare settings
  - One-on-one conversations with school heads or childcare leads.
- Welsh Government
  - Six representatives across three conversations
- 30 x local authorities
  - 20 one-on-one conversations with Directors of Education and 10 one-on-ones with Early Years' managers where education in childcare does not come under the Director of Education.
- 3 x Regional Consortia
  - 3 x one-on-one conversations.
- 1 x education partnership
  - One-on-one conversation
- ESTYN
  - One-on-one conversation
- Education Workforce Council (EWC)
  - One-on-one conversation
- 4 x childcare umbrella organisations
  - 4 x one-on-one conversations
- 3 x trade unions
  - 1 x one-on-one, 1 x group with two unions present.

3.1.4 All meetings were arranged via email and conducted virtually using MS Teams. Contacts across Welsh Government, ESTYN, EWC, childcare umbrella organisations, local authorities, trade unions, and other UK nations, were identified by Welsh Government or the RRRS steering group.

3.1.5 Schools and childcare settings were chosen by the evaluation team with a deliberate sample for a representative data set that reflected contexts from across Wales.

3.1.6 The sample divided Wales into four geographic areas. Education settings were defined by type; non-maintained and non-funded childcare, maintained nursery, primary, secondary, and special schools, and pupil referral units (PRUs). They were sorted into quartiles according to the amount of funding received<sup>6</sup> and further sorted by language medium. Eleven schools and five childcare settings engaged with were Welsh medium or bilingual. Two schools were English medium with significant Welsh language.<sup>7</sup> Care was taken to include a range of other factors including percentage of learners who receive free school meals, percentage of learners with additional learning needs, governance types<sup>8</sup>, and other school needs.

3.1.7 In total the evaluation interviewed:

- 13 secondary school head teachers
- 20 primary school head teachers
- 12 non-maintained childcare settings' leads (8 full day care, 4 sessional care, 2 are not funded to deliver nursery education)
- 3 special school head teachers
- 3 PRU teachers in charge<sup>9</sup>

3.1.8 The eleven case studies in this report were selected from this sample and further information was collected to complete each profile.

3.1.9 In early 2022 a monitoring survey was designed by Welsh Government and the draft questions were reviewed by the evaluation team (Annex C). This survey was distributed by Welsh Government to all schools in Wales to gather data on the implementation of the RRRS grant. The survey was not provided to childcare settings so

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<sup>6</sup> On a pan-Wales basis.

<sup>7</sup> [Defining schools according to Welsh medium provision | GOV.WALES](#) new non-statutory guidance has been published (Dec 2021) [Written Statement: Guidance on School categories according to Welsh-medium provision \(16 December 2021\) | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>8</sup> Diocese and local authorities

<sup>9</sup> The teacher in charge is responsible for the internal organisation, management and control of the PRU, and for advising on and implementing the strategic plan. In particular, teachers in charge need to formulate aims and objectives, policies and targets for the management committee and the LA to consider adopting. [Pupil referral unit management committees: guidance | GOV.WALES](#)

there is no data from this for childcare settings. 993 schools returned the survey and the results were analysed by the evaluation team.

3.1.10 The respondents to the monitoring survey were:

- 821 primary schools
- 130 secondary schools
- 16 3-16 schools
- 16 special schools
- 7 PRUs
- 3 Education other than at school (EOTAS) providers

3.1.11 By area the number of respondents were

- Central South Regional Consortium (CSC) 258
- Southeast Regional Consortium (EAS) 167
- North Wales Regional Consortium (GWE) 268
- Mid Wales Partnership 73
- Y Partneriaeth 171
- Neath Port Talbot<sup>10</sup> 56

3.1.12 This report contains the findings from phase one and phase two of the research.

## **3.2 Limitations and challenges**

3.2.1 As much of the fieldwork with schools and childcare settings is qualitative, sample sizes for some contextual factors are small. It is not then possible to draw quantitative conclusions for each priority group set out in each grant allocation (see section 1.3).

3.2.2 Welsh medium and bilingual settings have been conflated by this research, despite that not all learners in bilingual settings will receive education through the medium of Welsh. This was done to ensure representation of Welsh medium education across other factors,

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<sup>10</sup> Neath Port Talbot LA is not part of a Regional Consortia or education partnership

including amount of funding received. This approach is also in line with the approach for school census data.<sup>11</sup>

- 3.2.3 There is a lack of comparable data at the individual school, childcare setting, and local authority level to make firm quantitative assessments of some of the impacts of the grants. This is particularly the case for childcare settings, and the EIG-administered grant in schools. This has resulted in this report focusing on qualitative findings and for some findings, a greater focus on schools compared to childcare settings where quantitative data is available.
- 3.2.4 Phase two fieldwork ran over an extended period from March 2022 until October 2022, as difficulties in recruiting the required sample created challenges for interviews with schools and childcare settings. The primary cause for this was the ongoing disruption caused by Covid-19. Delays and unavailability of staff for meetings were attributed to staff absences, Covid-19 outbreaks in individual schools and settings, the pressures of the first GCSE exams since 2019 (for secondary schools) and the return to year 6 transition activities (for primary schools). A secondary cause for delays was a reluctance from some schools and settings to take part, with a feeling that their own approaches to the funding were being assessed, rather than their views contributing to the evaluation at a national level. The sample was only completed once further messaging directly from Welsh Government to clarify the purpose of evaluation was received by target settings.

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<sup>11</sup> [Schools census \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/schools-census)

## 4. What works and approaches in other nations

### 4.1 What Works: Education

- 4.1.1 International research into the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on equality and inclusion in education emphasises the importance of taking a holistic approach to supporting learners and their readiness to learn.<sup>12</sup>
- 4.1.2 Funding and resources should be targeted towards specific groups of more disadvantaged learners and their learning needs. This is because learners with diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds and those from historically marginalised communities are less likely to receive the support they need at home.<sup>13</sup>
- 4.1.3 Targeting support on specific groups of more disadvantaged learners has been found to be effective in promoting an equitable recovery, as has concentrating spending on early education and younger learners.<sup>14</sup>
- 4.1.4 Evidence from the US context shows that traditional strategies, including hold learners back a year or repeating key parts of the curriculum prove ineffective. In comparison strategies such as acceleration (focusing on teaching only what must be learned, at a given level, with an emphasis on skills to access knowledge), micro-teaching (focusing on small groups, with learning occurring in small chunks in a short timeframe), and tutoring (one-on-one or small group, tutoring can be considered an example of micro-teaching) are

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<sup>12</sup> [OECD, "The impact of COVID-19 on student equity and inclusion: Supporting vulnerable students during school closures and school re-openings," Nov 2020](#)

<sup>13</sup> "School closures have a very real impact on all students, but especially on the most vulnerable ones who are more likely to face additional barriers. Children and youth from low-income and single-parent families; immigrant, refugee, ethnic minority and Indigenous backgrounds; with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations; and those with special education needs suffer by being deprived of physical learning opportunities, social and emotional support available in schools and extra services such as school meals." [OECD, "The impact of COVID-19 on student equity and inclusion: Supporting vulnerable students during school closures and school re-openings," November 2020](#)

<sup>14</sup> [OECD, "Ten Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery from COVID," 2021; Save Our Future, "Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children"](#)

showing success in helping mitigate the disruption caused by the pandemic.<sup>15</sup>

- 4.1.5 What is more, countries should strengthen their approaches to secure responsive and robust data collection and analysis. Education systems need up-to-date, high-quality information on learning and learner wellbeing to enable the agile, effective targeting of support. This is especially important in the context of unprecedented disruptions, which require simultaneously identifying and implementing best practice.<sup>16</sup>
- 4.1.6 Finally, attention to the education workforce has been found to be an important part of strong education systems and is forming a key element of many European nations' responses to pandemic disruption.<sup>17</sup> This can mean ensuring teaching staff are supported with proper guidance and evidence of effective strategies for resuming progress after the disruption from Covid-19, so they are prepared to adapt to learner need. It is also important to make sure teachers and staff are supported in developing and maintaining relationships with families and learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These social relationships underpin the success of other strategies, especially in the context of remote learning and the use of technology.<sup>18</sup>

## **4.2 What Works: Early Education**

- 4.2.1 Holistic, child-centred strategies are advised in the early years sector. There is evidence for a focus on eliminating inequality and improving

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<sup>15</sup> [UNESCO, "Don't remediate, accelerate! Effective catch-up learning strategies: evidence from the United States," 2020](#)

<sup>16</sup> [OECD, "Ten Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery from COVID," 2021](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Save Our Future, "Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children" ; European Commission, "Pathways to School Success," 2022](#)

<sup>18</sup> [OECD, "Learning remotely when schools close: How well are students and schools prepared? Insights from PISA," 3 April, 2020](#)



the welfare of families to make an impact on young children.<sup>19</sup> This may require cross-sector working between government agencies and schools and childcare settings to ensure resources are well-coordinated and effective strategies are developed to streamline support.<sup>20</sup> The safety and mental and physical wellbeing of parents and caregivers is especially important for the youngest children, while additional attention should also be paid to protecting the children themselves from adverse childhood experiences. A whole-systems, integrated approach is recommended to ensure children can access any forms of social protection or social services that are available.<sup>21</sup>

4.2.2 Overall, across the globe, pre-primary and early education settings tended to close for a smaller proportion of the Covid-19 pandemic than primary and secondary schools.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, the pandemic catalysed a global rethinking of how digital technology could be used in education and childcare settings for the youngest learners. During the pandemic, digital tools were used for sharing information and providing materials, including for parents to then use “offline” with their young children, as the challenges of remote learning differ according to each young learner. Eighty per cent of countries with available data had less than an hour each day of real-time, interactive activities while closed. A lack of, or reduced access to digital technology for families from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds exacerbated existing inequalities. When there are challenges to using digital tools, such as access, younger learners are more easily left behind.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Adrijana Visnjic-Jevtic et al., “Policies and practices of early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives from five countries,” *Journal of Childhood, Education, & Society*, 2021; “Strategic Guidelines to Prioritize Early Childhood Development in the COVID-19 Response,” UNICEF, 2020 [Early Childhood Development and Learning During Crisis \(COVID-19\) | UNICEF](#)

<sup>20</sup> [UK Department for Education, “School Recovery Strategies: Year 1 findings,” Jan 2022](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Early Childhood Development and Learning During Crisis \(COVID-19\) | UNICEF](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Using Digital Technologies for Early Education during COVID-19,” OECD, 2021](#)

<sup>23</sup> Adrijana Visnjic-Jevtic et al., “Policies and practices of early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives from five countries,” *Journal of Childhood, Education, & Society*, 2021

- 4.2.3 As a result, three-quarters of countries surveyed by the OECD have changed the way they use technology in their early education systems since the first lockdowns in 2020.<sup>24</sup> Countries' revised approaches are prioritising training for early years professionals and access to digital tools designed specifically for the youngest learners. These are renewed efforts to address the risks of the reliance on digital tools for younger learners whilst maintaining approaches that are based on digital tools.
- 4.2.4 Workforce development more generally has been a key focus of pandemic response in the sector. Staff recruitment and retention had been a problem in many countries prior to the pandemic and the scale of the issue continues to grow.<sup>25</sup> Ensuring current and prospective early years staff have and understand options for professional progression is important. Salaries and benefits should differ according to job role, but all should provide a minimum basis sufficient for cost of living and should cover preparation and planning time in addition to time spent directly interacting with learners.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Using Digital Technologies for Early Education during COVID-19," OECD, 2021

<sup>25</sup> "[Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education & Care](#)," UK Parliament, 2021

<sup>26</sup> "[Early childhood education and care workforce development](#)," OECD, 2022

### **4.3 Approaches in other UK Nations: Education**

- 4.3.1 England took a three-pronged approach, focusing on 1) improving the quality of teaching; 2) targeted support and tutoring via the National Tutoring Programme; and 3) funding extra time for select groups of learners. Funding thus came from multiple sources, including the National Tutoring Programme's original funding and extension support, funds for teacher training, and additional resource pots such as the Additional Catch-Up Funding grant and the Recovery Premium, linked to the existing Pupil Premium and targeted at disadvantaged learners. A limited workforce, along with recruitment and retention issues, meant targeting of extra tutoring was necessary, as providing extra support to all learners would not have been feasible.
- 4.3.2 Funding in Northern Ireland and England was broadly linked to need, but schools were given autonomy to decide which learners required extra support. Feedback in Northern Ireland questioned whether free school meals levels were an appropriate indicator of need.<sup>27</sup> In Northern Ireland, schools had greater autonomy in spending in the second year of funding due to an underspend in the first half of the 2020/21 school year. Schools used this to fund additional external practitioners and other resources. Post-primary schools, the equivalent to secondary schools in Wales, were allowed to deliver interventions outside normal school hours and classroom assistants were used where workforce challenges made recruitment at Irish-medium schools difficult. Interventions delivered in primary and post-primary schools helped improve literacy and numeracy skills, in addition to emotional wellbeing.
- 4.3.3 Scotland's approach was based on an existing programme, the Scottish Attainment Challenge, which focuses on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Since the pandemic impacts on learners have

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<sup>27</sup> "An evaluation of the Department of Education's Engage Programme in primary and post-primary schools during 2020-2021," Education and Training Inspectorate, 2021 [An evaluation of the Department of Education's Engage Programme in primary and post-primary schools during 2020-2021 | Education Training Inspectorate \(etini.gov.uk\)](https://www.etini.gov.uk/evaluation-of-the-department-of-education-s-engage-programme-in-primary-and-post-primary-schools-during-2020-2021)

become clear, this funding stream has become much more important and aimed at Covid recovery and “catchup”. An additional £500 million was allocated for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years, nearly half of which was to recruit additional staff. Additional funds for digital devices were also distributed in an effort to ensure all children had access to a device for remote learning.

4.3.4 Given that approximately half of English schools are academies, LAs played a more limited role in England than in the other nations. In England some funds were distributed directly to schools, with varying levels of guidance. For example, the extra tuition time for 16 to 19-year-olds was given out with relatively strict guidance on who should be supported by this funding.<sup>28</sup>

4.3.5 Table 4.1 captures the main thrust of the approaches taken by England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland to supporting the education sector in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to note that this table is intended as a summary only and not as a comparison of the nations. The funding and programmes provided covered different parts of the sector and different time periods and were on significantly different scales in terms of the amount of funding allocated and the number of schools and learners being supported.

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<sup>28</sup> Amongst OECD nations, 30 per cent reported increasing teacher numbers in lower secondary and 37 per cent in primary level during the 2020/21 academic year. Portugal reported 3,300 new teachers. Spain utilised 30,000 new teachers to enable 21,000 extra classes to reduce overall class size. Other approaches to increasing capacity included increasing the school week by two hours in Austria. Luxembourg temporarily hired staff who were not certified teachers to increase capacity. In Latvia teachers received additional allowances to provide individual counselling to support the wellbeing of vulnerable learners.

**Table 4.1: Summary of Approaches to Supporting Education Sector**

	<b>England</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
Key Issues	Workforce (limited supply of (potential) practitioners)	Workforce (limited supply of (potential) practitioners, especially Irish language practitioners)	Workforce (limited supply of (potential) practitioners)
Focus	Teaching quality Targeted support and tutoring (all ages and additional for those who need it aged 16 to 19)	Targeted support and tutoring Wellbeing	Wellbeing support in school Staff recruitment Further support for learners in exam years
Funding & Programmes	<u>Learning</u> National Tutoring Programme Funding for summer schools Funding for extra tuition time for those 16- to 19-year-olds who need it  <u>Equity</u>	<u>Learning</u> Engage Programme for small group tuition <u>Wellbeing</u> Scheme with focus on emotional health and wellbeing  <u>Workforce</u> Employed supply teachers	<u>Learning, Workforce, &amp; Wellbeing</u> Scottish Attainment Challenge (predated Covid, but came to include Covid recovery elements) National Improvement Framework focusing on attainment and wellbeing Curriculum Reform

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland
	<p>Recovery Premium (linked to Pupil Premium, targeted at disadvantaged pupils)</p> <p>Catch Up Premium for all pupils from June 2020</p> <p><u>Workforce</u></p> <p>Funding for teacher training</p>		<p>Funding for additional support and teaching staff</p> <p><u>Access &amp; Equity</u></p> <p>Digital Device and Connectivity Funding to provide 72,000 devices</p>
Investment across all schemes	£4.9 billion	£46 million	<p>£500 million to support staff and students, including funds for additional staff (2020-2022)<sup>29</sup></p> <p>£1 billion for Scottish Attainment Challenge (predated pandemic)</p>

<sup>29</sup> [Education recovery - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/education-recovery)

	<b>England</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
			£90 million logistics funding for education settings
Delivery & Feedback	LAs had some responsibility, but 50 per cent of schools are academies and so had a direct relationship with DfE	<p>Money went straight to schools, funding dependent on size, but weighted towards FSM.</p> <p>Small uptake in the first year, mixed results.</p> <p>More autonomy granted in second year, schools allowed to divert more resources into bringing external practitioners or buying resources.</p> <p>First year limited by school closures – underspend due to digital delivery limitations.</p>	<p>Decision making led by Scottish Government’s Getting It Right For Every Child approach.</p> <p>Not overly prescriptive for LAs, but stipulated a focus on speech and language</p> <p>Schools had autonomy over which staff they took on.</p>

#### **4.4 Approaches in Other UK Nations: Early Years**

- 4.4.1 All three nations' responses were shaped by longstanding workforce issues in the childcare sector and were concerned with sector sustainability in addition to ensuring quality early education provision. They also all gave Local Authorities some level of control over how additional money for Covid-19 was spent in the childcare sector. The Scottish Government emphasized an outcomes-based approach for LAs, while the English Government distributed some money directly to schools and EY settings and some through a procurement process. In Northern Ireland, consultation with a practitioner stakeholder group in the sector strongly informed the needs identified, with an understanding that reduced demand for EY services would impact its sustainability.
- 4.4.2 English and Scottish governments both invested in training and funding for qualifications for EY practitioners, with a focus on SLC training and easing issues related to recruitment and retention. Scotland, in particular, is planning to roll out a new SLC early intervention programme over the next three years and gave LAs significant flexibility in how to spend their funding due to restricted resources and capacity.
- 4.4.3 Northern Ireland and Scotland focused on reinforcing the sector's sustainability. Northern Ireland's approach was especially concerned with helping settings get through the pandemic despite closures and reduced demand, with the government currently developing a longer-term EY plan. Given the limited evidence of best practice during the peak of the pandemic, Scotland's rollout of funding support for the EY sector was longer-term, based on supporting settings to implement plans that had already been in place, including the rollout of the expanded offer of funded childcare for two-year olds, which began in 2021.
- 4.4.4 Both Scotland and England also leveraged strong parts of the sector to aid others. Scotland utilised an existing network of equity and



excellence leads to support settings, and England is in the midst of rolling out a Stronger Practice Hubs programme in which strong settings are funded to support other settings in their local area.

- 4.4.5 As above, Table 4.2 captures the main thrust of the approaches taken in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland to supporting the early years in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to note that this table is intended as a summary only and not as a comparison of the nations. The funding and programmes provided covered different parts of the sector and different time periods and were on notably different scales in terms of the amount of funding allocated and the number of schools and learners being supported.

**Table 4.2: Summary of Approaches to Supporting Childcare Sector**

	<b>England</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
Key Challenges	Workforce (pre-dated Covid-19 but became even more apparent over the course of the pandemic)	Workforce (pre-dated Covid-19 but became even more apparent over the course of the pandemic)	Workforce (pre-dated Covid-19 but became even more apparent over the course of the pandemic)
Focus	Workforce development and training Guidance for settings	Sector sustainability  Workforce	Sector sustainability  Speech, language, and communication (SLC)
Funding & Programmes	<u>Workforce</u> CPD in child development, academic and social support  Extra funding for qualifications and training to encourage more people into the sector  <u>Guidance</u>	<u>Access &amp; Setting Sustainability</u> Covid Emergency Support Fund to help keep settings open, ensure sustainability of closed providers  Temporary Closure Fund  Childcare Recovery Scheme (July-September 2020)	<u>Access &amp; Setting Sustainability</u> Expanded Childcare Offer for two-year-olds (from 2021)  Pupil Equity Investment

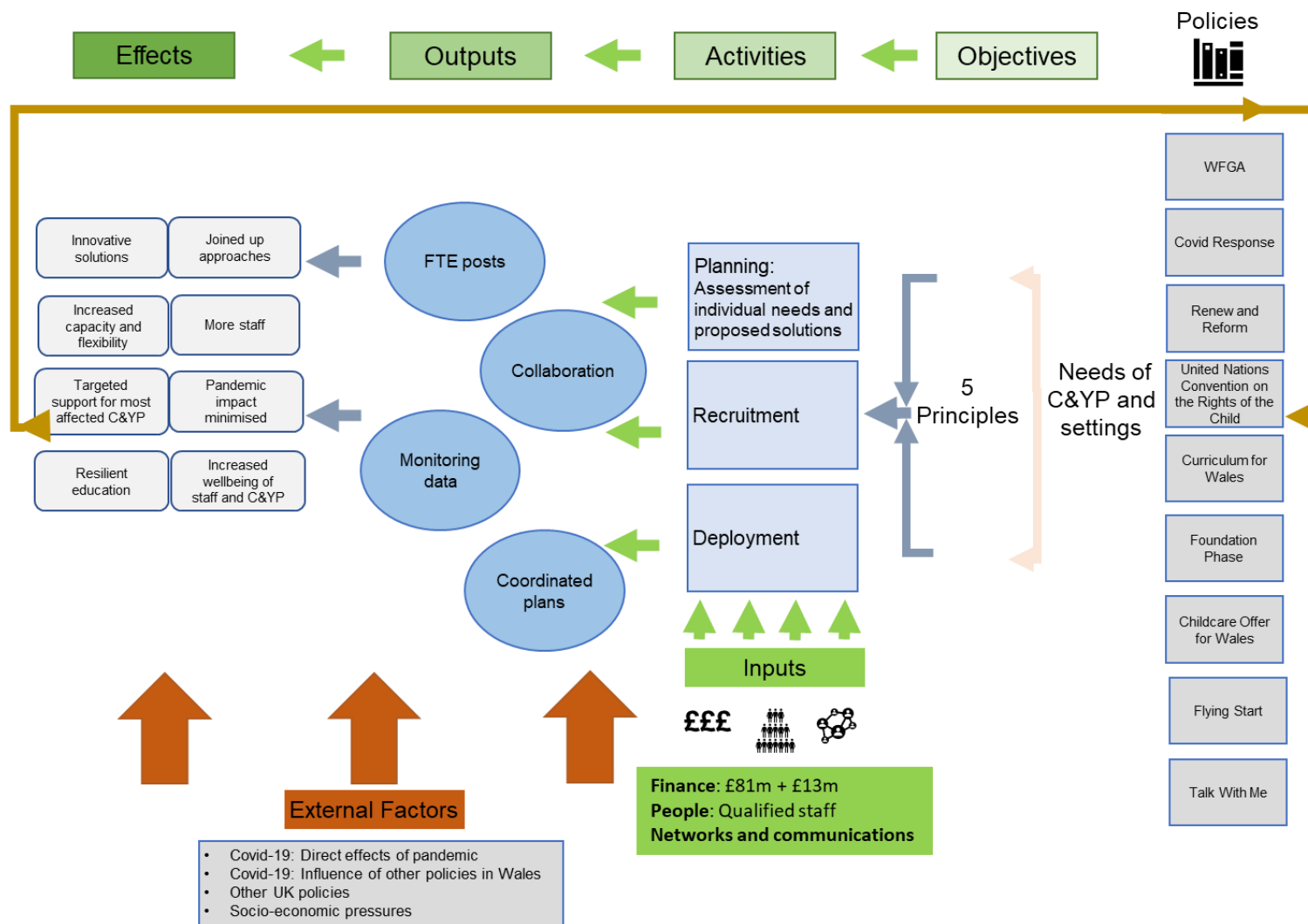
	<b>England</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
	<p>Support for settings with group of advisors established</p> <p>Strong Practice Hubs (established from November 2022)</p> <p>Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework requirements reduced</p>	<p><u>Workforce</u></p> <p>Sustainability Scheme to staff smaller pods (Oct 2020 – March 2021)</p> <p><u>Learning</u></p> <p>Engage Programme for small group tuition broadened to EY sector</p>	<p><u>Learning</u></p> <p>School Attainment Challenge Funds (predating pandemic) implemented flexibly with focus on SLC</p>
Investment across all schemes	£180 million	£40 million	£1 billion for Scottish Attainment Challenge (predated pandemic), half for 1140 hours childcare and half in ringfence grants for early learning and childcare component of local governments
Delivery & Feedback	Delivery through LAs and contractors	Stakeholder group with practitioners	Delivery through LAs

## **5. Theory of Change**

### **5.1 Overview**

- 5.1.1 The Theory of Change (ToC) of RRRS&EY grants enables an understanding of how the programmes are expected to achieve the desired results. It traces the causal logic chain back from the effects, through the actions and outputs generated by RRRS&EY, to the resources available and the original drivers and objectives.
- 5.1.2 The ToC was identified through a review of programme and policy documents, alongside academic literature. This resulted in a draft model that was refined through a workshop with the evaluation steering group.
- 5.1.3 The ToC sets out the high-level understanding of how the RRRS&EY programmes work to generate the intended outcomes. The grants were intended to be flexible to locally identified needs with individual local authorities, schools, and childcare settings responsible for the final form of delivery. The expectation is that delivery could vary significantly and therefore not all settings would produce all outcomes. The evaluation sought to investigate this high-level ToC in each individual case to understand how it worked in practice.
- 5.1.4 The overall Theory of Change is sound on a national level with agreement across all stakeholders that the RRRS&EY programmes correctly identify and tackle the needs with appropriate action to achieve useful objectives.
- 5.1.5 The ToC below illustrates the relationships between the different aspects of the programme.

Figure 5.1: RRRS&EY Theory of Change



## **5.2 Programme drivers**

5.2.1 The drivers for RRRS&EY arise from the policies that underpin education in Wales, those that drove the response to the pandemic and the policies aimed at overcoming the challenges posed by Covid-19 on education. These policies are:

- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Covid response – including lockdown periods, social distancing, and isolation periods
- Renew and Reform Strategy: Supporting Learners' Wellbeing and Progression
- United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child
- Development and implementation of Curriculum for Wales
- Foundation Phase (pre-September 2022)
- Childcare Offer for Wales
- Flying Start
- Talk With Me

5.2.2 The policies set out a need to deliver high-quality education to learners ages 3-16 years in the face of disruption to the systems available to do so. They identify universal needs shared by all education settings and learners. These are the need to:

- make up time for learning and development lost due to either national lockdowns or learner and staff absences as a direct result of Covid-19,
- address disengagement from education by learners due to these absences and a drop in preparedness to learn,
- allow learners to effectively recover educational progress. All learners are considered behind in attainment compared to where they would have been without Covid-19,
- support learners' wellbeing in the face of higher incidence of poor mental health including anxiety across all cohorts,

## 5.3 Objectives

5.3.1 The objectives in a ToC are what the programme sets out to do. An evaluation can assess the effectiveness of a programme by considering whether, and how, these goals are achieved. Objectives for RRRS&EY are encapsulated in five principles:

- **Principle 1: learners in greatest need.** The funding will most benefit priority cohorts of:
  - Learners preparing for examinations in year 11
  - Vulnerable and disadvantaged learners including the poorest children and families (often defined as those receiving Free School Meals (FSM)), learners with additional learning needs, learners from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, Gypsy Roma and traveller children, and learners in Welsh medium settings who live in non-Welsh speaking households
  - Year 7 due to disruption to the transition from primary to secondary
  - Individuals not in the above groups where there is an identified need as decided by schools and settings
- **Principle 2: RRRS priorities for learners.** To form a basis in line with curriculum reform the focus will be on:
  - Literacy, numeracy, and digital competence
  - Independent learning skills
  - Support and engagement through coaching
  - emotional, physical, and learning development for early education.
- **Principle 3: Growing capacity.** What the funding is designed to provide:
  - Additional staff capacity within schools
  - For early education, supporting staff and child ratios
- **Principle 4: Reducing bureaucracy and ensuring transparency.** To use the resources well and keep paperwork to a minimum:

- School plans should set out intentions in a simple way
- The intention should be signed off by the Governing Body and made available to the school's parents and community
- WG will maintain a 'learning brief' as an education system, by sharing intelligence and insights in respect of the impact of the programme as it develops.
- **Principle 5: Collaboration.** With regions, LAs, other partners, and settings:
  - Strategic collaboration to support the grants that will lead to further opportunities to support children, families, and schools and childcare settings.
  - Clusters and collaboratives of schools to pool resources.

## **5.4 Inputs, Activities and Outputs**

5.4.1 The resources necessary to input into RRRS&EY are:

- Financial in the form of grant funding
- Qualified staff of sufficient quality
- Networks and communications, both new and pre-existing

5.4.2 These inputs enable the following activities: planning, the assessment of individual needs at setting, LA, and regional levels, and the preparation of solutions. Recruitment of additional capacity to act in these plans, and the deployment of additional staff capacity.

5.4.3 The output (result) of this was expected to be a demonstrable increase in capacity as measured as full time equivalent (FTE), and increase in collaboration at all levels, monitoring data, and coordinated plans.



## **5.5 Effects**

5.5.1 The outcomes and longer-term impacts of RRRS&EY were expected to be:

- innovative solutions to the needs facing learners
- joined up approaches across schools and settings, and partners, LAs and regions
- increased capacity and flexibility at setting level
- an increase in staff working in education in Wales
- targeted support provided to the most affected children and young people
- a minimisation, as far as possible, of the impacts of the pandemic on learning
- a more resilient education sector in schools and childcare settings
- safeguarded wellbeing of staff and learners

## **5.6 Assumptions**

5.6.1 All Theories of Change assume that each component leads directly onto the next, and that there is a causal link between elements.

5.6.2 For RRRS&EY it is assumed that extra staffing capacity will provide the flexibility and resilience that schools and EY settings need to address the needs caused by Covid-19. It is further assumed that there is untapped potential capacity in the education workforce for the school and EY sectors to draw on. Finally, a key assumption at the launch of the RRRS grant is that the most affected cohorts include those that are most affected by other factors unrelated to Covid-19.

5.6.3 Stakeholders held a further assumption that staff capacity in general is a long-term issue for schools and early years settings and that full solutions may take years to provide irrespective of any additional challenges posed by Covid-19.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1 Relationship with other support packages**

6.1.1 RRRS&EY has been delivered alongside other grant schemes and support packages provided by the Welsh Government and others. This includes support that was in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and other streams of funding and support that came about as a consequence of the pandemic.

6.1.2 Specific examples of additional funding that stakeholders, schools, and childcare settings, worked well alongside RRRS&EY grants are:

- Sustainability funds for personal protective equipment (PPE) funded by the Childrens' Partnership
- The newly qualified teachers (NQT) placement scheme funded by Welsh Government
- LA Covid-19 relief funds
- Pupil Development Grant (PDG), including the element for Children Looked After (CLA)
- Funding for wellbeing and attendance, that has allowed RRRS to focus more on learning.

6.1.3 In the experience of stakeholders these different grants are not fully coordinated in both their roll out and their aims, with the relationships between them being accidental rather than purposeful. The high number of individual grants coming through similar channels has a negative effect on the understanding of each one individually. This is most evident in childcare settings, where funding is administered by local authorities leading in many cases to little or no awareness of the RRRS&EY grants and the belief that the support provided through them originated with the LA.

6.1.4 In terms of the extent to which existing learning/teaching support programmes and activities were levered to boost the effectiveness of the programme, examples include the RRRS grant being delivered alongside Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) delivering reading

interventions while the PDG grant was allocated to tackle the impact of poverty on the attainment of children and young people. As part of other funding interventions for attendance and wellbeing, certain school settings employed a wellbeing support officer and family engagement officer, which in turn enabled RRRS staff to focus on learning. However, it should be noted that many grants came late in the financial year or at short notice. As a consequence, school and childcare leaders reported that grant funds were often used to cover costs that had already been incurred.

## **6.2 Distribution**

- 6.2.1 The distribution of the RRRS grant has been determined by the allocation criteria (see 1.3), going directly to schools, often with little interaction with the LA. Of the LAs who took a more active approach, some specified to schools the categories for which the RRRS funding could be spent whilst others directly asked schools how they would spend the money.
- 6.2.2 Childcare settings received funding via the local authorities with little consistency across Wales in how this translated into support directly for childcare settings. One LA picked a range of training options according to WG headings and allowed the settings to select from the list. The offer included sessions with the sports development team and split the remaining amount for staff intervention work. In the context of childcare, LAs commonly selected to use the funding to provide training for the non-maintained sector.
- 6.2.3 The forms and guidance surrounding how the money should be spent were felt to be straightforward. This led stakeholders in schools and LAs to be well informed about the possibilities surrounding the funding. They were reportedly able to make the necessary decisions and adapt the funding to meet their bespoke needs. However, an issue encountered by school and childcare leads was the need for more information about the grant in the long-term, which would enable

schools and childcare settings to plan staffing and recruitment. For example, longer-term contracts could potentially then be awarded to staff. Other settings also claimed that the distribution system meant they felt they were reactively spending the grant funding, rather than effectively planning how to maximise its impact.

6.2.4 Regarding the funding allocations, some of the schools interviewed were critical of using the percentage of free school meals as a determinant of how much funding a school should receive. For these stakeholders there was a risk of missing some vulnerable learners as the cost-of-living crisis adds to the legacies of Covid-19. The roll out of universal FSM means there is no longer a need for parents to register their eligibility to claim. This makes the use of FSM as a proxy indicator for levels of economic deprivation increasingly untenable.

6.2.5 There did not appear to be a consistent approach in terms of support to childcare settings from LAs across Wales, with different approaches falling into three categories. Some LAs allocated childcare's share of RRRS or the £13m EIG for early education funding directly to settings. Others have taken a more strategic approach, spending the money on resources such as training that settings can choose from. The third group have taken a mixed approach with some funding spent strategically, and the rest going to childcare settings. The result of strategic spending is that many childcare settings were not aware of the RRRS or the additional £13m EIG as separate grants from WG, instead support was viewed as coming from the LA. As a consequence, childcare settings have had less options available compared with schools as the critical decision making was undertaken at LA level. Schools in comparison were able to make their own decisions with the funding.

### **6.3 Advice and support from LAs**

6.3.1 Many LAs provided school settings with broad guidance and advice on how to use funding, which was in line with Welsh Government

guidance. The LAs were generally flexible in their advising approach, depending on a school's particular circumstance. LAs provided support but schools retained autonomy to make their own decisions based on their unique needs. In some cases, it was reiterated by LAs that RRRS funding should be spent predominantly on staff and human resources.<sup>30</sup> This was driven by the need for a sustainable and effective teacher-pupil ratio, ensuring that learners' needs were sufficiently met, in the face of learning challenges that arose during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 6.3.2 Further advice and support were provided by some LAs through the facilitation of initial meetings as well as through continuous communications with school settings. Details of the grant were covered in these meetings, and continuous lines of communication were available to enable and encourage schools to share knowledge, ideas, and best practice around the use of the RRRS grant.
- 6.3.3 Some schools reported receiving limited advice, support, or additional guidance regarding the use of the RRRS funding received. It was ultimately left to the individual school's discretion on how to make use of the funding in a way that would most effectively benefit that school and their particular needs.
- 6.3.4 LAs provided more prescriptive guidance to childcare settings in line with strategic spend and some offered lists of specific resource ideas that funding could be spent on. There were several examples of these resource suggestions provided to schools and childcare settings, which included sporting and physical outdoor equipment, as well as training on effective well-being support and emotional development.
- 6.3.5 LAs' extent and type of support adapted over time as subsequent iterations of RRRS&EY were provided to settings, and LAs became more experienced in dealing with the funding. In later iterations of

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<sup>30</sup> For non-maintained childcare setting the funding could be spent on human resource; training; or material resources.

funding, several LAs were able to provide childcare settings with FAQs arising from previous funding stages.

## **6.4 Role of partners**

- 6.4.1 Schools have reported mixed experiences regarding the role played by the Regional Consortia and partnerships relating to how funding was navigated and used, and to what effect. Some schools reported that Regional Consortia/partnerships were heavily involved with the LA, schools, and settings. Within these examples, Regional Consortia/partnerships facilitated the sharing of ideas on how to use funding amongst schools and childcare settings, including examples of best practice and case studies from which to draw plans for fund usage. Others found it difficult to elicit information or detailed guidelines from Regional Consortia/partnerships, particularly where last-minute EIG funding was concerned.
- 6.4.2 From school and LA perspectives, Regional Consortia/partnership approaches are typically based around compliance and quality assurance. Only a small number of stakeholders were able to identify the role of a Regional Consortia or education partnerships in the grants. This suggests that limited additional value appears to have been gained by LAs, schools, and childcare settings from the involvement of Regional Consortia/partnerships. There has likely been missed opportunity for greater effectiveness of the grant through Regional Consortia/partnerships acting as hubs for sharing best practice or coordinating collaboration at setting level.
- 6.4.3 With regards to the roles that other partners played in promoting the scheme, Early Years Wales (EYW) and Children in Wales (CiW) provided guidelines on how funds could be utilised in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research found some examples of partners, including Umbrella Organisations being invited to be involved by LA and Regional Consortia at an early stage which assisted in producing a clear vision and support for the programme and fund planning.

6.4.4 Partners were critical of the lack of lead time when announcements of funding were made by WG. This related to the way funding was communicated and rolled out in a short space of time. Announcing the funding further in advance of its rollout and committing to longer term funding earlier on was felt to be of benefit to LAs, schools, and childcare settings. Conversely, it was felt that guidance provided by WG was clear about the purposes of the grants, and this guidance was flexible enough to enable schools to adapt their use of the funds to their needs.

## **6.5 How funding has been used**

6.5.1 From the monitoring survey of schools, on average schools had gained a full-time equivalent support staff member (1.05 FTE) (TA, LSA, HLTA, and others) and half a full-time equivalent teacher (0.5 FTE) up to January 2022. Other staff and external resource represent a smaller proportion of how the funding had been used with an average of 0.1 FTE across all schools. This pattern was similar for all age groups across Wales. Welsh medium schools and PRUs had been slightly more likely to spend on teachers' hours (1 FTE teacher per 1.5 FTE support staff) than English medium schools (1 FTE teacher per 2.4 FTE support staff). Special schools were four times more likely to spend on support staff hours (1 FTE teacher per 4.05 FTE support staff). No detailed data is available for childcare settings, as they were not included in the monitoring exercise.

6.5.2 The monitoring survey did not include the additional £10m EIG administered grant for early education or the £3m for non-funded childcare settings. Across both funded and non-funded childcare settings, the grants have been used in more varied ways in line with the different guidelines. LA approaches fell within three categories where some have used the funds to support the sector strategically, others have distributed funds to settings to spend directly in a similar model to the RRRS grant, and some have blended these approaches with varying proportions of funding spent by LAs and settings.

- 6.5.3 Qualitative feedback suggests that a near universal approach for schools, and childcare settings that received direct funding, has been to use the RRRS&EY grants to increase the hours of staff on existing part-time contracts. In this way RRRS&EY has been used to pay for the additional hours only, with the base contract hours still being funded by settings' own budgets. Settings who did not have part-time staff, or staff willing to increase their part-time hours have struggled to do this. This barrier is only experienced by a small number of schools. Where childcare settings increased hours, this was more commonly achieved on an ad-hoc basis through overtime rather than as a consistent extension to a particular member of staff's contract.
- 6.5.4 RRRS does not appear to have been used to simply fund the direct use of supply teachers. The additional capacity created by RRRS has utilised the supply teacher workforce as a source of trained staff. There have been challenges with this approach. Lockdown periods, and then the restrictions caused by social distancing measures, severely affected the supply teacher sector. Unable to work, move between schools, or even classes, stakeholders reported many supply staff leaving the sector during 2020 and 2021. Where good quality supply teachers were available, and had an existing relationship with a school, headteachers began offering contracts of employment before the RRRS was announced. RRRS funding has been used retrospectively to pay for these positions as the grant became available. Schools that waited until they had specific details of their grant allocation have found it much more difficult to access supply teachers to use in this way as many were already employed elsewhere. Indirectly, by increasing school budgets more generally, RRRS has supported the use of supply teachers by schools as restrictions have eased.
- 6.5.5 In a small number of schools and childcare settings RRRS&EY did not work to increase staff capacity. This occurred when the amounts of funding received were small, particularly where it was less than the cost of a staff member's contract. In some cases, RRRS&EY funding



has been used to offset the staffing budgets, generating additional financial capacity elsewhere. Schools and childcare settings agree that staff capacity is a priority and where additional financial capacity has been generated by RRRS&EY in this way it has been used to tackle the grant's priority areas anyway. For example, staff employed to support the priority groups commonly have part of their contract paid for by RRRS&EY and part paid for by existing school budgets.

- 6.5.6 From the monitoring survey, the most common interventions that RRRS has supported in schools have been support for literacy (91.2 per cent of all schools<sup>31</sup>) and wellbeing (85.9 per cent of all schools<sup>32</sup>). These interventions are often delivered in a short period of time for learners, for example limited to a single term. To target identified need these are delivered in groups smaller than a whole class, or at an individual level to support learners to overcome specific barriers to learning.
- 6.5.7 Interviewed schools highlighted that indirect approaches have been used for RRRS&EY. The capacity generated by RRRS&EY has enabled more flexibility in how staff resources are deployed. New-to-school staff have been utilised to work with classes with low or no priority groups and this has enabled more experienced staff to deliver extra support to priority groups. For example, in secondary schools, existing staff with more experience have been utilised to support years 10 and 11 whilst RRRS funding has paid for staff to work with year 8. Other indirect approaches have been to cover teacher PPA sessions or act as an internal source of supply staff to cover absences caused by illness.
- 6.5.8 Within childcare where funds have been spent by settings themselves, the EIG grant has been utilised to pay for additional staff. The grant has also paid for equipment to support specific learning such as materials and programmes to support SLC. Where the grant has been used strategically by LAs, it has paid for external providers

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<sup>31</sup> In 93.2% of primary schools, 88.5% of secondary schools, and 100% of 3-16 schools

<sup>32</sup> In 84.3% of primary schools, 94.6 % of secondary schools, and 93.6% of 3-16 schools

such as drama groups or outdoor sessions that are then made available for settings to access. Childcare settings also reported LAs have made training available to upskill the existing childcare workforce through the grant. This has been welcomed but there is some concern over the need to undertake training outside of working hours. Childcare settings also reported that they feel that they have little opportunity to put most of this training into practice before the next training sessions begin. With the shorter timeframe for the EIG grant compared to RRRS, and it only covering one year, there is a risk that the grant has been used on resources that were available rather than targeted where it could achieve the most impact.

- 6.5.9 One of the objectives for the additional EIG grant for early education was to support staff learner ratios in schools. Whilst there is more flexibility in the grant conditions for the childcare sector, it has been more difficult to support ratios in childcare settings. Childcare settings reported that additional staff recruited often lack the necessary qualifications to meet ratio requirements. Intermittent absences caused by Covid-19 can also affect ratios, particularly in the smallest childcare settings. In some cases, staff hired without qualifications have undergone the necessary training and this has taken time to complete.

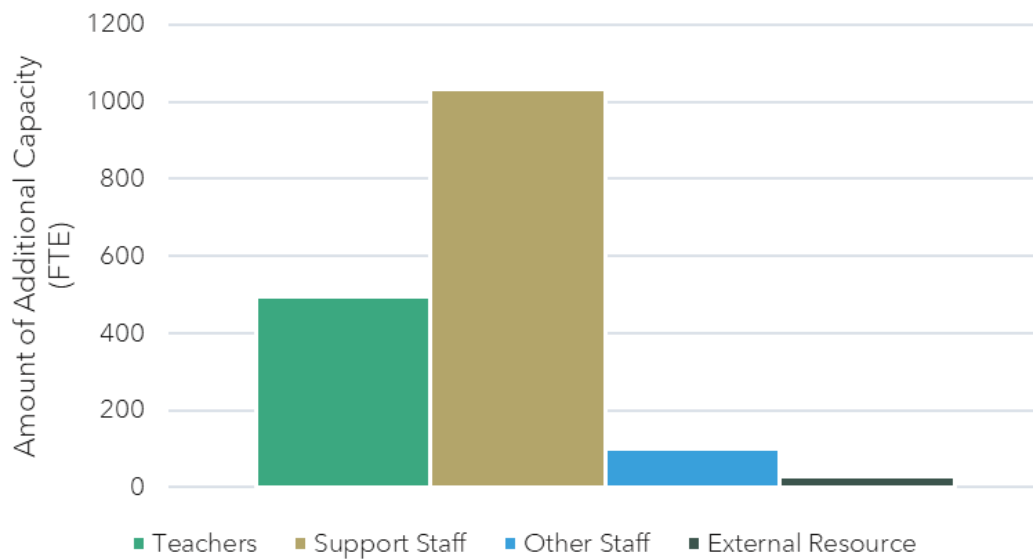
## **6.6 Additional capacity**

- 6.6.1 An estimated 2,452 FTE staff in schools have been funded by RRRS.<sup>33</sup> The majority of these positions have been support staff (62.2 per cent) followed by teachers (29.9 per cent). The average time gained for each school is 1.05 FTE support staff member and 0.5 FTE teacher. For perspective 0.05 support staff time is around 90 minutes of time per week.

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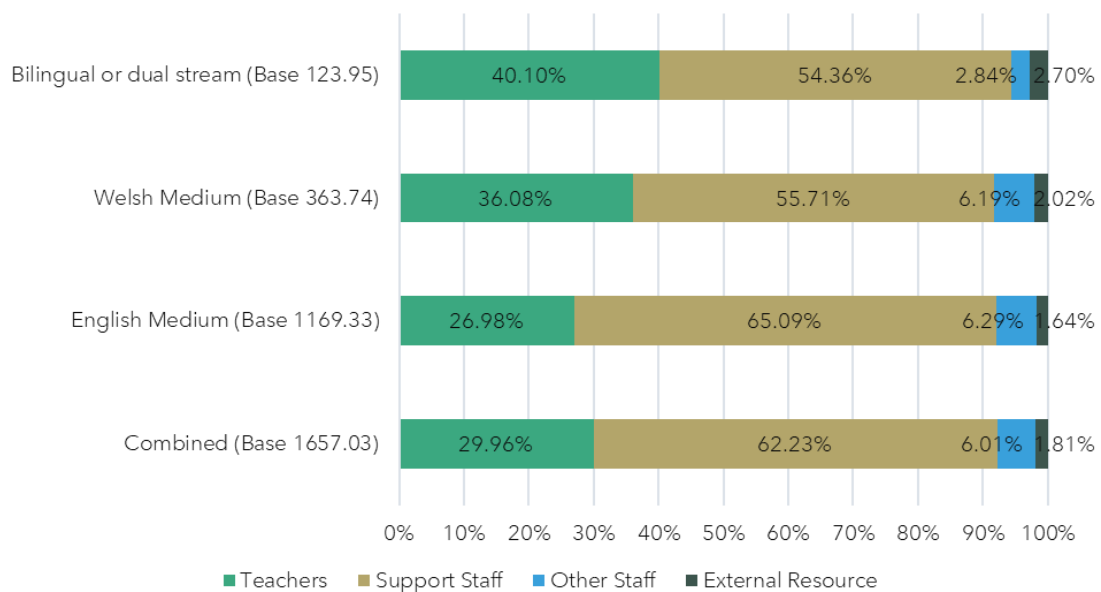
<sup>33</sup> 1657 FTE employed amongst the 993 schools who returned the monitoring survey. This number has been proportionately increased to estimate for 1470 schools in Wales.

**Figure 6.1: Additional staff capacity created by RRRS as FTE**



Source: Welsh Government monitoring data

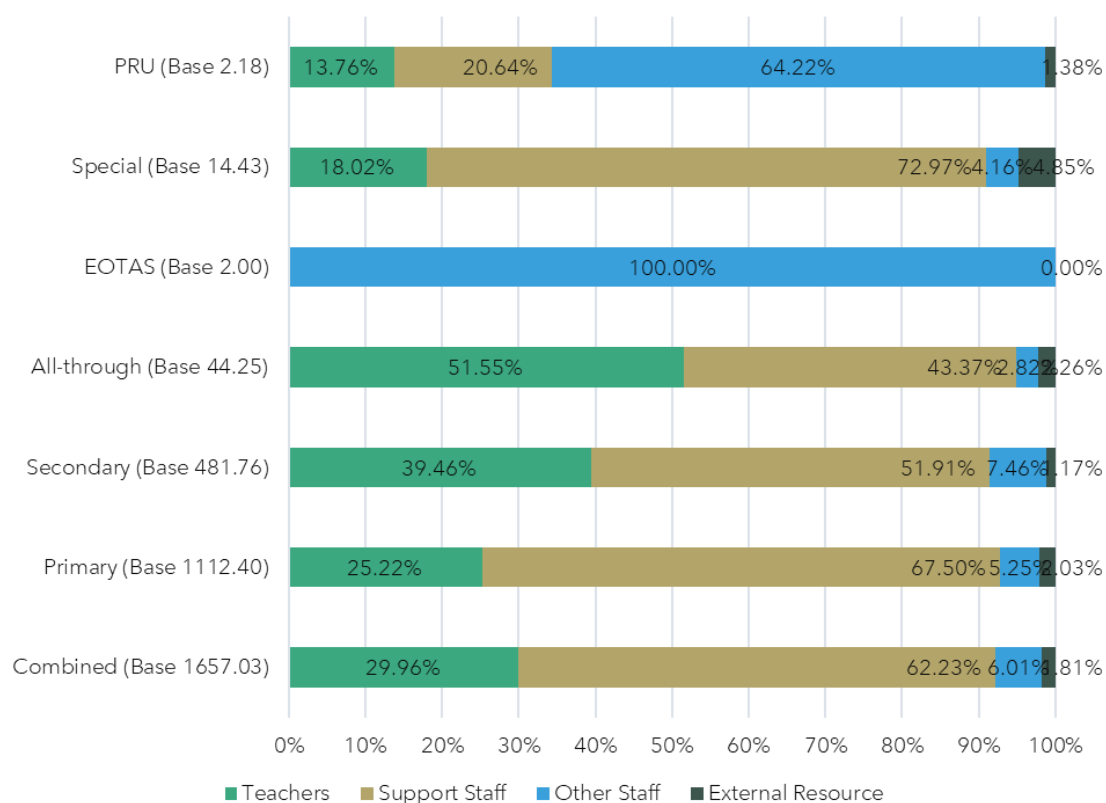
**Figure 6.2: Additional capacity by language medium**



Source: Welsh Government monitoring data

6.6.2 Support staff accounted for the greater proportion of funded additional capacity across all schools. Welsh medium and bilingual schools were also found more likely to have funded extra capacity through teachers (more than one third of FTE staff) than English medium schools (just over a quarter of FTE staff).

**Figure 6.3: Additional capacity by school type**



Source: Welsh Government monitoring data

6.6.3 Secondary schools reported a greater proportion of additional capacity as teachers than primary schools. In nearly all settings support staff formed a greater proportion of additional capacity than teachers. 3-16 schools were the only setting type where teachers were more prevalent than support staff, although this may be due to the smaller sample size.

6.6.4 Comparable figures are not available for childcare settings as they were not included in the monitoring exercise. At the time of the survey the EIG grant was still in the process of being distributed.

## 6.7 Decision making

6.7.1 When interviewed, school leaders described that the decisions around funding allocations have been primarily guided by the needs of learners with the lead element being schools' own knowledge of their

learners. This is the same for childcare settings where decision making has occurred at the childcare setting level. The availability of staff who can deliver against these needs has been a main factor in the form of additional support provided. Schools and childcare settings reported that they have often used RRRS&EY funding to enable additional capacity to make existing staff available to deliver Covid-19 reaction support. Existing long-term plans, particularly around vulnerable cohorts have also played a role in their decision making.

6.7.2 Schools and childcare settings explained in interviews how they took several factors about their learners into account. They were mindful of priority groups and observed individual needs regardless of learner background. Factors include:

- Wellbeing and behaviour
- Engagement during periods of remote learning
- Readiness to learn in general
- Academic ability/progress
- Urgency of support (e.g., learners in year 11)

6.7.3 Schools and childcare settings also factored in local knowledge and understanding to support learners. In some cases, needs were assessed through an ongoing process of local testing and re-testing.

## **6.8 Collaboration**

6.8.1 Guidance from WG has encouraged collaboration by strategic partners, LAs, Regional Consortia/partnerships, schools and childcare leads, in support of the RRRS&EY grants. It also encouraged cluster working and collaborative approaches between schools, and between childcare settings, to pool their resources and achieve a critical mass in growing capacity.

6.8.2 Collaboration at school and childcare levels has been limited. While there is a growing desire to collaborate and pool resources, there is

little evidence from the schools and settings interviewed to suggest that this is happening in a meaningful or effective way. A major limiting factor for collaboration at this level was the need to maintain class bubbles during the immediate post-lockdown period. Bubbles prevented staff working across different classes within settings and made the idea of staff working across multiple settings during a week an impossibility. The patterns of additional capacity were already established once bubble restrictions lifted and so far, have not changed to take advantage of coordinated working by multiple settings.

- 6.8.3 Some LAs have taken a lead when it comes to coordinating and planning with headteachers and Regional Consortia/partnerships, though LA stakeholders expressed frustration at the 'last-minute' pace of coordination particularly with Regional Consortia/partnerships. Umbrella organisations have been able to provide much more support within childcare settings, with this strategic collaboration in line with WG expectations.

## **6.9 Enablers and barriers for additional capacity**

### Enablers

- 6.9.1 A key enabler for achieving additional capacity was the extra pay through more contracted hours. Within the childcare sector, stakeholders reported that part-time hours are flexible and attractive to those who are parents themselves, however, some would like more hours to increase their overall income. Existing part-time staff in schools and childcare settings have been offered increased working hours up to full-time and this has been a key source of additional capacity. The benefits of this approach are that staff are already experienced and settled in their roles, have established relationships with learners and other staff members. This is particularly useful in wellbeing support roles where familiarity with learners is of benefit.

6.9.2 Pre-pandemic relationships between schools and supply staff is an important enabler of additional capacity. Similar to increasing hours for part time staff, existing knowledge and familiarity with school systems, staff teams, and learners made integrating these new staff into the setting much easier. With newly qualified teacher (NQT) placements guaranteed by Welsh Government, schools reported that they have been able to use the RRRS grant to retain NQTs after this period.

### Barriers

6.9.3 Schools and childcare setting reported that efforts to increase capacity have faced serious barriers. There is competition, particularly for support staff in school and childcare settings, from other sectors. Supermarkets and fast-food chains have been given as examples of employers who are now offering better hourly rates, with fewer qualification requirements, than education and childcare. Childcare in particular has faced further competition from courier services who have been able to offer greater flexibility in working hours.

6.9.4 As positions offered through RRRS are linked to the funding, and as the overall amount of RRRS funding is being tapered down in the coming years, contracts are offered for at most one year, and sometimes less with schools and childcare settings stating in interviews that they are generally unaware of the future of the grant beyond their current allocation. This serves to make vacancies less attractive, particularly as the cost-of-living crisis has followed on from the pandemic. With the grant coming in stages throughout the year, the length of time to complete the hiring process can sometimes be longer than the window available to spend the grant.

6.9.5 Staff in schools and settings have been through an incredibly intense period of working since March 2020. Covid-19 no longer causes waves of disruption at a national level, but it remains an issue for individual settings at different times. LAs, schools, and childcare

settings reported that there are high levels of burnout, with issues for childcare settings losing staff capacity. The result has been that the grant funding is addressing issues with maintaining staff capacity, but not necessarily increasing capacity from what it was before. According to LAs and school heads, school leadership is also heavily affected with greater numbers leaving the profession and fewer applicants for leadership positions.

6.9.6 Availability of staff is a general barrier, and one that is considered to be longer term than Covid-19. Particularly impacted by Covid-19 is the availability of supply staff. Schools often reported they offered contract positions to supply staff they had existing relationships with quickly in 2020 which has removed these staff from the sector for other schools. Other stakeholders reported that supply staff chose to leave the sector during the initial lockdown due to the lack of work available, further reducing the amount of supply staff available. The trend of supply staff leaving the sector has begun to reverse with more staff registered with EWC in 2022 than in 2021. Schools and strategic stakeholders stated that the NQT placement scheme provided guaranteed opportunities for NQTs to undertake their induction period within a supportive environment rather than on a supply basis. Some noted that the placement scheme had limited the availability of supply teacher across Wales than before the pandemic as nearly 400 NQTs were placed in schools during 2021/22 academic year. There was opportunity for some of them to carry on in the same schools, with some schools using the RRRS grant to retain them once the placement scheme had finished.

6.9.7 Staff who can teach through the medium of Welsh for all school and childcare types have been difficult to find. This is causing LA stakeholders to have concerns with teaching ability and the potential knock-on effects on learners. In areas with lower densities of Welsh



speakers, recruiting additional support via the RRRS has been a challenge due to low applicant numbers, particularly in Welsh-medium settings. The particular requirements for special schools also presented increased barriers to finding suitable staff.

- 6.9.8 Schools and settings further away from urban centres have had less success hiring new staff. These settings are more likely to be smaller in size, meaning smaller grant amounts. For the smallest settings, the funding would facilitate only a few hours of extra capacity per week and so did not encourage schools to create new positions that would have to be funded from other sources. Where vacancies were available, they have been more difficult to fill in rural areas compared to urban areas. Possible factors suggested for this according to schools and LAs include greater travel times and distances, with more workers choosing to be located closer to home since March 2020, general desirability of areas for work and living, particularly amongst younger NQTs who favour large urban centres, and the higher cost of living in remote rural areas.
- 6.9.9 Enabling an increase in capacity has been hindered by the continued staff absences due to Covid-19. This meant that the additional capacity has been used to maintain the status quo rather than addressing additional needs.

## **6.10 Impact**

- 6.10.1 The RRRS Programme was delivered with broad alignment between locally identified need and national priority cohorts. Schools consulted did not identify any specific groups, other than the priority cohorts, that were of concern. Instances of greater need was most often identified on an individual learner basis.
- 6.10.2 KS4 learners were particularly difficult to reengage immediately after lockdown, however this has since changed. Schools report that learners from more socially and economically advantaged families are disengaged to a greater degree than expected. The level of learner

need has increased because of the Covid-19 pandemic and some settings feel they are struggling to support learners in general.

6.10.3 PRU and special schools have reported the lowest levels of disruption to learner development and progress compared to pre-pandemic levels. The reason for this was thought by PRU and special schools themselves to be the already highly individualised support received by their learners, and the other factors impacting on learners in these settings that play a much more immediate role in their learning. PRUs reported increasing numbers of younger learners are being referred to their provision due to behavioural issues manifesting in more extreme ways, partly because of lockdown effects on socialisation. One PRU interviewed reported that the additional support made possible through RRRS has enabled reintegration back into mainstream education for learners in the upper ages of early education (school years 1 and 2).

6.10.4 Learners' Welsh language skills have been particularly impacted by the effects of the Covid-19. In early education this reflects the widespread reports by staff of lower-than-expected SLC in all languages, both in school and childcare settings. Childcare settings, and schools with early education age groups, reported that learners' skills in their first language were reduced compared to before 2020. Children in English medium schools and childcare settings are not being exposed to incidental Welsh usage at pre-pandemic levels, as the focus remains on SLC in English first. Learners of all ages in Welsh medium settings with limited access to Welsh outside of childcare and school have most noticeably been affected by the disruption to education. Schools and settings highlighted the important role played by the RRRS&EY funding addressing SLC issues. The difficulty in recruiting staff able to teach in the medium of Welsh has lessened the impact of the grant in Welsh medium schools and childcare. For childcare settings, it was highlighted that many commercial resources are only available in English and the options for wider support and interventions in Welsh are limited.

- 6.10.5 Stakeholders in schools and childcare settings stated that wellbeing support has been the most effective approach in enabling the development of children and young people in childcare settings, and in schools. Barriers to learning and development are reported as being more fundamental than simply missing lessons, something which wellbeing provision is key to addressing.
- 6.10.6 Best practice to increase the impact of the funding is to recruit staff with a clear design on enabling capacity. This requires a multi-level plan that both clearly envisions how much additional capacity is being created, and what the capacity is to deliver. Crucially the most impact is generated when the additional capacity is targeted to support identified learning interventions, whether to individuals, small groups, or classes.

## **6.11 Guidance and compliance**

- 6.11.1 Guidance from Welsh Government for RRRS&EY has been regarded as a very high standard. Guidelines and forms are straight forward with clarity on what the grants are for. Boundaries to their application are also clear and widely understood.
- 6.11.2 A key positive for stakeholders is the perceived high degree of flexibility allowed in both how local needs are identified and the strategies deployed by schools and LAs to address them. All groups of stakeholders feel this is appropriate given the need to support each learner individually. Schools and childcare settings much appreciated this flexibility and stated this favourably when compared to some programmes in the past though they did not give explicit examples.
- 6.11.3 Settings felt sufficiently well-informed about the various possibilities with the funding, and were able to make the decisions required using the knowledge that they had.

## **6.12 Value for money**

- 6.12.1 From the available evidence it is not possible to undertake a definitive value for money assessment. It is too soon for many possible quantifiable measures to be measured. Possible proxy indicators, such as GCSE results for the priority group undertaking exams, are open to other external factors that it is difficult to separate out with confident results. Furthermore, where evaluation is happening in individual settings, the detail available and approaches taken differ. Although it may be possible to measure individual progress, generalisation across Wales is problematic.
- 6.12.2 During the first months of the RRRS grant the efficiency of the funding in schools was lessened by the use of teaching agencies to source additional staff. Within this practice, agency fees were paid for by RRRS. This does not appear to be a major issue thanks to the more common approach of extending hours for part-time contracts rather than hiring new-to-school staff. With the continued delivery of grant funding, schools and settings have been more willing to offer their own, albeit short-term, employment contracts. This has accompanied the shift from using additional staff to cover staff absences due to Covid-19 to utilising additional capacity to provide support to learners.
- 6.12.3 Compared to areas of the curriculum such as literacy and numeracy, it is even more difficult to measure the impact on learner wellbeing. However, based on the evidence gathered in the evaluation it can be said that many of the interventions to support wellbeing, and the knock-on impacts on readiness to learn and other areas of the curriculum, would not have happened without RRRS&EY.

## **7. The Future**

### **7.1 Overview**

- 7.1.1 It is vital to understand that the effects of Covid-19 on learners, and education and childcare settings, will persist in the long-term. The experience of disrupted education will remain with learners, and the workforce will face continued disruption from Covid-19 absences. Teaching continues to adapt to meet these pressures.
- 7.1.2 The increased staff capacity due to RRRS&EY is entirely reliant on the grant funding. The capacity uplift will end when the programme ends. There is currently no plan amongst schools and settings that stretch beyond the RRRS grant.
- 7.1.3 With the heavy focus so far on fundamental aspects of education, including wellbeing and readiness to learn, the attention to attainment and progress is only just beginning. All cohorts are felt by stakeholders to be behind in development and learning at all stages when compared to pre-pandemic years.
- 7.1.4 There are new and continued pressures on childcare and school staff. Levels of fatigue are high, and the effects of the cost-of-living crisis are further impacting on staff as an external factor. Other opportunities for employment are able to offer either better pay or more flexible working conditions compared to short term contracts enabled by RRRS funding.
- 7.1.5 Since March 2020, leadership training for school staff has gone through a significant change as all leadership programmes had to be delivered online. LAs report senior leaders in schools are leaving the sector. This is mostly due to retirement, but LAs have also seen some examples of burnout. In some areas of Wales, leadership vacancies are also attracting fewer applicants. When staff do step up to leadership positions this creates gaps in middle leadership within schools. Whilst not yet critical, in some LA areas, a large percentage of school leaders are due to leave over the next five years which the sector needs to be prepared for.

## **7.2 Continued delivery**

### Continuing success

- 7.2.1 The most successful aspects of RRRS that are recommended to be continued are:
- the focus on addressing need, as defined at a school and childcare level in combination with national level priorities
  - the flexibility of delivery at the school and childcare setting level to address their needs in the effective way with the additional capacity available
  - the inclusion of support for non-maintained as well as maintained early education settings
  - the clear style of guidance. Current guidelines are widely understood thanks to their straightforward clarity

### Increasing impact

- 7.2.2 The impact of RRRS could be increased by:
- providing settings with more information sooner about the future of RRRS to enable them to plan longer term, such as hiring staff to be in place in time and offering longer contract durations to attract applicants.
  - specifying that any training provided by the grants is to increase staff capacity with learners, not just upskill the existing workforce.
  - linking more closely with programmes that promote an increase in staff numbers. For example, those that support entry into the workforces of the childcare and school sectors.
- 7.2.3 An important area that can increase the impact of RRRS is greater collaboration amongst schools and childcare settings. Cluster working was originally designed into the programme, for example shared funding and access to an additional member of staff. This was not possible due to restrictions on mixing earlier in the pandemic and by

the time these measures were lifted each setting was already following its own delivery plan for the grant. A focus on collaboration is necessary to encourage the uptake of cluster working along the original lines.

- 7.2.4 Size of setting remains the most important factor when determining the amount of funding received. This leads to the smallest settings receiving amounts that equate to fractions of an FTE position. The options available for these settings to support learners are reduced compared with larger settings with a much greater reliance on extending existing contracts or relying on other funding to top up the RRRS&EY, which is not always possible. The possibility should be explored of a minimum grant amount, by considering the additional capacity in FTE terms, so that learners in all settings can benefit from a meaningful increase in staff capacity.
- 7.2.5 Settings in rural locations face challenges to increasing capacity as they are more likely to be smaller in size and thus receive smaller funding amounts, with greater distances between settings making cluster working more difficult. Rural settings have had difficulty recruiting staff possibly due to external factors such as greater cost of living or the attractiveness of living in more urban areas (particularly for NQTs). Rural areas with low densities of Welsh speakers in the community are finding it increasingly difficult to source staff able to teach in the medium of Welsh risking the quality of teaching. Some additional weighting in the calculation of funding for rurality could be considered to address these issues.
- 7.2.6 Some schools, and strategic stakeholders stated that using FSM as a proxy indicator for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners is a useful but imperfect measure. The cost-of-living crisis is making the boundary for benefiting from FSM more malleable and learners will be affected by this alongside the legacies of Covid-19. With the roll out of universal FSM the use of FSM as a proxy is decreased as there is no longer a need for parents to register their eligibility. It was suggested by those who felt this way that socio-economic need may be better

represented by utilising the Indices of Multiple Deprivation as the indices take into account more factors.<sup>34</sup>

- 7.2.7 As highlighted, a key strength of the RRRS has been the flexibility to deploy the additional capacity to meet local needs as identified by settings themselves. A Wales-wide tool for assessing need at the school population level would make it possible for grant allocations to take these needs into account. This can then be used by schools and childcare to assess their learners needs in a way that is consistently applied everywhere in Wales. Schools could break down their populations by an expanded list of characteristics and then the RRRS can allocate grant amounts based on the detailed profile. Levels of funding could then reflect the needs of learners in more detail. Care would have to be taken that such a tool was not open to abuse and to ensure it is applied in the same way across Wales. There could also be additional use for such a tool for other programmes.
- 7.2.8 It is clear when qualitatively evaluating the programme that the RRRS&EY programmes have been of benefit to learners and settings. Additional support has so far mostly targeted wellbeing and readiness to learn. There is room for greater quantitative monitoring of the implementation of RRRS to better demonstrate and understand its impact. It would be specifically useful for quantitative monitoring of RRRS to begin for childcare as currently there is a disparity between the information about schools and childcare settings. In line with the well-received style of guidance this will need to be clear to understand and straightforward to implement and not an additional burden.
- 7.2.9 Suggested indicators to collect as standard are the levels of additional capacity per setting measured as FTE, and as a number of staff (for example hired or contract hours increased). As per the monitoring exercise settings should report how the additional capacity has been deployed using standard categories. Collecting this data in a standardised way would allow it to be analysed alongside funding

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<sup>34</sup> The evaluation recognises that this does present other challenges as the full Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation is updated every 4 to 5 years.



received. Impact could also be demonstrated through the use of other age-appropriate data sets such as attendance levels (as a proxy for readiness to learn), progress and attainments as displayed in assessment or examinations.

## Annex A: Case Studies

### Maes Derw, PRU



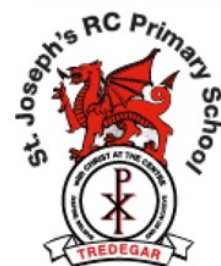
Number of staff supported: One FT level 4 TA (part funded)

Maes Derw is an English medium Pupil Referral Unit in Swansea. Its learners are both primary and secondary age groups.

In 2021/22 academic year the RRRS grant has part funded an additional TA who provides targeted support in the Foundation phase<sup>35</sup>. The learners have been referred to the EOTAS provision in the PRU as they have struggled to reengage in their mainstream settings after lockdown. There are six learners in the group targeted for the additional support, all of whom qualify for FSM, and all have an ALN provision. Three have a School Action Plus Plan (SA+) and three have Local Authority Individual Development Plans (LA IDP).

The TA has worked with the learners to develop strategies to regulate behaviour, improve social skills, and begin to express their emotions and request support when required. As a result, verbal and physical aggression has reduced. Three of the group have made significant progress with their attendance and engagement with learning to the point where they have begun to re-integrate back to their mainstream schools on a part time basis.

### St Joseph's RC Primary School



Number of staff supported: 1 ELSA (emotional literacy support assistant). 1 part time TA

St Joseph's is an English medium Roman Catholic primary school in Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent with 111 learners. Its three-year FSM average is 46 per cent. 11.9 per cent of learners have ALN (SA+).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Pre-September 2022 early education

<sup>36</sup> [Pupil Level Annual School Census summary data by school \(pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary, middle or secondary schools\) \(StatsWales\)](#)

As the pandemic saw a huge rise in social and emotional needs, the Foundation Phase learners and their parents were supported by the ELSA to remain engaged and stay connected with their class teachers, where need was identified. Another TA was part funded by the RRRS&EY by increasing the hours of a part time staff member to identify most at-risk learners and provide additional numeracy and literacy activities.

Engagement was increased by focusing on the fun of learning with daily challenges and 'Fun Friday' activities. Parents were provided with pre-recorded videos introducing them to literacy and numeracy activities and strategies to help them with their children. Small groups of learners were supported more intensively with differentiated phonic learning activities. The additional capacity enabled the Foundation Phase Lead to produce "oracy packs" for younger families focused on parent and child interaction at home, and also to provide family engagement sessions for concerned parents. These have proved popular with learners and their families.

### Ysgol Treffynon, Secondary School



Number of staff supported: 5 tutors in total since 2020, plus supply.

Ysgol Treffynon is an English medium secondary school in Holywell, Flintshire with 525 learners. Its three-year FSM average is 32 per cent. 19.3 per cent of learners have a School Action Plan (SA), 3.4 per cent have a SA+, and 2.7 per cent have a statement of special educational needs.<sup>37</sup>

The inability to provide permanent contracts for staff with the grant funding has meant that difficulties with teacher recruitment are not being addressed by RRRS. Since 2020 the RRRS grant has paid for a total of five one-year contracts for tutors. These are school leavers with good A-level results who

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<sup>37</sup> PLASC 2021/22 [Pupil Level Annual School Census summary data by school \(pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary, middle or secondary schools\) \(StatsWales\)](#)

wish to take year out before beginning university. Further capacity has been created by using the RRRS to pay for supply staff as needed. This frees up subject specialists to work with targeted learners with additional revision sessions. Supply staff are also used to enable school TAs to accompany learners on alternative curriculum provision. These learners, particularly those with ALN, are able to benefit from the existing positive relationships with school staff.

In 2022, year 11 outcomes improved on 2019, in part from the intensive support from the tutors around reading and understanding the language of exam papers. Tutors worked with identified groups of learners using a peer mentoring approach, with access available to all year 11 learners. This provision also provided additional opportunities to converse in Welsh. As the tutors are closer in age to the year 11 learners, oracy sessions in English and Welsh took on a relaxed feel. The tutors worked with year 7 learners in a more traditional adult/learner approach. This focused on literacy and numeracy which helped to mitigate lost learning due to Covid-19. The alternative curriculum reduced exclusions and improved engagement amongst KS4 learners at risk of disengagement and examination failure. The support of staff members with existing relationships with learners, enabled by the RRRS, is a vital part of this improvement.

### Corpus Christi Catholic High School

Number of staff supported: 23 in total, including:

- 1 x Distance Learning Coordinator – Information and Communications Manager
- 2 x cover supervisors
- 2 x Associate Assistant Head teachers
- 10 x Progress Recovery Mentors



Corpus Christi Catholic High School is an English medium, voluntary aided secondary school in Lisvane, Cardiff with 1,076 learners. Its three-year FSM average is 15.1 per cent. 2.6 per cent of the learners have a SA+, 1.8 per cent

have a statement of special educational needs, and 0.9 per cent have an ALN Individual Development Plan (IDP).<sup>38</sup>

The RRRS grant has provided funding to support 23 staff over the three years. These have included distance learning coordinator position to lead on remote learning provision and quality assure its delivery to isolating learners. Two cover supervisors to act as an internal source of supply staff to maintain provision when other staff are absent. Two associate assistant head teachers oversee interventions targeted at learners in need. As part of their role, they manage 10 progress recovery mentors. The mentors identified 40 students across each year group in need of support, engaged them and their families, and developed individual support plans. These plans are shared with school staff and do not decrease the lesson time for learners or teachers.

Enhanced transition activities have been carried out with vulnerable learners entering year 7 using the additional capacity. Small group or 1-to-1 interventions have helped to support maths and reading amongst learners working below age related expectations or high needs learners with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

These strategies have had a series of impacts. Consistent high-quality provision has been provided to all isolating students. Class and whole school closures due to staff absences have been infrequent leading to maintained classroom time for learners. Attendance amongst staff and learners has remained high thanks to mental health and wellbeing support. Amongst targeted learners' ability in reading, comprehension and phonic knowledge, and numeracy has increased alongside confidence. There is strong confidence amongst staff that gaps in learning caused by the national lockdown periods have closed. The majority of raw outcomes at GCSE in 2022 exceeded 2019, in line with national trends, and 2021, better than national averages. Of the 42 targeted learners predicted to fail most of their subjects, 87 per cent achieved five A\*-C grades.

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<sup>38</sup> PLASC 2021/22 [Pupil Level Annual School Census summary data by school \(pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary, middle or secondary schools\) \(StatsWales\)](#)

### Oldcastle Primary School



Number of staff supported: 3

- Family Engagement Officer
- 2 x Wellbeing Champions

Oldcastle is an English medium primary school in Bridgend with 445 learners. Its three-year FSM average is 8.9 per cent. 2.1 per cent of learners have an ALN IDP.<sup>39</sup>

Wellbeing champions have worked with all year groups on key life skills. Learners have experienced how to cook, grow vegetables, basic sewing, and increased understanding of the importance of keeping healthy. A wellbeing dog is now part of the team, supporting more anxious learners arriving at school every morning, and working with target groups during Thrive and wellbeing sessions. The RRRS&EY grants have also been utilised to employ a family engagement officer trained in the Thrive approach to work with learners and their families. They address attendance issues using a mixture of approaches including 1-to-1, nurture groups, attendance meetings, and linking with external agencies.

A structured enrichment programme is now delivered every Friday afternoon delivered by the whole school staff. This offers a range of activities, skills, and experiences. Through this all learners have access to the same opportunities. External professionals are often involved, and a network of community members now exists. There are closer relationships between the school, parents, and the community. Attendance has improved across the whole school, most notably amongst learners with anxieties around attending school. Behaviour has improved with Thrive and 1-to-1 sessions available to be booked or accessed instantly.

### Cylch Meithrin Felinfoel, Childcare

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<sup>39</sup> PLASC 2021/22 [Pupil Level Annual School Census summary data by school \(pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary, middle or secondary schools\) \(StatsWales\)](#)

Number of staff supported: 5

Cylch Meithrin Felinfoel is a Welsh medium funded non-maintained nursery in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire, with places for 24 learners.

With a focus on the future the RRRS&EY funding has been used to support five staff to deliver on digital skills, confidence, and independent learning skills. Learners have acquired skills, knowledge, and attitudes to enable them to be confident, creative, and critical users of technologies and systems.

These skills were considered essential by Cylch Meithrin Felinfoel to allow children to have the potential to succeed in contemporary learning environments, especially with the greater reliance on digital tools since 2020. The extra capacity has also allowed Cylch Meithrin Felinfoel to fully prepare for the start of the Curriculum for Wales in September 2022.

#### Monkton Priory Community Primary School

Number of staff supported: 3



Monkton Priory is an English medium community primary school in Monkton, Pembrokeshire with 225 learners. Its three-year FSM average is 48.8 per cent. 20.6 per cent of learners have a School Action Plan, 19.4 per cent have a SA+, and 3.8 per cent have a statement of special educational needs.<sup>40</sup>

One NQT, to work with all learners, and one TA with a focus on outdoor learning were funded as part of the RRRS&EY grant. Foundation phase learners were targeted with a fine and gross motor skills programme developed by the school's health and wellbeing lead. Learners have been provided with targeted support using several programmes:

- Accelerated Literacy programme. Twenty learners per year over three years.

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<sup>40</sup> PLASC 2021/22 [Pupil Level Annual School Census summary data by school \(pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary, middle or secondary schools\) \(StatsWales\)](#)

- Numeracy through the use of an International Dyslexia Learning Solutions Limited (IDL) programme. Forty learners over one year, around half of whom were previously identified as more able and talented.
- Bespoke Maths intervention. Forty learners over one year.
- Digital competence through projects linked to whole school theme. Eighty learners over one year.
- A bespoke Physical Activity and Wellbeing programme devised by the schools health and wellbeing lead. One hundred and fifty learners per year over two years.
- Priory Outdoor Ranger. 200 learners over one year.

The impact of this support has been dramatic. Due to the IDL many learners made progress in excess of 2 sub-levels. Through targeted literacy support over ten weeks progress of:

- one year for 13 learners
- two years for 14 learners
- three years for five learners,
- four years for three learners,
- five-year progress for one learner.

These achievements, and the outdoor classroom, have improved wellbeing with opportunities taken to let learners celebrate what they have done, develop a love of reading, and take pride in their work.

#### Tiddlers Wraparound, Childcare

Number of staff supported: 2

Tiddlers Wraparound is an English medium funded non-maintained playgroup in Trethomas, Caerphilly for ages 2-4 years. It has capacity for 39 children including Flying Start, early education, and Assisted Places.

Thanks to the RRRS&EY funding an additional staff member has been employed who is not counted for Foundation Phase ratios. This member of



staff has attended COMIT (Torfaen local authority's speech language and communication (SLC) team) and Hana SLC training, and leads a small group to support learners with additional SLC needs.

The new practitioner has gained in confidence and ability to support learners. They identify specific needs, measures, and assess progress at an individual level. Strategies are adapted as each learner progresses. Working with families is a vital element to ensure continuity of progress. From this nearly all learners identified and supported have evidenced improvement in their SLC.

### Ysgol Tir Morfa, Special School

Number of staff supported: 1 teacher and 4 TAs.

Ysgol Tir Morfa is a special school in Rhyl, Denbighshire, for learners aged 3-19.



The RRRS&EY funding has been used to resource an additional teacher to provide training for staff on coping with change, TEEACH programme, and assessments of individual learning programmes. One TA provides additional support for individual interventions and group work. A grade 6 TA assists with learner communication needs across all year groups by supporting and training school staff working with learners using communication aids. A further grade 6 TA plans and delivers rebound therapy for learners with profound multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). To target learners developing gross motor skills, physical health, social skills, and improve mental health and wellbeing, 34 frog bikes have been funded. This is supplemented with an iPad to give learners aged 14-19 years access to cycling accreditation. RRRS has funded supply staff to cover time for preparation and planning the cycling accreditation.

The implementation of interventions has required the coordination of resources across the school. This has included ELSA sessions, Seasons for Growth, draw and talk therapy, sound therapy, Lego therapy. PMLD learners have been supported with bereavement, loss and grief, friend's resilience, trauma informed, and Solihull parenting.

Digital skills have been built using software for graphic design, video editing, web development, and photography. The grants have enabled a new library 'The Reading Shed' which promotes learners' reading and literacy development. Resources also provide work skills and experience opportunities for learners aged 14-19 with a florist, second hand shop, bike repairs and servicing, and a learner run café.

### Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin, Secondary School

Funding received: £47,161

Number of staff supported: 8



Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin is a Welsh medium secondary school in Croesyceiliog, Carmarthenshire, with 910 learners. Its three-year FSM average is 4.4 per cent. 6 per cent of learners have a School Action Plan, 1.9 per cent have a SA+, and 1.1 per cent have a statement of special educational needs.<sup>41</sup>

The RRRS funding has created additional capacity which has enabled smaller target groups at KS4 for core subjects. Specific subject teachers are able to work with an individual focus on more learners. Literacy and numeracy interventions at KS3 have worked with target learners as individuals and groups out of regular class time. Wellbeing has been an important focus with many hours of work required from heads of year and welfare officers. They have spent time with learners and their families to reengage them with education post-lockdown.

There have been major successes for wellbeing and engagement with learning. Academic progress has been made by learners due to interventions made possible through the RRRS grant. All learners have access to extra-curricular activities as extra capacity has meant that sufficient clubs are run on a weekly basis.

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<sup>41</sup> PLASC 2021/22 [Pupil Level Annual School Census summary data by school \(pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary, middle or secondary schools\) \(StatsWales\)](#)

### Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Secondary School

Funding received: £233,133

Number of staff supported: 20, including 2 full time teachers.



Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni is a Welsh medium secondary school in Blackwood, Caerphilly, with 1,810 learners. Its three-year FSM average is 15.1 per cent. 13.1 per cent of learners have a School Action Plan, 6.5 per cent have a SA+, and 1.2 per cent have a statement of special educational need.<sup>42</sup>

Additional capacity from the RRRS grant has worked with learners to support wellbeing by coaching and emotional support. Learners have been supported to develop independent learning skills, and readiness to learn. Academic support has been provided to all year groups in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, and digital competency. Learners in KS4 have benefited greatly from additional capacity to prepare them for examinations.

There has been a large increase in learners' commitment to combined learning with nearly all learners who caused the most concern around engagement joining distance learning following the periods of support. Wellbeing of learners has improved and achievement levels in examinations have been maintained. The additional capacity has further enabled the school to better prepare for the Curriculum for Wales.

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<sup>42</sup> [PLASC 2021/22 Pupil Level Annual School Census summary data by school \(pupils aged 5 to 15 in primary, middle or secondary schools\) \(StatsWales\)](#)

## **Annex B Evaluation research questions**

**Aim: Carry out a literature review, building on recently published reviews, to set out what is known about what works in recovery & dependencies with other schools/childcare support packages**

- What are the key messages in recent relevant literature about effective approaches in schools (nurseries, primary, secondary and special) and childcare settings to supporting learning to recover following disruption, including that published in the UK and internationally?
- How have other nations that are similar to Wales responded to the challenge, particularly England, Scotland and Northern Ireland? What level of investment was / is being made? At what levels of the system has intervention design happened (school, region, government?) Upon which evidence were the interventions based? What monitoring and evaluation has been in place and what has that found?

**Aim: Articulate evidence-based expectations about how the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards Programmes will support schools/childcare settings & learners to recover and the assumptions (including barriers and facilitators) that underpin these to aid future monitoring and evaluation and recovery planning**

- What is the theory of change underpinning the RRR programme? What are the implicit and explicit assumptions and evidence behind the RRR programme about how inputs and activities will produce outputs, outcomes and impacts?
- What are the relationships and dependencies between the RRR Programme and other support packages provided by the Welsh Government and others

**Aim: Learning from the implementation of the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards Programme and early evidence about its reach and effectiveness**

- How have local authorities distributed the funding to schools/childcare settings?
- In terms of support for childcare settings, did local authorities take a more strategic approach to support or pass money directly to settings?
- What advice did local authorities provide to settings on the use of the money?
- How has funding been used by regional consortia and to what effect? To what extent were existing learning / teaching support programmes and activities levered in to boost the effectiveness of the programme?
- What part did other partners play in promoting the scheme, including Education Workforce Council (EWC)/Social Care Wales (SCW), and Cwllwm?
- How has the funding been used by schools/childcare settings? How have schools/childcare settings taken decisions about how to use the funding – what information about their learners and other groups/factors did they take into account, and how?
- To what extent has funding been used for activities that are known to be effective (in the existing evidence base)? How well did learners engage with the additional support offered and what were the facilitators and barriers to schools'/childcare chosen uses of the funding and engagement of learners?
- How much additional capacity for teaching and learning was achieved? Were there any barriers to or facilitators for achieving additional capacity? How many additional posts? Were teachers in good supply / easy to recruit & employ alongside staff teams? What else did schools/childcare settings use the funding to buy?

- To what extent did the programme reach and benefit priority groups of learners?
- To what extent did the programme reach and benefit groups of learners who share protected characteristics (under the 2010 Equality Act) – did any groups benefit disproportionately and were any groups less able to engage with the programme? If so, how and why?
- How effective was the support provided, as a result of the programme, for the following: literacy, numeracy & digital competence; development of independent learning skills, and; coaching for disengaged learners?
- Did implementation of the programme achieve the right balance between reducing bureaucracy and ensuring transparency?
- To what extent were the programme principles of flexibility for identification of children/young people and design of support felt to be appropriate? Did schools/childcare settings feel sufficiently well informed about what the possibilities were and in a position to make the decisions required? Was the sign-off process feasible and effective (including for governors)? Did partners feel that the role played by Welsh Government was appropriate?
- Were all schools/childcare settings able to provide the support needed for learners? If not, why not? Did patterns emerge amongst schools/childcare settings with different characteristics regarding the use of the programme funding and its effectiveness?
- What are the examples of good collaboration that have resulted at regional, local authority or school/childcare levels? What could be done in future to facilitate more effective collaboration across programmes?
- Which approaches to using the funding were the most impactful and considered to be good practice?

- Were there geographical differences in the extent to which the funding provided was sufficient?
- To what extent can value for money be assessed and to what extent has it been achieved? What was the added value of the programme?
- To what extent did the programme fulfil its primary purposes: to provide temporary support to priority cohort learners, to enable them to reengage with school/learning, to progress and to rebuild confidence and learning capability.
- What can early years settings and local authorities learn from each other in terms of what works (especially across maintained and non-maintained settings)?
- What are the lessons for the future? Which changes in approach would make future programmes more effective and impactful?

**Aim: Understanding what further support is required**

- What can be learnt from implementation and evidence of early impacts of the RRR programme for planning related programmes and ways of working with partner organisations in the future?
- Which aspects of the RRR Programme should be prioritised to be continued and why?

**Aim: Understanding the critical elements that a future a monitoring and evaluation approach need to include**

- What are the critical elements that a future monitoring and evaluation approach needs to include in order to achieve a systematic approach to assessment of needs, allocation of resources and understanding of effectiveness and impacts of the programme?

## **Annex C: Monitoring survey**

- 1) School Name
- 2) School Type
  - a. Primary
  - b. Secondary
  - c. All through
  - d. Special school
  - e. PRU
  - f. EOTAS
- 3) Please choose the closest descriptor for the language type of your school
  - a. Bilingual or dual stream
  - b. English medium
  - c. Welsh medium
- 4) Choose your region/Local Authority
  - a. CSC
  - b. EAS
  - c. GWE
  - d. Mid Wales Partnership
  - e. Neath Port Talbot
  - f. Y Partneriaeth
- 5) Contact Name
- 6) Contact email address
- 7) Number of teachers employed through the RRRS grant. Write your answer as a full time equivalent (FTE), e.g. someone working half time would be 0.5 etc.
- 8) Number of support staff employed (including TAs, HLTA, LSA, LSO etc) through the RRRS grant. Write your answer as a full time equivalent (FTE), e.g. someone working half time would be 0.5 etc.



- 9) Number of other staff not included above that were employed through the RRRS grant. Write your answer as a full time equivalent (FTE), e.g. someone working half time would be 0.5 etc.
- 10) Please note details of the capacity secured from an external organisation not accounted for in the above responses, e.g. no. of people, amount of time, function performed etc.
- 11) Tick all the interventions that have been used in your school as part of the RRRS programme.
- a. Support for wellbeing
  - b. Support for learner motivation
  - c. Learning skills
  - d. Exam preparation
  - e. Tutoring
  - f. Literacy support
  - g. Oracy support
  - h. Numeracy support
  - i. Support for digital skills
  - j. Transition preparation between schools or phases
  - k. Coaching and mentoring
  - l. Bringing in outside agencies
  - m. Support for speakers of languages other than the medium of instruction
  - n. Other (as noted above)
- 12) Please rate the importance of each intervention where 1 is most important and 5 is least important
- a. Support for wellbeing
  - b. Support for learner motivation
  - c. Learning skills
  - d. Exam preparation
  - e. Tutoring
  - f. Literacy support
  - g. Oracy support
  - h. Numeracy support
  - i. Support for digital skills
  - j. Transition preparation between schools or phases
  - k. Coaching and mentoring
  - l. Bringing in outside agencies

- m. Support for speakers of languages other than the medium of instruction
- n. Other (as noted above)

13) If you have any further comments on any aspect of RRRS, please record them below. You may wish to consider the impact/benefit the RRRS interventions have had on your school and learners.

14) We are seeking to contact schools to take part in further research around recruit, recover and raise standards. If you wish to take part, please check the below box.