



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT, DOCUMENT

Research on foundation learning in the Curriculum for Wales: government response

Our response to the evaluation report.

First published: 23 March 2026 **Last updated:** 26 March 2026

Background

On 26 March 2026, the Welsh Government published the Government Social Research (GSR) report '**Foundation Learning in the Curriculum for Wales: A qualitative study** (<https://www.gov.wales/foundation-learning-curriculum-wales-qualitative-study>)', developed by Arad Research and Cardiff Metropolitan University. This report is part of the formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales, a multi-year study which will provide us with a broad qualitative and quantitative picture of how the reforms are working, how practice is changing and how these changes are being experienced by senior leaders, practitioners, learners and their families.

A **summary of the Foundation Learning qualitative study's findings** (<https://www.gov.wales/foundation-learning-curriculum-wales-qualitative-study>) has been published. The study explores how schools are realising foundation learning practice in the context of the Curriculum for Wales Framework and how they are using guidance and professional learning to support practice. The research considered current foundation learning pedagogy and practice across Wales.

Foundation learning forms part of the Curriculum for Wales and focuses on the pedagogical teaching and learning approaches which scaffold the learning and development for all children from 3 to 8 years of age, or learners that have similar developmental needs.

Curriculum realisation

The study highlights that many schools are designing and enacting learner-centred, developmentally appropriate curricula in the early years.

Schools consistently placed a clear emphasis on learner-centred curriculum planning, ensuring approaches were responsive to children's developmental needs and informed by the local context, with learning experiences closely linked to the community. Across all schools in the study, play was emphasised as the foundation of early learning, and many practitioners recognised the value of providing authentic, meaningful experiences within play-based pedagogy, including the rich opportunities offered through outdoor learning.

Observation was viewed as a central feature of foundation learning practice. Many schools were also embedding child development principles more purposefully into their curriculum planning. This has been accompanied by a noticeable shift in the role of practitioners as adults that enable learning, as they become increasingly confident in fostering greater independence in children's learning.

The study echoes Estyn's 2024 to 2025 annual report which highlights that many primary schools now have clear strategies to strengthen staff knowledge of child-centred approaches. In the most effective settings, professional learning is demonstrably improving provision for younger learners, underpinned by secure understanding of child development and the value of play, observation, authentic learning and outdoor experiences.

Challenges

Alongside these positive developments, we recognise that challenges remain for effective realisation of the Curriculum for Wales.

Practitioners call for strengthened support to evidence learner progression, highlighting the need for approaches that reflect the Curriculum for Wales' emphasis on broad, holistic understanding and authentic learning.

The findings indicate a need to support schools in developing pedagogical approaches that ensure continuity across progression steps, helping to move away from perceptions of previous phase and stage transition points that are not part of the Curriculum for Wales.

These challenges are heightened by practitioners' experiencing increasing complexity in learner needs, including delays in communication, language, and social-emotional development, alongside funding and staffing ratios.

Practitioners report variability in access to professional learning. There is also a need for more examples specific to foundation learning practice and real-world case studies to support high-quality, developmentally appropriate pedagogy.

Support for schools

The Curriculum for Wales Framework, including the **enabling learning** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/enabling-learning/>) and **supporting learner progression: assessment guidance** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/assessment-arrangements/supporting-learner-progression-assessment-guidance/>) sections of statutory guidance, as well as the **curriculum and assessment arrangements** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/curriculum-and-assessment-arrangements-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings/>) for those delivering nursery education in funded non-maintained nursery settings, provide a strong foundation on which to provide further support.

We continue to signpost practitioners and local authorities to **curriculum design tools**, (<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/tools-and-templates-for-curriculum-design>) including the **National Support Programme** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/news/articles/a2458758-2cff-446e-b5b8-fd4b7216019c>) (NSP) and other Hwb resources. The NSP provides a dedicated pathway for Enabling learning that emphasises how the three enablers (enabling adults, engaging experiences and effective environments) underpin effective curriculum planning and support all learners.

Examples of professional learning focused on foundation learning practice include two complementary suites of professional learning which we will continue to promote. These include '**Understanding the five developmental pathways and pedagogy** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/playlists/view/203d9156-31af-41e5-a411-d7176f6e841a/en/1?options=CNIQ39k7rbEp4zsz8OdGxip83XDxyAM%252BxyuNqUgoOrvEtxGXwma9Q0UtNK7LrNnQRd0IDKVUxOJcs83WovMvhAyiCCDScO%252FXzJa8lJSiPljcqJf9zKFBTguRkoZbZljbh1iAvIYvPerFxbY1eoqd%252FvUKi4FoG3J1XltNG1mvjL6rshyORWdgSdVEe5ChzyTY8piWCI%252Fe3qDyzZwLpppkPg%253D%253D>)', and **modules** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/repository/resource/b8781f79-5eb7-4548-a20e-a17b0da88df2/overview>) designed for schools and settings to support play-based learning, outdoor learning, child development, observation, transition and authentic and purposeful learning. These modules reflect developmentally appropriate pedagogy.

This work is supported by approaches such as the notice-analyse-respond cycle which promotes high-quality observational assessment and helps practitioners to understand learner needs and adapt their practice. In doing so, practitioners

intentionally draw on the three enablers to create the conditions for holistic, meaningful learning. It also ensures curriculum design is grounded in the five developmental pathways (belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being) enabling learners to progress in ways that are authentic, developmentally appropriate and responsive to their needs.

The Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance sets out that assessment should support each learner's individual progress and should be rooted in practitioners' understanding of the learner. On-entry assessment should provide a holistic picture of each child, enabling practitioners to plan provision that supports and challenges appropriately. These principles are reinforced in the **assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/curriculum-and-assessment-arrangements-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings/assessment-arrangements-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings/>), which emphasise observing children in context, recognising unique developmental patterns, and ensuring learners' needs remain central to pedagogy.

To promote greater consistency in applying the Curriculum for Wales principles, including effective use of the developmental pathways, we will continue to promote high quality professional learning and exemplification materials. These will build on existing resources embedding assessment within developmentally appropriate pedagogy and helping practitioners develop a shared understanding of progression. We will continue to work collaboratively and constructively with practitioners and local authority partners to identify and share effective practice ensuring the use of coherent approaches.

We are supportive of schools' using the curriculum and assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings to inform development of their own curriculum, and we will continue to highlight this as an option. We have signalled this support in the refreshed nursery education guidance for local authorities which is due for publication at the end of March 2026.

As part of an ongoing cycle of review and refinement of the Curriculum for Wales, we will consider how clearly curriculum and assessment requirements are articulated in the Curriculum for Wales Framework and how best to support a shared understanding across the system to address variability.

We are pleased that pedagogy is increasingly intentional, building on previous practice while placing play-based learning and experiential learning at the centre of effective foundation learning practice. Practitioners are demonstrating greater confidence in positioning themselves as enabling adults, supporting independence, authentic learning and holistic development. It is clear pedagogical expectations across the Curriculum for Wales for children aged 3 to 16 would benefit from further clarification and practical support. The Curriculum for Wales emphasises pedagogy that is developmentally appropriate and draws on a blend of approaches, with practitioners acting as enabling adults and using effective environments to scaffold learning.

Practitioners and senior leaders have highlighted a need for clear, practical guidance to support confidence, continuity and consistency when designing and realising the curriculum for younger learners and supporting learner development.

Local authority and regional support, together with the Enabling learning statutory guidance and other support on Hwb, form important sources of information for schools. Some schools draw effectively on **a curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings/>) to support planning and assessment, while others find adapting it for their context more challenging.

There are several programmes already in train to support learners including the CAL:ON programme which will provide learners aged 3 to 8 with a developmentally appropriate foundation in early language and literacy, focusing on skills that underpin later reading success. Alongside this a Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Training Framework for Wales is due for publication at the end of March 2026 to assist practitioners working with 5 to 16-year-olds in identifying practitioner training needs and facilitating access to the necessary support to enhance their skills and improve outcomes for all learners. We are also expanding the original communications developmental pathways resources, which supported practitioners working with children aged 3 to 4, to extend support from age 5 upwards, further developing practitioner knowledge and understanding of SLC.

We have appointed a new early years professional advisor to review how Additional Learning Needs (ALN) support operates across Wales, identifying variation in local authority practice to inform future steps for greater national

consistency. Estyn has reported that Early Years ALN Lead Officers are working effectively with parents and settings to secure the right support for young children. Through Cwlwm funding, we are strengthening sector confidence in ALN, including training, and we have published an ALN toolkit to help families navigate the system, developed with input from parents, carers and professionals across education, health, social care and local authorities. In parallel, the Welsh Government has developed new supplementary guidance to strengthen transparent, evidence-based decision making using the two-stage legal test and clarify expectations for communication, disputes and appeals.

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring strong alignment between early years provision and education, promoting continuity in children's development and enabling smoother, more effective transitions into education. The draft of **Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Assessment arrangements for 0 to 3 year olds in Wales** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/56eefe72-c515-4a94-b2cc-6c89b4347f50/250910-early-childhood-play-learning-and-care-assessment-arrangements-for-0-to-3-year-olds-in-wales.pdf>), published in September 2025, is one example of this in action, strengthening alignment across play, learning, and care in the early years. The final arrangements are due for publication in September 2026.

We are also making excellent progress rolling out high-quality childcare to two-year-olds across Wales through the Flying Start expansion programme. Building on the success of the original **Talk with Me** (<https://www.gov.wales/talk-with-me>) programme for children aged 0 to 5, we are **consulting on extended support through Talk with Me Phase 2** (<https://www.gov.wales/talk-me-phase-2-speech-language-and-communication-slc-delivery-plan-2026-2030-html-0>) to support children aged 0 to 11 with their SLC skills. **'Parenting. Give it time** (<https://www.gov.wales/parenting-give-it-time>)' also provides parenting information, advice support and tips on common parenting concerns such as children's behaviour, child development, starting school and signposts parents to sources of further support.

The mandatory Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience plays a key role in supporting learner's physical, emotional and mental well-being. The Curriculum for Wales Framework also supports opportunities to build emotional literacy, empathy, motivation and decision-making skills - equipping children to

grow as healthy, confident individuals that have the foundations to be lifelong learners.

We have published our **Strategic Education Workforce Plan for Schools** (<https://www.gov.wales/strategic-education-workforce-plan-schools>) setting out how we will support the continued development of our schools and settings-based workforce.

Adnodd (<https://adnodd.gov.wales/>), the Welsh Government arm's length body continues to oversee and coordinate the provision of bilingual educational resources to support the teaching and learning. We are also exploring ways to improve access to language technologies.

Working with **Dysgu** (<https://www.gov.wales/dysgu>), our national professional learning and leadership body, we will provide a clear and consistent offer of professional learning that supports practitioners across all settings to realise the Curriculum for Wales. Dysgu and its partners will develop and promote opportunities that build practitioner confidence, strengthen professional judgement and broaden access to high-quality support. This will include provision that deepens understanding of child and adolescent development and supports the use of approaches grounded in strong developmentally appropriate pedagogical principles. For example, '**Calm Classrooms, Thriving Minds** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-learning/developing-as-a-professional/calm-classrooms-thriving-minds-professional-learning-for-educators>)' is a pilot programme co-developed by practitioners and other experts, providing practical, evidence-informed techniques that help practitioners build confidence and self-efficacy in the classroom, gain practical tools for behaviour management and well-being, and deepen their understanding of child development, neurodiversity and mental health, while also supporting staff well-being.

The professional learning delivered by Dysgu is complemented by updated **school improvement guidance** (<https://hwb.gov.wales/school-improvement-and-leadership/evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/school-improvement-guidance/>) which clarifies expectations and helps local authorities, school leaders and governing bodies to understand the culture, behaviours and practices required for schools to become effective learning organisations and engage in purposeful collaboration. Dysgu will also broaden opportunities for practitioners to engage in reflective and collaborative activity that supports school improvement.

Together, the Foundation Learning qualitative study and Estyn findings demonstrate steady and sustained progress in using the Curriculum for Wales in the earlier years and identify clear priorities for future action. Our next steps will prioritise clarity, exemplification, and coherent professional learning with a strong emphasis on assessment as part of pedagogy, and collaborative school improvement so that practitioners can confidently realise the Curriculum for Wales and every learner can thrive.