



1907-2007

Estyn

Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

The Foundation Phase pilots

August 2007



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LEAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
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Introduction and background

- 1 The Foundation Phase, introduced as a pilot in September 2004, aims to provide a broad, balanced and varied curriculum for children aged between three and seven. It is a major pillar of the Welsh Assembly Government's early years programme. The Foundation Phase aims to make sure that young children develop a good range of skills and gain positive attitudes to learning which will provide the building blocks for lifelong learning. It is based on compelling research evidence that suggests that what happens to children in their early years affects the rest of their lives. It stresses the positive benefits to children of learning skills and knowledge through first-hand activities that allow them to experiment and play.
- 2 Currently, the Foundation Phase is being piloted in 42 settings. This is made up of one school in each local education authority (LEA) and one funded non-maintained setting in 20 LEAs.
- 3 The Foundation Phase will be introduced to all schools and settings with three to five year olds from September 2008.
- 4 When the pilot began, the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned a two-year evaluation to monitor how effectively the Foundation Phase was being implemented in the pilot schools and settings (Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effective Implementation of the Foundation Phase – MEEIFP report). The intention was to learn from the experiences of the pilot schools and settings and to reflect these lessons in plans to extend the Foundation Phase to all schools and settings in Wales. The research team reported its findings in December 2006. In response to these findings Welsh Assembly Government produced an action plan.
- 5 In 2005-2006, in the Welsh Assembly Government's annual remit to Estyn, the Minister asked for a survey of the impact of the funding for education places for three year olds. A few visits were made to Foundation Phase pilot settings as part of this remit. Initial visits by inspectors demonstrated that it was too early to measure outcomes. It was therefore agreed with WAG officers that Estyn should continue undertaking visits in order to gather evidence to inform the roll-out of the Foundation Phase.
- 6 This report is based on evidence gathered during visits to almost all pilot schools and settings. We have also used evidence from inspecting pilot schools and settings as part of the six year cycle of school inspections. During visits we observed children and interviewed practitioners over a period from October 2005 to December 2006.
- 7 Many of the findings in this report echo the findings in the MEEIFP report. We have enclosed an appendix to this report in Appendix 1, which shows how the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Building the Foundation Phase Action Plan' aims to address some of these issues.¹

¹ This action plan can be found on the Welsh Assembly Government website:
http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/early-wales/foundation_phase/foundation_phase_documents/?lang=en

Main findings

- 8 Almost all practitioners in the pilot schools and settings are enthusiastic about the Foundation Phase and show high levels of commitment to its success. Overall, practitioners have worked extremely hard to make adjustments to practice and to learn new ways of working.
- 9 In all pilots, practitioners are developing curriculum planning to support the delivery of the content of the seven areas of learning (Appendix 2). However, a significant minority of practitioners are less secure in deciding how best to balance child-led and adult-led activities. It has been difficult for some settings to determine how much direction adults should give to young children in their activities and how far the children should be allowed and encouraged to plan for themselves.
- 10 While many schools and settings have on-entry assessments for children at the start of the Foundation Phase, this is not universally the case. This means that not all schools and settings are able to measure children's progress over time as effectively or consistently from a common starting point.
- 11 All schools and settings have some assessment processes in place. In almost all settings, practitioners keep records that show the progress that children are making in most areas of learning, although some do not record children's progress in bilingualism and multi-culturalism. While observations take place regularly in the majority of schools and settings, not all practitioners are clear about why they are assessing and what they should record.
- 12 Despite the fact that almost all schools and settings have devised their own systems for recording children's progress or are using systems developed by their LEA, these vary considerably in terms of content. This lack of common criteria for recording progress means that transition between schools and settings, and in some cases between classes, does not always build well enough on children's prior learning.
- 13 Almost all schools and settings are making more use of the outdoors. However, in approximately 25% of the pilots, practitioners are unsure or unconvinced about the benefits of outdoor learning and continue to see this merely as play sessions using large toys and equipment.
- 14 In the best practice, good use is made of outside areas to allow children opportunities to do things that are not always possible inside. For instance, this could mean creating a building site with as much real equipment as health and safety considerations allow.
- 15 Despite the fact that almost all practitioners have received some training on multiculturalism, this area is generally not well developed in the majority of schools and settings and is often misunderstood by practitioners. For instance, learning and teaching experiences in multiculturalism are not always well-planned across all areas of learning and are often stand-alone activities. This approach, while raising awareness of some aspects of other cultures, runs the risk of encouraging children to note what is different from their own culture rather than what is similar. Where schools and settings are developing good multicultural development, practitioners

use personal and social development well to develop core values in their children, such as fairness, tolerance, a positive self-image and a sense of belonging.

- 16 In non-Welsh medium schools and settings, bilingualism is a cause for concern. Practitioners are unclear as to what the expectations are for this area of learning. They are unsure about whether they should be aiming to make their children competent in using two languages by the time they are seven or whether they are merely teaching Welsh as a second language with lower expectations. Mixed messages from a range of organisations are also adding to the confusion. In addition, many staff in these schools and settings lack the skills and confidence to deliver this area of learning.
- 17 Although all schools and settings value the additional funding, almost all felt it was not enough to meet their needs and the expectations of the Foundation Phase.
- 18 Only a few schools and settings have effective systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision they currently offer in the Foundation Phase and its impact on children's achievement and attainment.
- 19 The quality of monitoring and evaluation of the pilot schools and settings by their LEAs is mixed. While all LEAs offer support to pilot schools and settings, many have not yet begun to make judgements on the quality of education provided by the settings and the impact this has on children's learning.
- 20 Overall, practitioners say that they get adequate support from their local education authorities although there are differences in perception between schools and settings. There is evidence that levels of support and take-up of training vary from local authority to local authority, particularly as far as settings are concerned.

Recommendations

The Welsh Assembly Government needs to:

- R1 produce additional guidance that would clarify misconceptions about what is meant by child-led and adult-led activities and outdoor learning;
- R2 devise an all-Wales system to record children's skills on entry to the Foundation Phase to allow children's progress to be measured more consistently over time;
- R3 develop an all-Wales system of assessment and record keeping that can be used by all practitioners to ensure consistency and ease transition between schools, settings and classes;
- R4 define and clarify the expectations for bilingualism; and
- R5 produce guidance and training for all practitioners on planning, assessment and record-keeping.

Local authorities need to:

- R6 take the lead in monitoring and evaluating their pilot schools and settings; and
- R7 use this information to plan how best to prepare schools for the full implementation in 2008.

Schools and settings need to:

- R8 work with their LEAs to monitor and evaluate more systematically the impact of the Foundation Phase on children's attainment and achievement; and
- R9 make sure that all practitioners are confident enough to teach cultural diversity and have the language skills necessary to support children's development as bilingual learners.

Learning and teaching

- 21 In all schools and settings, daily routines are generally well-established with many making sure that there is a good balance between activities that are planned and led by adults and activities that children choose for themselves. In these schools and settings children are encouraged to be make their own snacks, set up their own role-play areas, 'write' and 'produce' their own plays and use digital cameras to record their learning. In the best practice, practitioners know when and how to intervene in children's activities to extend their learning successfully and challenge their thinking.
- 22 However, in both schools and settings there are some examples where practitioners are unsure of how to achieve an appropriate balance between allowing children to choose things that they enjoy doing and intervening to direct activities. This confusion means that children do not always receive the support and guidance they need and play can become aimless. In a few other cases, activities are so adult-directed that children have no opportunities to make choices or think for themselves.
- 23 In a few schools and settings, practitioners have interpreted the Foundation Phase guidance to mean they should plan far less to avoid being too adult-directed in their approach. They believe that children will learn by themselves if they simply provide them with the resources. While children will learn some things by this approach, there are certain important skills that need to be planned, taught and directed by practitioners.
- 24 A few less experienced or less confident practitioners sometimes miss opportunities to broaden and consolidate children's learning by asking challenging and relevant questions.

Case study 1

This case study illustrates how practitioners are building on children's independent learning skills.

The setting is a Welsh-medium maintained school setting of approximately 30 pupils in North Wales.

Fourteen learners aged three to seven are experiencing the Foundation Phase curriculum. A full-time teacher and classroom assistant encourage the children to take charge of their own learning by deciding when they will complete any teacher-directed tasks during the day. Children quickly learn how to manage their time well and what they should learn. A range of well-thought out additional activities are provided by adults as well as activities that the children choose themselves. Planning is detailed, skills-based and flexible. For instance, if the class teacher is planning the use of describing words this will happen in lots of different contexts during the day with both practitioners, who are aware what their focus should be. Older children complete a work-time card at the start of the day to show what they are planning to do.

- 25 Overall, most schools and settings make good use of the outdoors to develop children's physical, personal and social skills and knowledge and understanding of the world.
- 26 In almost all schools and settings, staff make more use of the outdoors than they used to, although a significant minority remain uncertain as to its benefits. In schools and settings where practitioners are less confident in using the Foundation Phase methodology, planning for using the outdoors often concentrates on the activities that adults provide rather than what the children can learn. For these schools and settings there is a danger that outdoors learning becomes an additional area of learning rather than another context to develop all areas of learning.
- 27 In the best schools and settings visited, children learn much from using the outdoor environment. They enjoy what they are doing and have the freedom to experiment and try things out. Most schools and settings continue to timetable outdoor sessions, particularly during the winter and early spring. However, only a few schools and settings allow open access throughout the year. Not having open access restricts choices that children can make and does not always make best use of the outdoors as an additional resource.
- 28 In many schools and settings, the building does not allow for open access. Sometimes, the lack of suitable outdoor wear restricts open access except for the late spring and summer term. In a minority of settings, practitioners are concerned about parents' reaction to children being out of doors in inclement weather. Some practitioners are unsure or unconvinced as to how all areas of learning may be developed outside. There is a continuing need for support and training for Foundation Phase practitioners in this new aspect of curriculum provision.
- 29 In nearly all schools and many settings, more time is now spent on observing children's activities. However, not all practitioners are clear about what they should record when they observe children and often note what children are doing rather than what they are learning. In a few instances, in both sectors, too much time is spent assessing children at the expense of interacting purposefully with them. Nevertheless, it is useful to continue using a variety of different methods to record these assessments. For instance, practitioners in schools are keeping daily field notes, weekly logs, skills ladders and focussed task assessment sheets. In settings, practitioners are recording children's progress using post-it notes, giant class diaries and notebooks.
- 30 In the best practice in planning and assessment, practitioners:
- plan carefully across all areas of learning to make sure there is a good balance of activities both indoors and out;
 - provide good opportunities for children to play independently and in groups;
 - know what skills they want children to learn and are flexible as to how this can be achieved;
 - allow space in their planning to take account of children's interests;

- plan jointly with other practitioners, sharing ideas;
- plan time to observe children at play and use this information to good effect; and
- assess children's progress regularly and use this information well to plan future steps in their development.

Case study 2

This case study illustrates an example of good assessment practices in a non-maintained setting.

The setting is an English-medium non-maintained setting of approximately 30 pupils in North Wales.

This setting was visited quite soon after the pilot began but already staff were introducing some innovative practices in assessment and recording. Each child in the setting has a Treasure Box in which is kept samples of things the child has accomplished or notes of activities they have enjoyed during a session. This mechanism not only records children's progress but also celebrates each child's achievement however small it may be. To make sure that parents and carers are well informed about their child's progress each child also has a home link box. In the box are things that the child has made during the session, but in addition setting practitioners often add post-it notes to let the parents know if their child has done or said anything special.

- 31 The ways in which practitioners record and track children's progress across the phase vary considerably between areas, schools and settings and in some cases between classes in the same provider. For instance, some recording systems track children's progress from 3-7 years, while other systems track children from 3-5 years. Some systems record children's skills, while others include knowledge acquired as well as skills. These different practices mean that it is difficult to track children's progress as they move on. Without consistency among practitioners as to what should be recorded there is also a potential to disrupt children's learning. Rather than building on what has already been mastered a child may re-visit what they already know because the tracking system is not adequate. There is no agreed centrally-produced tracking system at present.

Curriculum development

- 32 Most practitioners are pleased with the curriculum guidance that they have received from the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) to support the implementation of the Foundation Phase.
- 33 Initially guidance was slow to reach schools and settings and this caused some anxiety as practitioners were unsure of what to do. While the lack of guidance was seen as a negative by many settings, some settings reported that they found that this gave them freedom to evolve their own approach to learning and teaching.
- 34 Practitioners are generally happy with the curriculum content of the Foundation Phase, although our visits show that in almost all pilots practitioners have less understanding of how to deliver bilingualism (where required) and multiculturalism than other areas of learning.
- 35 In schools and settings where practitioners are confident and experienced, they have used guidance well to plan the curriculum carefully and make sure all areas of learning (AOLs) are appropriately covered over time. However, even in these settings, planning for developing multiculturalism and bilingualism (where required) is sometimes less well-structured. In schools and settings with less confident practitioners these areas of learning are developing less well than other AOLs. This is because practitioners are less secure about the types of activities they should introduce in order to develop them effectively.
- 36 In almost all schools and settings, practitioners are introducing children to multiculturalism through:
- celebrating major festivals from other cultures during the year, such as Diwali and the Chinese New Year;
 - telling stories based on the history or faith of other cultures;
 - encouraging children to sample foods from different countries;
 - developing role-play corners where children can 'visit' other countries; and
 - providing opportunities for children to study dance, art and design from around the world.
- 37 In the best practice, sensitive use is made of information about children from other countries. However, in some schools and settings, weaker understanding by practitioners means that children are made too aware of differences that exist between cultures and people rather than understanding the similarities. Stereotypes are therefore sometimes reinforced rather than challenged.
- 38 Since our visits to schools and settings, which took place up to December 2006, DCELLS have produced a new draft framework for consultation. This framework has changed the requirement to teach multiculturalism, which is no longer coupled with bilingualism. Instead, multiculturalism is referred to as cultural diversity and is now

part of the AOL of personal and social development and well-being. This is helpful to practitioners as it is now more explicit that cultural awareness should be taught across all areas of learning and not as a discrete area.

- 39 In non-Welsh medium schools and settings, almost all practitioners are enthusiastic about using Welsh with the children, and most children respond very positively. Although there is more use of incidental Welsh in these schools and settings, bilingualism remains at an early stage of development.

Training, staffing and funding

- 40 All LEAs have been proactive in providing some training for staff in their pilot schools and settings. Training is provided for the pilot schools and settings mostly in the context of whole authority training and, while this is valued by most practitioners in the pilots, many feel that they are sometimes training others in this situation by sharing their experiences rather than being trained.
- 41 While most schools and settings acknowledge the support of the LEA, a few schools and settings feel that there has not been enough practical help to meet their individual needs. Many schools and settings would like more reassurance from their LEAs that what they are doing is right.
- 42 There is some confusion among staff, where English is the main language of instruction, as to the expectations on them to make children bilingual. For many pilots, particularly in the non-maintained sector, this is proving an impossible expectation as practitioners often lack the Welsh language skills to do this.
- 43 In discussions with practitioners, pilot schools are generally happier with the training they have received than pilot settings. For instance, most schools regularly access LEA training and have found it to be beneficial. Most settings access some training although many feel that the content and focus are sometimes too directed at schools. A small minority of settings feel isolated and marginalised.
- 44 Many LEAs have developed informal networking groups for the pilot schools and settings and these are generally valued by staff as a way of discussing concerns and sharing information. With the inclusion of Early Start schools and settings into the pilot from September 2007 there are further opportunities to develop this good practice.
- 45 Formal network groups for the pilot schools and settings have also been set up by the Welsh Assembly Government's Early Years Education and Safeguards Team and the Curriculum and Assessment 3-14 Team. These group sessions provide additional opportunities to develop practitioners' knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Phase as well as a mechanism for consultation. However, not all schools and settings attend these meetings regularly.
- 46 All schools and settings value the additional funding from the Welsh Assembly Government for the Foundation Phase. In many cases, schools have also used their own resources in addition to this funding. In a few schools, funding has been used to develop access to the outside area or to create more space in the staff-room for additional staff. In the non-maintained sector, most of the funding received is used to purchase new resources, which leaves little for staff training. In both sectors, extra funding has allowed schools and settings to purchase additional learning resource to support all areas of learning. Overall, staff feel that the additional funding provided has not met all their resource and accommodation needs.
- 47 Staffing ratios have been improved in the maintained sector and funding for extra staff has been useful for these settings. However, many schools felt a period of adjustment was necessary to make full use of extra staff as teachers had to learn

new skills of working in much larger teams. For instance, a class teacher in a class of five year olds (reception class) may now be managing a team of two additional assistants where previously they may only have received timetabled help for shorter periods. Most teachers are making good progress in co-ordinating and monitoring the work of large teams and are focusing their planning better on developing a shared understanding of children's needs and their development. Where additional practitioners are not always used correctly they are not given enough guidance on what to do to extend and challenge children's thinking. In a few schools and settings, practitioners do not always present good models in the way they use language.

- 48 In the non-maintained sector, staffing ratios have remained the same. This is because non-maintained settings were already required to have staffing ratios of one member of staff to eight children as a requirement for registration with Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW).
- 49 During our visits, practitioners in all schools and settings were purposefully engaged with children although less experienced practitioners sometime lacked the necessary questioning skills to extend children's learning.

Case study 3

This case study illustrates an example of effective leadership in training and supporting new staff.

The setting is a large English-medium primary school in South Wales. At the time of the visit there were approximately 60 learners between the ages of three and five experiencing the Foundation Phase.

In this school, the headteacher has been pro-active in devising systems to develop and encourage team-working between all support staff involved in the helping to deliver the Foundation Phase. An experienced early years practitioner has been appointed as a senior support worker with a key role in developing the new team. Her role is to oversee the work of the support team on a day-to-day basis and hold informal meetings to make sure new staff in particular are comfortable in their roles.

The senior support worker is supported by the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator who meets with her regularly and the whole support team termly. The headteacher also meets with the support team termly. During these informal and formal meetings issues and concerns are discussed, good practice and ideas are shared, and some training takes place.

All support staff have continuing professional development files and have personal improvement targets. These targets are linked specifically to developing skills that are needed in the Foundation Phase. For instance, staff have personal targets to use more incidental Welsh with the children. To facilitate this the school is developing phrase banks that support staff can use during activities indoors and outdoors.

The school uses closure days to train all Foundation Phase staff together. This ensures that all staff are receiving consistent messages and have a shared understanding.

Making a difference – monitoring quality

- 50 Too few schools and settings are measuring the impact of the Foundation Phase on children's achievement and attainment or monitoring and evaluating the quality of their provision.
- 51 Only a few schools and settings can provide examples of data that show measurable improvement in children's achievement. One maintained setting has analysed its statutory baseline scores for the last few years to look for improvement trends. Another maintained setting is tracking children's attendance and claims that improved attendance is a good indication that the curriculum suits more children. While recording data systematically is only one means of capturing information about children's progress, it is a cause for concern that only a few settings use other sources of information systematically and analyse it to judge the impact of the new curriculum.
- 52 In almost all schools and settings it is practitioners' perception of how well children are doing that is the measure by which impact is generally judged. Practitioners report, for instance, that children are more confident and happier, and that they can concentrate for longer periods. In a few settings, in both the maintained and non-maintained sector, staff report that boys are much more engaged in their activities, especially if the activities are outdoors. Over one third of schools also report that children's speaking and listening skills have improved. Just under a quarter of group leaders in non-maintained settings note that the biggest impact in Foundation Phase relates to improvements in staff confidence.

Case study 4

This is an example of where experienced and knowledgeable practitioners are using their knowledge of good early years practices to develop work in the Foundation Phase.

The setting is an English-medium maintained primary school of approximately 150 pupils in North Wales.

Thirty-one learners aged three to seven are allocated two full time teachers, one nursery nurse and one teaching assistant.

The school makes exceptionally good use of the outdoor environment. The younger children in particular develop a wide range of good quality vocabulary and excellent interpersonal skills through working in pairs and groups, for example by building a castle.

All ages work well together in a supportive and challenging environment.

Excellent planning at all levels ensures that the headteacher and early years staff have long, medium and short term objectives to allow children to progress from the early stages of the Foundation Phase through to key stage 2. There is also good use of teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time (PPA) to facilitate joint planning. Support staff are used very well: there is no noticeable difference between 'teaching' and 'non-teaching' staff. Staff stress that the good practice is simply the continuation of sound existing pedagogy for teaching early years pupils.

The headteacher provides strong leadership and is very knowledgeable about learning and teaching for young children.

Appendix 1

Estyn's recommendations	Welsh Assembly Government's Building the Foundation Phase Action Plan Action points
<p>R1: produce additional guidance that would clarify misconceptions of what is meant by child-led and adult-led activities and outdoor learning.</p>	<p>Put in place a major in-service training programme for teachers and other staff working within the Foundation Phase.</p> <p>Fund 22 Foundation Phase Training and Support Officers.</p> <p>All guidance materials to have a glossary of terms.</p> <p>New guidance to include teaching and learning, play/active learning and observing children.</p>
<p>R2: devise an all-Wales system to record children's skills on entry that will allow children's skills to be better measured over time.</p>	<p>Review current baseline implementation and requirements.</p>
<p>R3: develop an all-Wales recording system that will allow for greater consistency between practitioners and assist in ensuring good transition between settings and classes.</p>	<p>Develop a draft Foundation Phase Profile (child's record and practitioners' guidance) to record children's on-going achievements, stages of development and for transition purposes.</p>
<p>R4: define and clarify what the expectations are for bilingualism.</p>	<p>Further guidance will cover bilingualism.</p> <p>Review current role of Athrawon Bro.</p> <p>Funding for Foundation Phase Setting Support Teachers.</p>

<p>R5: produce guidance and training for all practitioners on planning, assessment and record keeping.</p>	<p>Develop exemplification of standards guidance for the seven Areas of Learning.</p> <p>Put in place a major in-service training programme, supported by a Foundation Phase Training Pack, for teachers and other staff working within the Foundation Phase.</p> <p>Fund 22 Foundation Phase Training and Support Officers.</p> <p>Practitioners provided with guidance on children's development stages that will support observation and assessment of the children.</p> <p>Funding for Foundation Phase Setting Support Teachers.</p>
<p>R6: make sure all settings are suitably funded to implement the Foundation Phase.</p>	<p>Review funding arrangements for the Early Years and Foundation Phase Revenue Grants.</p> <p>Local authorities to audit accommodation both indoors and outside.</p>

Appendix 2

Areas of Learning²

Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity

Language, Literacy and Communication Skills

Mathematical Development

Bilingualism

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Physical Development

Creative Development

² Areas of Learning are taken from the Foundation Phase Framework for Children's Learning, Consultation Document January 2007.