



The Annual Report of Her
Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Education and Training in
Wales

2018-2019



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Guide to the report

This year's report is the 27th consecutive annual report published in Wales since the Education (Schools) Act 1992 required its production. The report consists of:

The Chief inspector's foreword

Section 1: A thematic section focusing on key themes in education reform

Section 2: Individual sector reports about inspection findings in 2018-2019

Annex 1 provides an overview of the inspection framework and notes about the words, phrases and data used in the report.

Annex 2 provides a commentary on the recently issued PISA findings for 2018.

Annex 3 sets out a series of charts showing Estyn's inspection outcomes for 2018-2019.

Annex 4 contains links to the documents referenced in the report.

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Foreword

Major reform

Looking back over the last three years, the most striking features of the Welsh education system have been a set of fundamental reforms and the preparations made for those reforms. In the **compulsory education phase**, the reforms have centred around designing and planning for a new school curriculum, and on the knock-on effects onto teaching and assessment practice, staff professional learning, leadership development, and almost every other aspect of schooling and teaching. In the **post-compulsory education and training phase**, the proposed creation of a Commission for Tertiary Education and Research signals a major structural change to the planning and governance of higher education, further education, apprenticeships, sixth-form provision and adult learning. And there are also significant changes in train in the field of **special educational needs** that bridge the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors.

There is a widespread consensus among educationalists within Wales and further afield around the need for major changes to the Welsh education system. And indeed, there has been considerable agreement around the broad nature of particular reforms, while there has been debate on specific elements, such as the pace of change and the resources available. Even given this general consensus, **transforming a whole education system is a complex and long-term undertaking**, and one that is estimated to take at least a decade.

The reform programme can be conceived of not only in terms of a set of policy changes aimed at reshaping practice, but also in terms of a broader shift in the underlying culture of our national education system. The magnitude of this task is highlighted by identifying some of the cultural changes envisaged:

- moving from an education system where variability is tackled and improvement is driven by competition to a system based on self improvement and collaboration
- moving towards a more balanced use of performance data that avoids the unintended consequences of a high-stakes approach to accountability and target setting
- moving to a more reflective, evidence-informed education system with a greater emphasis on professional enquiry and research



Meilyr Rowlands

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Education and Training in Wales

Foreword

Gathering momentum

Progress is being made on implementing the initial stages of this reform programme and the pace has accelerated recently. For example, the new curriculum has been published and there is a **growing culture of collaboration** between national, regional and local education organisations. The initial stages of this work have taken time, as expected of a process based largely on co-creation between government and a wide range of stakeholders, including the teaching profession. In terms of curriculum reform specifically, a stage has now been reached when **all schools need to think carefully about what the new curriculum means for them**. The newly published Curriculum for Wales offers an overarching structure for curriculum planning, but the responsibility is on each school to design its own curriculum to provide what their learners need to thrive in the modern world.

During a period of structural reform, it is important that the quality of education and standards do not slip. There is still much left to do and, along with identifying much good and excellent practice, this report highlights some of the challenges that remain. The messages regarding the sectors and phases of education and training that we inspect are similar to last year, with this year's inspection outcomes being broadly similar to those of previous years. There are well-established strengths in non-maintained nursery settings, primary schools, special schools, and post-16 provision. There have also been improvements this year in inspection outcomes for the growing all-age school sector.

Standards are good or excellent in eight-in-ten primary schools and in just under a half of secondary schools. The proportion of secondary schools causing concern compared to other sectors remains a challenge for several local authorities and for the system as a whole. Possible reasons for this have been explored in previous annual reports. **Improving teaching and learning is the most common inspection recommendation for these schools**. Improving teaching and the learning experiences of all pupils is a major aim of the current curriculum reforms. Revising qualifications to align with the new curriculum and ensuring that accountability measures do not distort teaching and learning are major tasks for the next few years. In the meantime, it is good that a new multi-agency approach to supporting secondary schools is being trialled across Wales.

It is also encouraging that there are **signs of improvements in several cross-cutting education themes**. Improvements in aspects of literacy and numeracy over recent years have been consolidated, although there is more to do to develop learners' higher-order skills. Encouraging a life-long love of reading is a key task for any education system. Wide reading of fiction and non-fiction books broadens horizons, develops critical thinking, and helps build a rich vocabulary that enables learners to articulate their thoughts and feelings. There is also more to do to improve learners' digital competency and particularly their technical understanding of digital technologies.

Foreword

Meeting the needs of all learners

This year, we have also seen improvements in the outcomes for more able learners, including their PISA, GCSE and A level performances. Yet more support for these learners is needed, because, when they perform well, they serve as models of excellence for their peers, pointing the way to what can be achieved, and benefiting other learners and the system as a whole. It is also crucial that the most vulnerable in society are cared and provided for particularly during a time of change. We have a reputation as a country that values equity and inclusion. Special schools maintained by local authorities have been consistently strong over many years, with little variability in quality of provision – they work well together and share expertise effectively. This year, we have also seen improvements in independent special schools and in pupil referral units, including evidence of excellence in these sectors for the first time for many years. These sectors work with learners who have been excluded from other schools or have complex requirements that maintained schools are not able to provide.

Despite these improvements in equity, the ‘poverty gap’ has not narrowed. **The differences in attainment and attendance between pupils from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds has not closed over the last decade.** These gaps typically widen as learners become older, and at least partly result from how families and the local community view education, as well as from the quality of the education provision itself. In previous annual reports, I have argued that closing this gap needs a two-pronged approach: by improving teaching and the learning experiences of all pupils and by providing a more ‘community-focused’ schooling system. Pupils cannot benefit fully from improved education provision if they are not in school or not supported with difficult circumstances in their lives. The work of the various agencies that help schools to support pupils and families require management, co-ordination and resourcing. We are currently reviewing the various models of community-focused schools for publication later this year.

Reform is a key feature of the post-compulsory education and training phase too. Just as the new curriculum provides a focus for policy changes in the compulsory sector, the proposed creation of a Commission for Tertiary Education and Research is intended to do the same for the post-compulsory sector. Together, these reforms have the potential to improve collaboration between schools and other post-16 providers. More seamless policy and practice should help ensure that young people’s experiences at different stages of their education build progressively to support them in becoming enterprising and creative contributors to workplaces across Wales. At the moment, too many young people do not progress into the most appropriate post-16 provision in relation to their ambitions, interests and abilities. Our report later this year on collaboration between further education colleges and schools will provide helpful examples to build on.

Foreword

Listening and learning together

Estyn too is changing. Next academic year, 2020-2021, instead of inspecting a sample of schools, we will visit nearly all schools to learn about and feed back on how they are planning and preparing for the new curriculum. Keep up to date with how we're changing on our website.

Education reform is wide-reaching and complex. It's time now for schools to think seriously about what the curriculum means for them and take responsibility for designing learning experiences that meet the needs of all their pupils. But schools cannot do this alone. The education system as a whole needs to work together to support our schools and education workforce in transforming education and training in Wales.

About the report and its data

The structure of the annual report reflects the extent and comprehensiveness of the current education reforms mentioned above. The report is in two parts: a thematic part addresses the main policy developments and cross-cutting themes over the last few years; and a sectorial part that contains separate sections on each of the sectors we inspect.

We published all our inspection judgements for the 2018-2019 academic year as official statistics in October 2019. Our interactive data website allows readers to explore these judgements. This report provides a commentary on that data and places it in context.

In 2018-2019, we recognised the excellence of those providers that achieved 'excellent' in the majority of their inspection judgements.



Non-maintained nurseries	Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup Cylch Meithrin Llanhari Cylch Meithrin Talgarreg Little Stars Nursery LLP
Primary schools	Broughton Primary School Clase Primary School Ewloe Green C.P. School Garnteg Primary School Glenboi Primary School Risca Primary School Shirenewton Primary School St Joseph's R.C. Primary School, Newport St Julian's Primary School St Mary's Catholic Primary, Wrexham Tremorfa Nursery School Trinant Primary School Ysgol Twm o'r Nant Ynysowen Community Primary School Ysgol Bryn Coch C.P. Ysgol Bryn Tabor Ysgol Brynaerau Ysgol Dolbadarn Ysgol Dyffryn Cledlyn Ysgol Ffordd Dyffryn Ysgol Gynradd Bethel Ysgol Gymraeg Y Gwernant Ysgol Gynradd Carno Ysgol Llanbrynmair Ysgol Mynach Ysgol Pant Pastynog Ysgol Pen Barras Ysgol Gymraeg Sant Curig Ysgol Y Foryd Ysgol Y Garnedd
Secondary schools	Bishop Hedley High School Cardiff High School Cowbridge Comprehensive School Cwmtawe Community School
Independent schools	Headlands School Landsker Education The Cathedral School Woodlands School
Special schools	Trinity Fields School & Resource Centre
Pupil referral units	Denbighshire PRU Tai Educational Centre

Section 1 Key themes in education reform



Developing the curriculum

Since the publication of *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015), an increasing number of schools are trying out new approaches to the curriculum and this trend has accelerated since the publication of the draft Curriculum for Wales in April 2019. Many of the schools that are making the most progress in preparing for curriculum change are schools that worked as pioneer schools¹ and are now 'quality improvement' or 'innovation schools'². There are also good examples of creative and interesting approaches to preparing for the curriculum in schools that have not been involved directly in pioneer work.

Most schools that have started thinking seriously about preparing for the new curriculum took their inspiration from the four purposes and the principles first introduced in *Successful Futures*. Many of these schools were keen to start considering how they could apply these principles to their own school and began thinking about the sort of curriculum they wanted to design for their pupils. Reading about the schools featured in the *Curriculum Innovation in Primary Schools* report (Estyn, 2018b) and speaking to staff from those schools also gave many teachers and school leaders the confidence to start thinking about the various possibilities for preparing for a new curriculum in their own schools.

Collaboration within and across schools on curriculum planning has increased in recent years and this often brings significant benefits for teachers and pupils. For example, primary teachers often share expertise and work across year groups and phases to plan specific projects, develop their thinking or try out new approaches in an area of learning and experience across the school. In secondary schools, there are useful examples of teachers collaborating with primary colleagues to re-think some or all of the key stage 3 curriculum and to improve continuity and progression in schoolwork from Year 6 to Year 7 and Year 8 within the current curriculum. Cwmtawe Community School, for instance, works closely with its partner primary schools to plan challenging transition activities that help Year 7 teachers plan a curriculum that builds on the ICT, communication and creative skills that pupils already have at the end of key stage 2.

Many special schools and pupil referral units have a good track record of adapting the curriculum to suit their pupils. As a result of working closely with other professionals in health and social care, these providers often offer an individualised curriculum that is tailored to the specific needs, abilities and interests of their pupils. The curriculum is often practical and provides learning experiences that are meaningful to them and will prepare them well for the future.

Generally, primary schools are becoming less dependent on commercial schemes of work. They are more willing to think creatively to design bespoke projects relevant to their school and pupils. Those that still use

¹ For more information about pioneer schools, please see Welsh Government website <https://gov.wales/new-school-curriculum-overview>

² For more information about quality improvement and innovation schools, please see <https://curriculumforwales.gov.wales/2019/09/18/taking-your-feedback-forward-refining-the-draft-curriculum/>

Developing the curriculum

schemes tend to do so more flexibly, tailoring topics to meet the needs and interests of their pupils and by involving pupils in planning and making decisions about what and how they learn. Pupils in Ynysowen Community Primary School, for example, evaluate the curriculum each week and contribute imaginatively to planning the following week's programme of work. This motivates pupils to engage in a wide range of tasks. At Ysgol Gynradd Treganna, before planning a new topic, teachers and pupils work together to consider the activities they would like to undertake as part of their chosen theme, and how they would like to arrange their classroom environment to reflect the theme. This means that teachers plan a comprehensive and progressive curriculum, and create a rich and stimulating classroom to reflect the pupils' contributions.

The attitude to forthcoming change in most primary schools is increasingly positive. A majority of school leaders are becoming more confident to consider and try new approaches to the curriculum, to take measured risks that they feel may benefit pupils, and to evaluate the successes and failures of their efforts to continue to improve. The reduced emphasis on end-of-key-stage data in primary schools has helped and has been broadly welcomed. Schools have responded positively to the work of the Welsh Government, regional consortia and local authorities, and Estyn to create an environment that recognises the importance of the experiences and breadth of curriculum offered to pupils, supports creativity, and is not driven by an overly narrow interpretation of outcomes. This has begun to change the perception of school leaders and teachers about what matters in the education system and has driven improvements in primary schools.

Secondary pioneer, quality improvement and innovation schools are also fully engaged in thinking about and preparing for curriculum reform, but the appetite for change is less widespread in other secondary schools. Secondary staff are generally positive about the aims of the new curriculum, though uncertainty around the nature of future qualifications and accountability measures means that secondary school leaders are generally more cautious about preparing for changes to the content and organisation of their curriculum. Even so, a minority of secondary schools are beginning to explore different approaches to the curriculum in key stage 3, mainly by linking subject areas together more coherently, by organising interdisciplinary projects, or by rethinking the curriculum to provide better opportunities to develop specific areas of learning. A good example is Islwyn High School, where a 'Challenge Champions' programme in key stage 3 draws on a range of traditional subject areas to help develop pupils' creative, innovative, critical thinking and planning skills through one multi-disciplinary challenge. Another example is Ysgol Gyfun Bryn Tawe, where a teaching and learning committee is passionate about broadening pupils' cultural knowledge. By working closely with teachers, they have ensured a stronger emphasis on Welsh history and culture across the curriculum.

In many secondary schools, the range of subject and option choices offered at key stage 4 is heavily influenced by the nature of performance indicators. One example is the entry of whole cohorts of learners for skills or broadly vocational qualifications, often not taught by specialist teaching staff. While worthwhile for a few learners, these qualifications are generally unsuitable for the full range of pupils being entered. They are frequently delivered during form registration periods to mixed-ability groups by a form

Developing the curriculum

tutor, instead of using this time for care, support and guidance purposes. Also, the range of options at key stage 4 is restricted in many schools. In a few schools, the number of options available for the pupils' own choice is as low as two. This trend is often exacerbated by budgetary difficulties. The number of vocational courses being offered is now lower than in recent years and as result many lower ability pupils are following a diet of largely traditional courses.

Qualifications

Over the last three years there have been major changes to the qualifications available to pupils at key stage 4, including changes to specifications, to assessment processes, and to when pupils are able to sit examinations. Our report '[New qualifications](#)' (Estyn, 2018d) discusses the changes to 2018, and evaluates the impact of the changes on schools. Our sector report on secondary schools includes our latest evaluation of outcomes at key stage 4.

AS and A level qualifications have also undergone change in recent years. At A level, the overall pass rate has remained stable and there has been an increase in the proportion of learners achieving grade A* or A (Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 2020).

There have also been significant changes to the way that qualifications are aggregated at a pupil, whole-school, local and national level to produce performance indicators. These changes make it difficult to analyse or present graphically pupils' outcomes at key stage 4 during this period, and like-for-like comparisons between years in many qualifications and indicators are not valid.

Changes to the curriculum will lead to further changes to the qualifications that are available to pupils. A timetable for the development of new qualifications is available at [Qualifications Wales, 2019](#).

Developing skills

Children's early experience of education

As a result of their experiences during the first three years of their life, children start education with a variety of levels in language, mathematics and their knowledge and understanding of the world. In general, children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have lower skill levels than their peers, particularly in language, literacy and communication. Their personal and social development, physical development, and creative development are also all at different stages. In particular:

“The first 1000 days, during pregnancy and up to a child's second birthday, represent a critical part of childhood when we form attachments to our caregivers, learn how to safely explore and trust the world around us, and start to communicate. It is when we see the most rapid phase of brain growth and development and where the foundations are laid down for our future health and wellbeing. This critical period has a long lasting impact on individuals and families. They shape the destiny for children as they grow up: their educational achievements, their ability to secure an income, their influences on their own children, and their health in older age” (NHS Wales, 2018).

Many non-maintained settings and schools in disadvantaged areas offer Flying Start provision for two to three-year-olds in addition to providing early education. Flying Start promotes language, cognitive, social and emotional skills and physical development. Where settings and schools develop strong links with their local Flying Start provision, practitioners value and build on the information they receive when children transfer. In these settings and schools, practitioners generally know the children well, respond to their individual needs and plan effectively to develop their skills. This supports children to engage with wider aspects of the foundation phase curriculum.

All three-year-olds are eligible to receive funded education, and most parents take up this offer. These children initially receive their education in a non-maintained setting that the local authority funds to deliver education, such as a playgroup or day nursery, or in a maintained nursery class in a school.

The foundation phase curriculum currently sets out the education that three to seven-year-olds receive. In effective schools and settings, practitioners use the information from their observations and assessments to develop children's skills through active and experiential learning³ that provides hands-on, play-based opportunities to build on children's skill levels. They respond intuitively to children's needs and develop their skills through an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. They use questioning skilfully to develop children's thinking and know when to stand back and when to intervene to take learning forward. In the most effective schools and settings, practitioners combine this approach with a strong understanding of child development. They use this understanding to plan tasks at an appropriate level and do not introduce children to new concepts before they are ready or try to force their learning, for example by introducing

³ For more information on what these terms mean, see our [‘Active and experiential learning’](#) report (Estyn, 2017a).

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children to letters before they are at a suitable developmental stage. They know when children are ready to move on and when they need to consolidate their skills through a wider variety of practical experiences.

In these effective schools and settings, children, including children from disadvantaged backgrounds, make strong progress and gain confidence in applying their skills to new situations. In schools and settings where skill development is less effective, children begin to feel that there are things that they cannot do at an early age.

Around three-quarters of four-year-olds' physical development is in line with that expected for their age (Welsh Government, 2019g). In the best schools and settings, physical development has a high profile and practitioners make good use of indoor and outdoor environments to provide an active curriculum where children take managed risks and develop their physical skills, such as through balancing and climbing. Around seven-in-ten four-year-olds have outcomes for personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity that are consistent with their age (Welsh Government, 2019g).

In recent years, there has been less focus on young children's creative development in schools and settings. When creative development is part of a focused task⁴, adults often over-direct the activity to make sure that children achieve a specific outcome or product, rather than teaching a skill and then providing exciting opportunities for children to learn, develop and practise this skill. In many schools and settings, there are also generally too few opportunities for children to develop their creative skills through music and dance.

Developing literacy skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing

In primary and secondary schools, despite improvements in aspects of literacy skills, standards of literacy overall are broadly similar to those three years ago. Progress in reducing the impact of disadvantage on pupils' educational attainment in literacy, and in providing enough challenge in literacy teaching to meet the needs of more able pupils, has been limited. These areas should remain priorities for many schools.

Where schools use effective teaching and learning strategies in the foundation phase, this has a positive impact on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills, and provides a sound foundation for developing their reading and writing later on. In schools where standards are good or better, most younger pupils communicate well with each other and with adults. They extend their vocabulary and talk confidently about their experiences in school and at home in the language of the setting or school.

⁴ A focused task in the foundation phase is where adults teach pupils specific skills, knowledge and concepts through whole-class teaching, working in groups or alongside individuals.

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Nearly all Welsh-medium settings and primary schools develop their pupils' language skills effectively through immersion in Welsh across all areas of learning during the foundation phase, whatever the home language of the pupils. Many pupils in Welsh-medium secondary schools speak well in Welsh and use the language confidently in different contexts across the curriculum. In English-medium secondary schools, a majority of pupils develop strong speaking and listening skills. These pupils listen and respond to others carefully. They use a wide general and subject-specific vocabulary to communicate their ideas clearly.

In general, pupils in primary and secondary schools do not always have enough opportunities to take part in learning experiences that focus specifically on talking, for example to improve their ability to question, challenge and build on the contributions of others through debate. In less effective schools, listening and speaking are viewed as skills that support reading and writing, rather than as skills that need to be developed in their own right. Frequently, teachers' interventions and comments focus exclusively on what pupils are talking about rather than also on how they are saying it.

Generally, pupils in both primary and secondary schools have a slightly better understanding of, and make wider use of, different reading strategies than three years ago. Applying these strategies supports pupils' independent learning across the curriculum and accelerates the progress they make. In a minority of primary schools, there is the lack of opportunity for pupils to listen to adults role-modelling reading in key stage 2, or to engage with more challenging fiction and non-fiction books. Schools do not always build pupils' vocabulary and knowledge of language as well as they could, or develop their higher-order reading skills well enough. In general, too few teachers read enough new children's literature themselves, and this does not encourage children to read recently published books. In a majority of secondary schools, pupils do not have enough opportunities to use and develop their higher-order reading skills, particularly inference and deduction, to increase their understanding of texts other than those they already know well, such as GCSE English or Welsh Literature set texts. As a result, pupils do not develop or transfer these skills to new situations well enough.

The latest PISA results broadly confirm these findings⁵. In particular, pupils performed better in tasks that required them to consider more than one text. They feel more confident about their reading ability than the average pupil across the other countries that take part in PISA, but are less likely to read a book. Pupils in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland continue to perform significantly better in reading than in Wales.

The standard of pupils' writing in many primary and secondary schools remains weaker than other aspects of their literacy. Pupils generally have more opportunities to write at length than was the case three years ago, but the quality of those opportunities and the expectation for pupils to check, correct and re-write their work is too variable. Even in a minority of schools where pupils develop useful editing skills to check and improve the accuracy of their writing, few of these schools help pupils to improve

⁵ Please see Annex 2 for our analysis of the latest PISA results. PISA results for Wales are available here: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-12/achievement-15-year-olds-program-international-student-assessment-pisa-national-report-2018_0.pdf

the content and structure of their writing well enough. This, along with ineffective feedback from teachers in a minority of secondary schools, results in basic errors remaining and contributes to a minority of pupils, particularly boys at key stage 4 not being able to structure their writing or express their ideas clearly enough. In addition, teachers do not identify precisely enough weaknesses in pupils' writing.

In schools that are most successful in developing pupils' literacy skills, there is a clearly understood and co-ordinated whole-school strategy for doing so. These schools have embedded the literacy aspects of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (Welsh Government, 2013) into their planning and teaching. Leaders ensure a systematic approach to developing literacy across the curriculum and keep this approach under review, using a range of first-hand evidence to evaluate pupils' standards. Self-evaluation and improvement planning enable the schools to pinpoint specific aspects of literacy provision that require improvement. This helps these schools to ensure learning experiences offer a suitably high level of challenge for all pupils to develop their literacy as they move through the school.

Increasingly, in response to Curriculum for Wales developments, primary schools use a wide range of engaging real-life and imaginative contexts to develop or extend pupils' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Teachers who have a strong understanding of how children develop language ensure that pupils develop a thorough grasp of the purpose, intended audience, structure and language features of different forms of written texts and speech. They ensure that pupils use these different forms in their language sessions and design purposeful opportunities for pupils to apply their skills independently outside of language sessions. Progress in providing opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills in secondary schools remains much slower.

Where provision for literacy is effective, leaders ensure that teachers and support staff access high-quality professional learning on technical aspects of language learning and on how to develop pupils' literacy skills progressively. This includes how to develop pupils' vocabulary and phonological awareness in the early years and their use of inference and deduction to understand a variety of texts in the secondary phase. In these schools, staff with specialist knowledge often share their expertise within their own schools and with others. Schools that are most effective at addressing inequalities in language acquisition provide exceptional teaching and learning that meet individual pupils' needs. They choose the interventions they use carefully, draw appropriately on research to inform their practice, and monitor pupils' progress closely.

In schools where shortcomings in pupils' literacy skills are not addressed well enough, this is often because leaders do not drive a co-ordinated approach to developing literacy across the curriculum. Teachers do not build on what a pupil has accomplished previously to plan literacy activities that challenge the pupil to develop the skill further or to apply the skill in a different context. Too often, pupils complete low-level activities that do not enable them to apply their literacy skills across the curriculum at the level of which they are capable. Creating opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills but without clear teacher intervention does not help pupils to develop their skills and, in most cases, simply allows them to practise what they can already do. Leaders

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monitor generic aspects of teaching and do not focus closely enough on subject-specific aspects of language teaching. This means that leaders do not identify teachers' professional learning needs and there is little impact on pupils' literacy.

Developing numeracy skills

Over the last two years, the provision for numeracy has improved a little. It is at least good in around eight-in-ten primary schools and nearly half of secondary schools.⁶

In non-maintained settings and in nursery and reception classes, children develop their numeracy skills well when they have plenty of rich opportunities to use the skills they have learned in their independent play. They learn to count through singing number songs and rhymes and use numbers in familiar daily contexts, such as counting how many children are present or how many plates are required for snack time. Where teaching is most effective, practitioners maximise opportunities for children to use numbers in real-life contexts and they use correct mathematical language when talking to children about their play. For example, they talk about the biggest and smallest size clothes when sorting laundry for the three bears. Practitioners provide interesting opportunities for children to look at and talk about patterns and shapes and to create repeating patterns in their independent play.

In the best schools, leaders ensure that planning for the progressive development of pupils' numeracy skills is a whole-school priority. They plan provision systematically so that pupils make strong progress in their numeracy skills year on year and at key transition points, such as when pupils move between the primary and secondary school. In these schools, teachers provide pupils with valuable activities that require pupils to apply the numerical skills they learn in mathematics lessons in a variety of other subject areas. For example, pupils use their knowledge about graphs to select the most appropriate graph to display the results of their science experiments, analysing their results to draw conclusions. In these schools, teachers use the numeracy aspects of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (Welsh Government, 2013) and their knowledge of individual pupils' ability to ensure that the opportunities they provide are suitably challenging for all pupils. In the best schools, class teachers work in partnership with the numeracy co-ordinator or mathematics specialist to ensure that the opportunities provided enrich the subject and are at an appropriate level of challenge.

Many schools provide pupils with the necessary experiences in mathematics sessions to learn the basic mathematical facts they need to support their learning in the number, measurement and data analysis strands of the Numeracy Framework. In the best schools, teachers of mathematics ensure that pupils of all ages develop a deep understanding

⁶ For more details on standards in numeracy see the sector sections of this report.

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of mathematical concepts, along with practical strategies that allow them to apply their numeracy skills in other areas of the curriculum. They identify misconceptions in pupils' understanding and intervene in a timely manner. In these schools, teachers provide pupils with valuable opportunities to develop their numerical reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Leaders in the best schools use data alongside other first-hand evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils to evaluate the quality of numeracy provision. They support staff by providing them with a range of professional learning opportunities to improve their skills. There are regular opportunities to discuss and agree suitable methodologies for teaching numeracy. They often arrange opportunities for staff to observe and share effective practice, in their own school or elsewhere. When leaders observe ineffective teaching, they encourage and support their staff to develop the appropriate skills and ensure that they improve their understanding of the subject.

Many schools have effective systems for monitoring pupils' progress in numeracy. They make good use of this information to identify those pupils with weak numeracy skills and plan interventions that help them to make progress.

In a few primary schools and around half of secondary schools, there are weaknesses in the provision for numeracy. In these schools, teachers miss opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in real-life situations or in other learning areas of the curriculum. The introduction of numeracy into other learning areas is often tenuous and at a much lower level than pupils are able to apply in mathematics lessons. In a few of the least successful classes, teachers do not have the skills to teach mathematics or the numeracy aspect of their subject. They mainly teach aspects of mathematics that they are comfortable with and do not plan opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy outside of mathematics sessions. These teachers often have not been shown how to plan tasks that encourage pupils to use their mathematical skills in other learning areas. In a very few cases, teachers teach mathematical concepts incorrectly.

For the first time, Wales' performance in mathematics in the latest PISA test was not significantly lower than the average for all countries (Sizmur *et al.*, 2019). The improvement in mathematics follows the introduction by the Welsh Government of strategies aimed at raising pupils' standards in mathematics:

- the literacy and numeracy framework in 2013
- numerical reasoning tests in May 2014
- new GCSEs in mathematics and mathematics-numeracy for first teaching in September of 2015

The new GCSE mathematics and mathematics numeracy qualifications require pupils to have a deep understanding of mathematical concepts, to be able to reason mathematically, and to solve problems that are set in context. These skills are also at the core of the mathematics domain of the PISA framework.

Developing skills

Developing information and communication technology skills and digital competence

Standards of information and communication technology (ICT) skills are good or better in around four-in-ten primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools. Although standards have improved a little over the last three years, they are still much lower than for literacy or numeracy. For further detail, see the reports we have published on how schools develop ICT skills across the curriculum (Estyn, 2013, 2014, 2017b, 2018e).⁷

Most pupils use basic ICT skills competently to research facts, and to retrieve and present information. Many primary pupils apply their ICT skills alongside their creative skills, for example while using green screens to create engaging videos and animations. Many primary schools provide pupils with opportunities to interrogate and create their own databases. In a very few excellent examples, pupils understand that data fields can hold different types of information and use this to check the validity of the data retrieved. The majority of primary schools are introducing simple coding and pupils' coding skills are developing well, as they learn to persevere and understand the importance of being precise when developing algorithms. Although there is an improvement in data handling and modelling skills in primary schools, these remain at an early stage of development in many schools. This hinders the development of pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills, and their application of higher-order number skills.

Many secondary schools do not provide pupils with enough challenging opportunities to apply and develop their ICT skills across the curriculum. Pupils in key stage 3 often copy information from websites without summarising it in their own words or reorganising it when preparing for a presentation. In many secondary schools, pupils tend to use only basic word processing and presentation skills outside of formal ICT lessons, and the standard of work is little better than at the end of key stage 2. A few secondary schools are making good progress, as highlighted in the case studies in Estyn's '[Preparing for the Digital Competency Framework](#)' (2018e).

Poor standards in the use of ICT across the curriculum in many secondary schools, along with recurring weaknesses in a minority of primary schools, suggest that school leaders have not used the two years since the digital competence framework (DCF) was made available well enough to prepare for its implementation. Too few teachers, especially in secondary schools, have received training to enable them to implement the DCF confidently. On the other hand, there has been a notable growth in the proportion of staff and pupils using a learning platform well. Most schools use the Welsh Government provided Hwb learning platform and many use it to access digital resources, collaborate on tasks and save their work.

⁷ We currently inspect standards of ICT skills, as ICT is part of the current national curriculum. Digital competence is 'the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable the confident, creative and critical use of technologies and systems' (Welsh Government, 2018b, p.1). Digital competence is a cross-curricular responsibility, distinct from ICT, and is currently non-statutory. The new Curriculum for Wales will introduce digital competence as a mandatory cross-curricular skill alongside literacy and numeracy. The new curriculum includes Science and Technology as an Area of Learning and Experience, within which there will be a specific curriculum requirements for computing. For further information on the difference between ICT and digital competence is available from the Welsh Government: <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/85f69bca-0134-426d-bff1-c46b4c1d067b/digital-competence-framework-your-questions-answered.pdf>

A few leaders of Welsh-medium schools change the interface language of key computer software into Welsh, which reinforces that Welsh is a natural part of the digital world. In other best practice, a secondary school uses its staff subject expertise to train and upskill staff in its partner primary schools in creating videos.

PISA

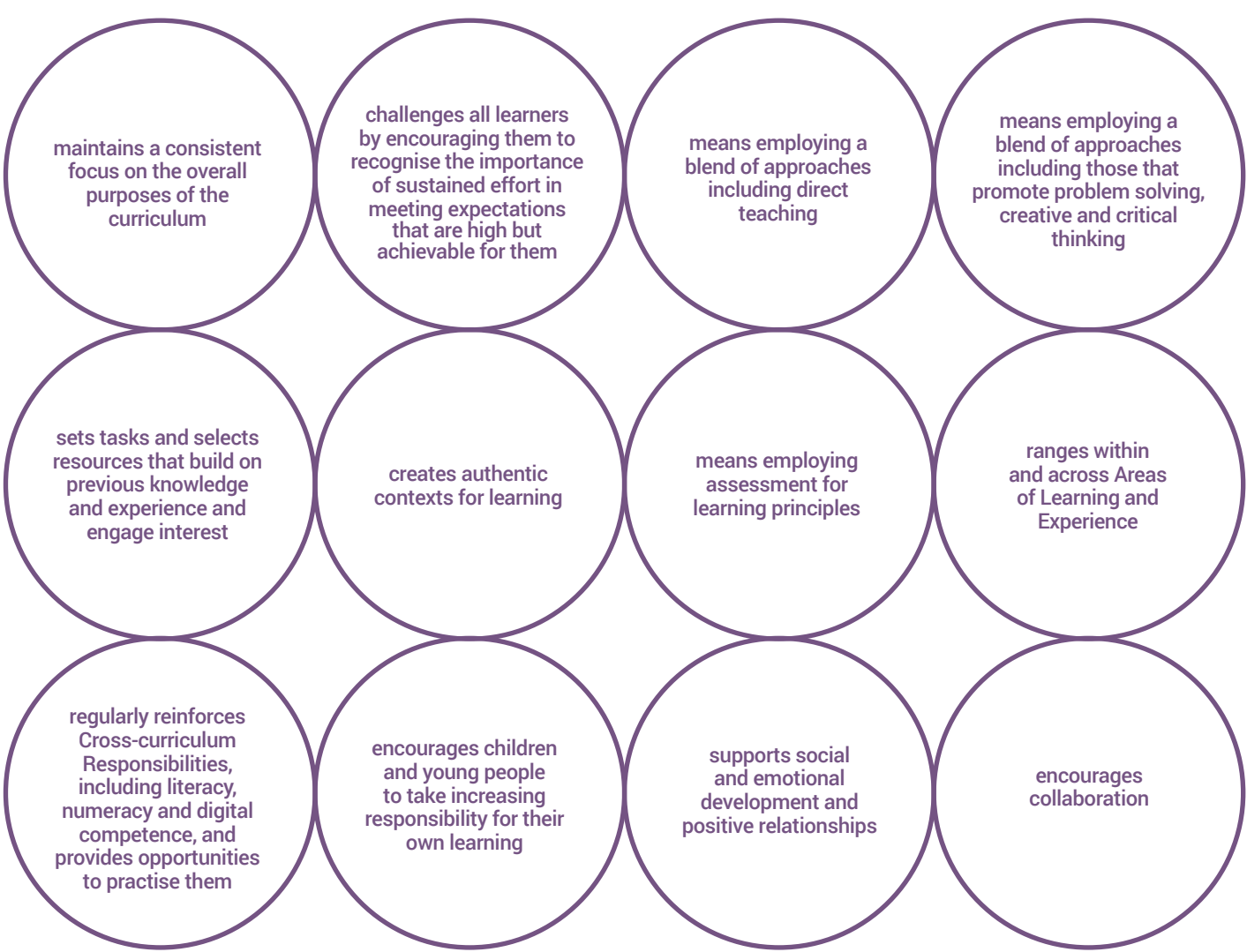
You can read more about our view of PISA results in reading, mathematics and science in Annex 2.

A high-quality education profession

Teaching

‘Successful Futures’ (Donaldson, 2015) identifies 12 pedagogical principles of good teaching and learning that schools need to consider as they decide how to realise the new Curriculum for Wales:

Figure 1: Good teaching and learning



(Estyn, 2018c, p.6)

A high-quality education profession

Where schools are successful in improving the quality of teaching and building teaching capacity for the future, they build a culture of collaboration and trust that encourages staff to evaluate their own practice honestly. They promote an ethos where teachers learn from each other and talk candidly about the strengths and areas for improvement in their own practice and that of their colleagues. In schools that are most successful, leaders encourage teachers to take reasonable risks and experiment with different approaches, while emphasising the impact of changes on outcomes for pupils. They ensure that the monitoring of the quality of teaching concentrates on how learners progress over time and do not make simplistic judgements about the quality of teaching by grading individual lessons. In weaker schools, leaders do not ensure a strategic approach to developing teaching and do not provide enough opportunities for staff to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of teaching at their school.

Many teachers, particularly in the primary sector, are becoming more reflective as they work with colleagues in their own school and in other schools to examine their professional practice. In a minority of schools, teachers engage with research evidence to inform their practice. Where this is most successful, they identify a specific need within their own practice or that of their school and access a wide range of research evidence to identify the most appropriate solution. In the best cases, they modify the suggested approach to fit the specific context of their school. However, in too many cases, schools engage with research at too superficial a level and do not focus on whether new approaches to teaching and pedagogy lead to improvements in standards or wellbeing for pupils.

The quality of teaching is good or better in around eight-in-ten non-maintained settings, around three-quarters of primary schools, and around half of secondary schools. These findings indicate an inconsistency of quality and of approaches to teaching as pupils move through the various phases of education. For example, in the most effective non-maintained settings, practitioners employ techniques to develop children's skills as independent learners. They implement foundation phase principles to ensure that children have opportunities to select resources, solve problems and develop collaborative working skills. In many primary schools, teachers build upon these skills, creating opportunities for pupils to reflect on the success of their learning and contribute their own ideas into lessons and topics. In many secondary schools, pupils receive more limited opportunities to develop their skills as reflective and independent learners. As pupils move into key stage 3, teaching does not often enough build on the achievements of pupils at the end of primary school, and teachers' expectations of pupils' ability are not high enough and tasks are not challenging enough, particularly for the more able.

A high-quality education profession

More schools are now using innovative ways to develop pupils' skills. This is particularly prevalent in the foundation phase, but becoming more evident in key stage 2 as well. For example, in a minority of schools, teachers weave literacy, numeracy and ICT skills through the curriculum using creative elements, such as dance, art and poetry. In a few cases, schools are working together to share expertise on how to use the expressive arts to develop pupils' skills. This is particularly the case in all-age schools and in clusters where secondary expertise in, for example, drama and art, is shared with primary colleagues.

Increasingly, teachers provide learners with opportunities to influence what and how they learn. In the best cases, pupils and staff collaborate on what they would like to learn to shape the themes the class will study. In a few primary schools, teachers work with pupils to identify the skills they will be learning and plan activities around these. However, use of assessment techniques to engage pupils in their learning and ensure that it builds well upon what pupils already know remains limited. In the secondary sector, these techniques, when used, are often ineffective, particularly the use of peer and self-assessment for tasks where pupils would benefit more from expert feedback from their teacher.

In the most effective schools, teachers take a strategic approach to giving feedback to pupils and do not feel the need to provide detailed written comments on every piece of work. Instead they prioritise aspects of pupils' work where written feedback would be most productive and balance this with other methods, such as verbal feedback that addresses common misconceptions among particular groups of pupils. In too many schools, feedback is not supporting pupils to improve their skills. Often, this is because teachers do not provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to respond to the feedback or practise the skills necessary to bring about the improvements.

A high-quality education profession

Support staff

Support staff represent about half the school workforce. Around half of support staff are general teaching assistants, around two-in-ten are teaching assistants who support pupils with special educational needs, and the rest are employed in a variety of roles as shown in figure 2 below (StatsWales, 2019I).



Just over three-quarters of teaching assistants are employed in primary schools, whereas special needs support assistants are more evenly employed across primary and secondary schools (StatsWales, 2019I). The number of support staff with Higher Level Teaching Assistant status who are deployed in that role continues to grow (StatsWales, 2019I).

Most schools deploy teaching assistants to support the progress of individuals and of groups of pupils. In many cases, teachers use these additional practitioners well to enhance foundation phase provision. In the best examples, these practitioners use their expertise to respond to pupils' needs and have a good awareness of when and how to intervene in pupils' learning. These interventions help to encourage the development of pupils' resilience and independence. However, often teaching assistants over-direct the work of pupils and this hinders their development as independent learners. In the best schools, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the ongoing assessment of pupils' progress and work productively with teachers to plan lessons and activities.

In most schools, leaders deploy teaching assistants to support the progress of pupils with special educational needs. In secondary schools this is the core role of most teaching assistants. In nearly all schools, this usually includes the delivery of intervention programmes to assist pupils with specific gaps in their skills or to support pupils with emotional and behavioural challenges. For example, in many primary schools, teaching

Figure 2: Support staff in maintained schools in Wales, by category, 2018-2019

51%

Teaching Assistants (a)

20%

Special needs support staff

8%

Higher Level Teaching Assistants

14%

Administration staff (b)

3%

Pastoral support staff

4%

Other support staff (c)

(a) includes foreign language assistants

(b) includes examination officers, school business managers and other administration staff

(c) includes technicians, childcare, nurses, medical and library staff

A high-quality education profession

assistants deliver speech and language support to younger pupils that enables them to make good progress with their communication skills. In many cases, schools use grant funding appropriately to provide additional teaching assistants to support the needs of vulnerable learners, although leaders generally do not evaluate the impact of this funding.

Professional learning

Over the last few years, the Welsh Government has introduced strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning, and for helping practitioners to develop their practice throughout their careers. The aim is to build capacity and to drive out variations in quality within and between schools. Current education reforms are based on a model of self-improvement and school-to-school working. This means that, in the most effective schools, leaders and teachers take responsibility for their own development and that of their peers. This self improvement approach is school-led, and balanced by support from local authorities, regional consortia and the Welsh Government. Recently, professional learning is also becoming better informed by relevant research. The best school leaders look for evidence that proposed innovations are likely to have benefits for teachers and pupils and use existing research evidence and action research to inform decisions.

At best, professional learning is tailored to each school and is responsive to the needs of staff as individuals and groups. Professional learning is available for teachers at all career stages and supports teachers' development progressively. The culture of professional learning encourages and promotes a continuous cycle of improvement. Teachers and leaders use opportunities for professional learning to reflect on and develop their practice. These opportunities are revisited and evaluated to ensure that they have a positive impact on classroom practice. The least effective practice is where schools only invest substantially in professional learning at a specific stage of a teacher's career, such as entry into the profession or the early years of practice, or when teachers are in difficulty (Cordingley, 2013).

Where leadership of professional learning is effective, there is a clear focus on improving teaching and its impact on pupil progress. Other key areas that contribute to successful professional learning and pedagogy are:

- creating the right culture and conditions for professional learning
- building collaborative and supportive professional relationships within and between schools
- having an open classroom policy that encourages peer observation
- creating dedicated time for staff to engage with research evidence and carry out their own action research
- using data and new technologies as catalysts for improvement and innovation
- evaluating impact and effectiveness of the professional learning provision regularly within wider self-evaluation and improvement planning processes
- using professional development days as strategic opportunities to explore further initiatives in teaching and learning
- learning how to lead professional learning and staff development

A high-quality education profession

Strong leaders know their staff well and understand individual teachers' current level of practice and the next steps needed for their development. As a result of this underlying knowledge, a planned and bespoke approach to professional learning is possible, employing a range of different activities tailored to the individual's career pathway and improvement priorities. Teachers develop best when leaders enable them to "dare to experiment" through valuing those staff that take considered 'risks' (OECD, 2016, p.5). In these schools, leaders trust staff to make professional choices and encourage them to be open-minded. They support staff to approach their practice differently by taking problems as opportunities for learning. This encourages staff to think critically about their practice.

In effective schools, leaders place a high priority on professional learning for support staff. They provide opportunities for teaching assistants to observe good practice in their own and other schools. They facilitate the sharing of good practice, for example enabling staff with skills in 'green screen' technology to share these with colleagues. They ensure that effective performance review arrangements are in place to allow staff to reflect on their practice and work with leaders to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. In schools where leadership is most effective, leaders ensure that support staff play a full role in self-evaluation and improvement activities and actively consider their views. For example, in Cogan Primary School, teaching assistants engage in discussions with leaders, other teachers and pupils as an informal source of monitoring the school's provision and its impact on standards.

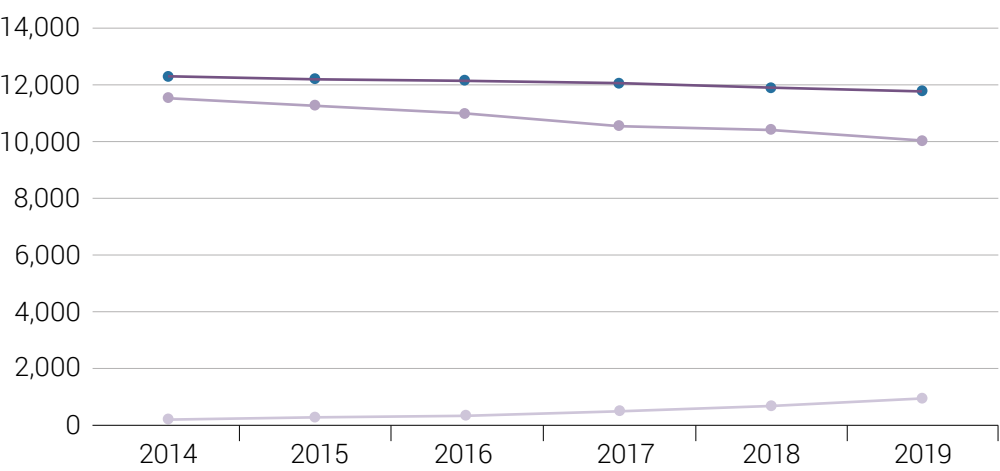
Where professional learning is less effective and does not have an impact on the school's work, there is often no strategic planning of professional learning activities. As a result, activities are often disjointed and not aligned to the school or the individual's improvement needs. In these cases, leaders do not use self-evaluation processes to identify the key aspects requiring support. In less effective schools, leaders take a blanket approach to professional learning regardless of individual need.

Teacher recruitment and retention

Overall, teacher retention in Wales has remained stable over the past five years. Typically around 3% of teachers leave the profession each year (StatsWales, 2019n). The proportion of teachers remaining in teaching in Wales compares favourably with that of England, where the percentage of teachers leaving the profession has remained at around 10% a year over the same period (Department for Education, 2019).

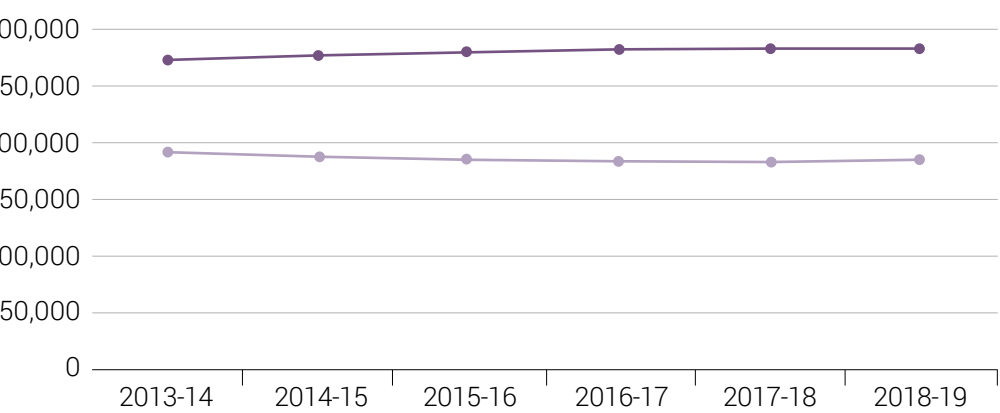
A high-quality education profession

Even so, over the last five years, there has been a steady decline in the number of teachers in Wales. During the same period, until 2018, the number of pupils of primary school age increased while the numbers of secondary school age pupils decreased. Both trends reversed in 2019 (see figure 3 below).



(StatsWales, 2019o)

Pupil numbers in secondary schools and the secondary phase of all-age schools are due to rise further over the next five years as higher numbers of pupils come through from primary schools (StatsWales, 2019k).



(StatsWales, 2019k)

Figure 3: Number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers in primary, secondary and all age schools in Wales, 2014 to 2019

Primary
Secondary
All-age

Figure 4: Number of pupils in maintained schools in Wales, 2013-2014 to 2018-2019

Primary age pupils
Secondary age pupils

A high-quality education profession

There has been a drop in the number of students recruited to initial teacher education programmes in Wales as in other countries. Recruitment to primary programmes has decreased by around 10% in the last five years and that to secondary programmes has fallen by 40% over the same period (StatsWales, 2019d). Within this overall decline, several subjects have seen recruitment fall by 50% or more, including chemistry, ICT, mathematics, modern foreign languages, art and physics. The most recent figures for student teacher recruitment show that numbers have fallen again in around half of subjects (StatsWales, 2019e).

The number of teaching posts advertised in schools in Wales over the past few years has remained relatively stable (StatsWales, 2019m). The number of applications received by schools for the posts on offer has fallen overall (StatsWales, 2019m). There are, on average, just over twice as many applications for teaching posts in primary schools compared to secondary schools (StatsWales, 2019m). Over the last five years, in many secondary subjects, schools are receiving on average fewer than ten applications for each post (StatsWales, 2019m). A few subjects attract very low numbers of applicants. Over the last five years, an average of seven applications were received for each post advertised for biology, and five for chemistry and physics (StatsWales, 2019m).

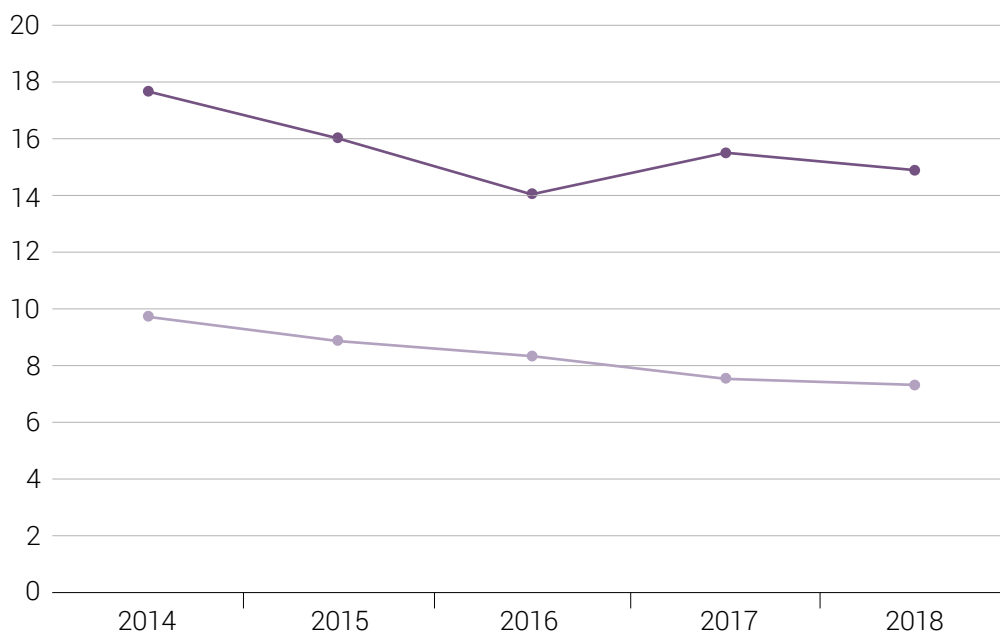


Figure 5: Average number of applications per teaching post in primary and secondary schools, 2014-2018

Primary
Secondary

These figures are for schools across Wales, and recruitment in Welsh-medium schools, rural schools, and schools in areas of high deprivation is more challenging (StatsWales, 2019m).

A high-quality education profession

Initial teacher education

There is now, for the first time, a national approach to professional learning that aims at creating a structured model that will have impact on teaching, leadership and standards. This integrated approach that sees initial teacher education as the initial stage of career-long learning and development for teachers, and of establishing reflective practice from the outset, is welcome.

Initial teacher education has changed significantly in Wales, with new accreditation arrangements for programmes that emphasise the importance of schools and universities working together (Welsh Government, 2018a). In 2018, Estyn undertook a thematic survey ‘[The professional learning continuum: mentoring in initial teacher education](#)’ (Estyn, 2018g). This report identified good features and areas for development in provision prior to the reform of ITE. It provided evidence to inform the new programmes that started in September 2019.

Initial teacher education providers help student teachers to organise their written reflections on their teaching through structured evaluation frameworks. These frameworks help students to consider aspects of their teaching and pupils’ learning, and to propose their own targets for improvement. However, in the main, students do not reflect critically enough on their teaching or on their progress against targets in their written evaluations or otherwise. They do not show evidence of deeper thinking, such as making connections between other learning experiences, or drawing upon research findings or wider reading. Generally, students do not make enough progress in these skills over the duration of their initial training. Very few mentors discuss students’ written evaluations, or provide feedback to help students to improve this aspect of their work. In addition, many students consider their written evaluations as a task to complete, rather than as a tool to help them develop. Only a few students make effective links between their lesson evaluations and their lesson planning. A majority of students do not ensure that their planned learning objectives for pupils describe learning specifically enough. This means that lesson evaluations do not analyse how successful their planned teaching strategies were in helping pupils.

In the best examples, mentors provide opportunities for students to develop their critical and reflective skills through learning conversations that link theory to practice. They help students to build the skills they need for planning and evaluation through reference to research and how this relates to experience and context. The Estyn thematic report on mentoring in ITE identified that highly effective mentors “have a good understanding of how to build students’ knowledge and experience incrementally, starting with more structured and supported learning activities and developing students’ independence, reflection and criticality as they become more experienced” (2018g, p.6). These mentors are often engaged in their own higher education study.

Schools where mentoring is effective involve their students fully in the professional learning activities that take place in the school. This provides students with a model of good practice in career-long professional learning, and a realistic picture of what good schools do. In many schools, mentors and leaders have limited knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the university develops student teachers’ critical thinking and reflection skills. As a result, they do not make links to this learning to support the student teacher in developing this aspect of their professional practice.

Inspirational leaders

School leadership

Leadership is good or excellent in around three-quarters of primary schools and in around half of secondary schools. Excellent leadership is as common in secondary schools as primary schools. Secondary schools are nearly three times as likely as primary schools to have unsatisfactory leadership.

Across all sectors, the best leaders support school improvement and the smooth running of their organisations by distributing roles and responsibilities skilfully and by prioritising improving teaching and outcomes for pupils. Successful leaders lead by example and foster a strong ethos of teamwork in their schools. They have high expectations of pupils' and of staff achievement and wellbeing. These leaders have a clear vision for the development of the school, which they share with pupils, staff parents and governors.

Successful school leaders ensure that improving teaching and learning is at the heart of their work. They make sure that staff have access to relevant professional learning opportunities and establish a culture that supports the development of staff skills and those of pupils. They foster a culture of leadership across the school by providing opportunities for staff to take on genuine leadership responsibilities. Many successful secondary schools have a clear succession plan and often 'grow' their own leaders.

Staff wellbeing is a key factor in achieving good pupil outcomes. Successful leaders create and sustain a culture where staff feel valued and supported to flourish in an environment that has a positive influence on their job satisfaction. Effective leaders promote staff wellbeing. For example, Penllergaer Primary School, Swansea, paid for a local school-based counselling service to provide regular professional supervision for any member of staff who wished to participate. Staff were able to share their feelings and experiences, and also learnt skills for supporting each other. The school now runs its own supervision in-house. In Bishop of Llandaff High School, Cardiff, the leadership team demonstrates its strong appreciation of the commitment of staff, by providing refreshments during break times and arranging car MOTs. This has resulted in a highly motivated team that aims for continuous improvement. The senior leadership team at Cardiff High also values and promotes staff welfare and has developed an innovative staff charter that aims to make the school an attractive place to work and learn.

The most successful school leaders manage change well and have a deep understanding of the school context. They plan what is best for their school in terms of wider reforms and steer how new initiatives relate to their overarching vision for the school. They protect staff from being overloaded and from unnecessary bureaucracy. They calm crises and take the heat out of emotional situations. These leaders empower their staff to innovate and are prepared to take considered risks as they try out new approaches. They champion objective and critical professional discussion about the impact of these changes.

Inspirational leaders

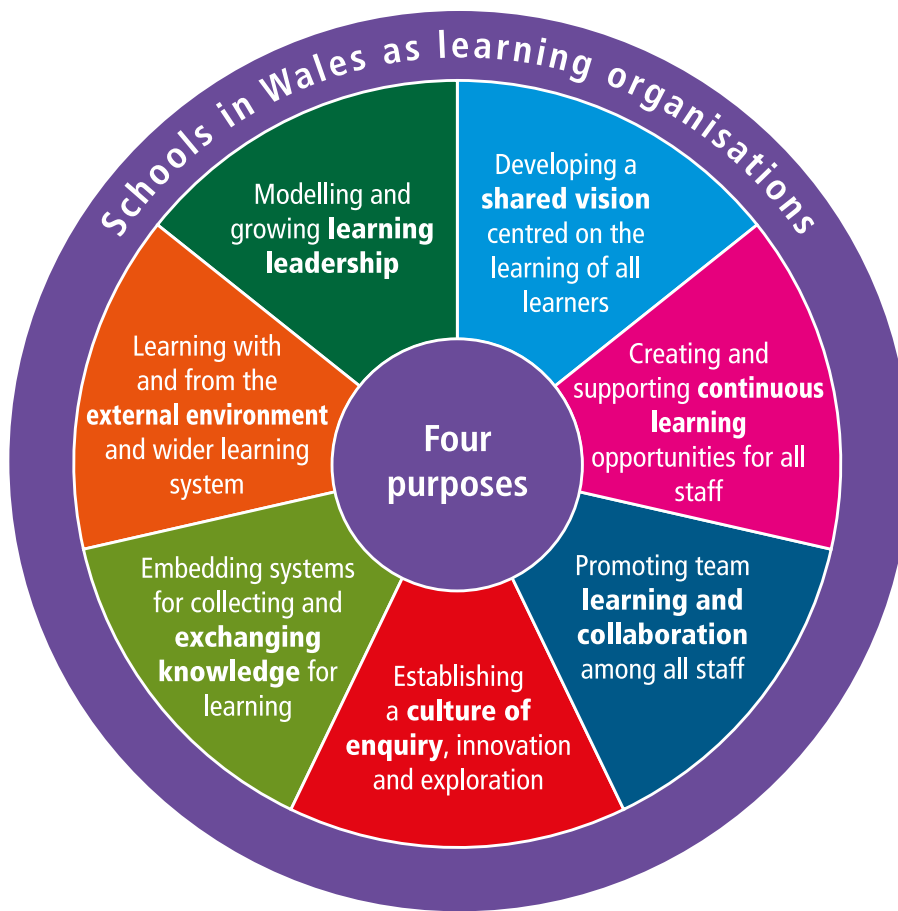


Figure 6: Schools in Wales as learning organisations

(Welsh Government, 2018f)

Increasingly, successful leaders work with other schools to share and develop good practice. They are agile and respond to immediate issues creatively and swiftly. At the same time, they are forward-looking, foresee problems, and plan for the long term without getting lost in day-to-day business.

The most effective leaders ensure that robust quality assurance arrangements are in place to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. They establish an open culture of self-evaluation that draws on a range of first-hand evidence and on pupils' outcomes. In these schools, all staff see themselves as part of the self-evaluation and of the school's continuous improvement process.

The Welsh Government has promoted the concept of schools as learning organisations (SLO). The SLO model has seven dimensions that capture the features of excellent school leadership outlined above and is being used increasingly by school leaders.

Inspirational leaders

Where leadership is less effective, senior leaders do not concentrate their work well enough on driving improvements or raising expectations, particularly through improving teaching and learning. They do not evaluate the effectiveness of teaching in terms of its impact on pupils' learning well enough. In weaker secondary schools, the role of middle leaders is often underdeveloped. Middle leaders do not have enough opportunities to lead initiatives, to evaluate outcomes or to identify areas for development and plan for improvement.

In the best schools, members of the governing body work alongside school leaders to provide a strong strategic direction for the school's work. The governors are involved in activities around the school that help them gain a first-hand insight into how well the school is meeting its priorities. They use a wide range of evidence, as well as performance data, to understand the school's strengths and the areas that need to improve. In the minority of schools, where governance is weak, members of the governing body rely too heavily on information provided by school leaders, do not have a secure understanding of the quality of education provided, and fail to challenge leaders on the work of the school.

In nearly all schools, senior leaders ensure that there is a senior member of staff with responsibility for co-ordinating provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). In the best examples, this staff member is part of leadership team discussions and is able to influence the quality of provision for pupils with SEN. In most schools, senior leaders ensure staff receive training and support, often from the local authority, on additional learning needs (ALN) reform. In particular, successful leaders provide appropriate support and training for staff to ensure that they make suitable adaptations to resources, the curriculum and teaching methods to meet the special educational needs of individual pupils. As a result, many school and PRU leaders have a good awareness of the changes planned under the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and are aware of the draft Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code published in February 2017 (Welsh Government, 2018c). Schools and PRUs with clear leadership roles and excellent practice are well placed to make the transition from the current SEN system to the new ALN system.

In many schools, leaders use funding strategically to provide the best possible education, for example by identifying individual staff expertise and using these to improve provision and standards throughout the school. Only a minority of primary schools employ a business manager, although this proportion has risen over recent years, with increasing cases of a single business manager employed jointly by a cluster of schools. As part of a national pilot started in September 2017, the Welsh Government supported business managers for clusters of schools in several local authorities, with benefits being quickly realised. For example, in Conwy this has led to a reduction in headteachers' administrative workload, giving them more time to support improvements in teaching and learning, improved collaboration between schools and supported the sustainability of small and rural schools (Welsh Government, 2019e).

Inspirational leaders

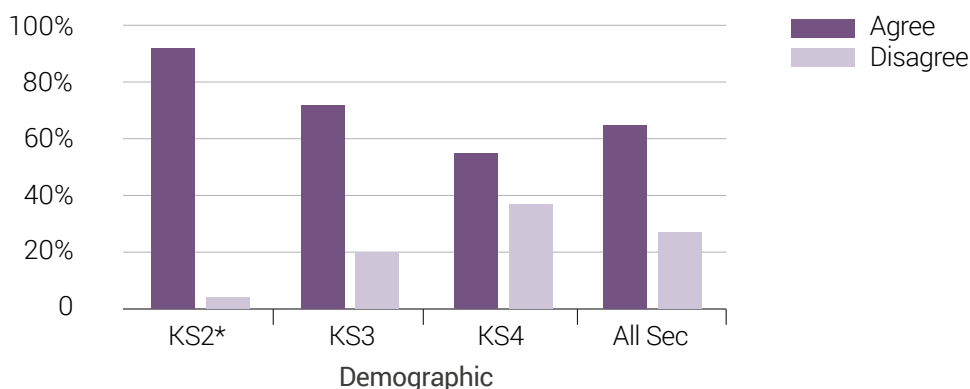
Overall, the level of reserve funding held by primary schools has been around £40 million over recent years. Reserves held by secondary schools have reduced over the same period, and at the end of the 2018-2019 financial year they were in overall deficit by £4.4 million (Welsh Government, 2019l).

Excellence, equity and wellbeing

Pupil voice

In recent years, schools in Wales have strengthened their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), with increasing numbers using it to underpin their work to promote excellence, equity and wellbeing. As part of this work, they are giving pupils a more influential voice in decisions about their education, from choosing a learning activity through to agreeing the individual support they will receive or shaping school policies. Around nine-in-ten pupils in key stage 2 feel that teachers and other adults in school listen to them and care about what they think about the school. However, this reduces to around seven-in-ten pupils in key stage 3 and to around a half of pupils in key stage 4. In a few primary schools and in a majority of secondary schools, 'pupil voice' groups are directed too much by adults. In these schools, despite opportunities for participation, pupils are not involved enough in decision-making about core aspects of school life, including aspects of teaching and learning.

Figure 7: Pupil voice (2016-2019)



*There was no question about pupil voice in 2016-2017 for key stage 2

Questions



Key stage 2

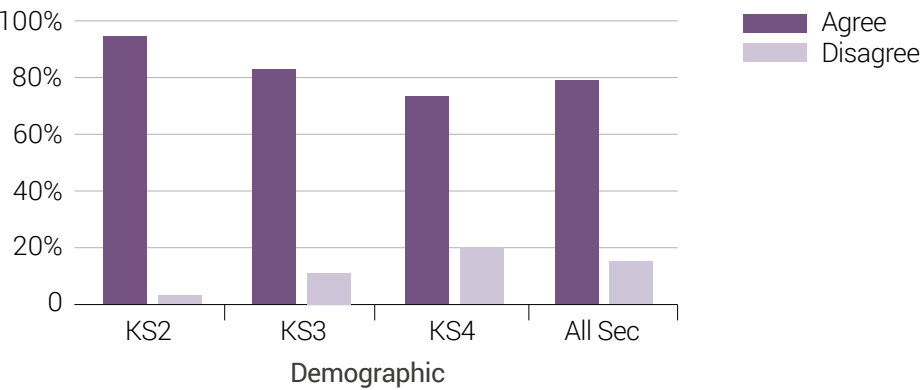
Teachers and other adults in school listen to me and care about what I think about the school

Key stages 3 and 4

Teachers and other adults in school listen to me and care about what I think about the school

Excellence, equity and wellbeing

Figure 8: Have someone to talk to (2016-2019)



Questions



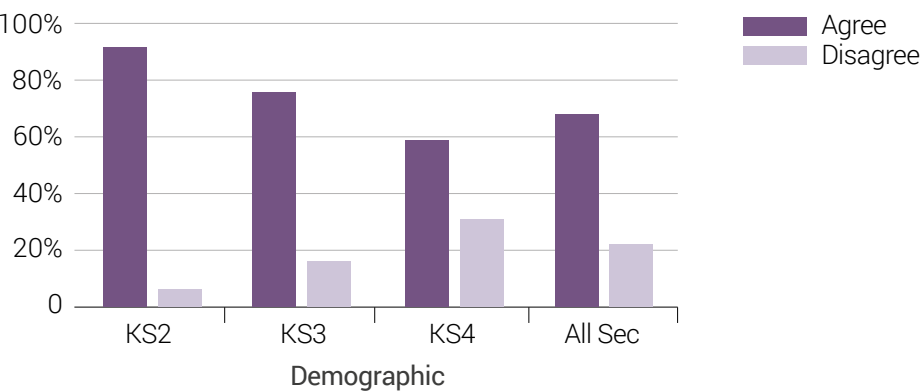
Key stage 2

I know who to talk to if I am worried or upset at school

Key stages 3 and 4

If I am worried or upset at school, I know there is a member of staff I can talk to

Figure 9: School deals well with bullying (2016-2019)



Questions



Key stage 2

If any bullying happens, the school will deal with it well

Key stages 3 and 4

If any bullying, harassment or discrimination occurs, the school will deal with it well

Excellence, equity and wellbeing

Promoting excellence

Over the past two years, there has been an improvement in the attainment of more able learners in Wales in external examinations (StatsWales, 2019h). The most recent PISA results have also shown that the proportion of pupils in Wales achieving the highest levels has generally improved, though still lower than the other countries of the UK and the OECD average. In around a third of schools, more able pupils do not achieve as well as they should or use their skills to a level that matches their ability. In primary and secondary schools, more able girls perform better than boys at the higher levels. More able pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as other pupils who are more able (Estyn, 2018f, pp.3,17).

Schools that are effective in supporting more able learners have a clear strategic approach. They focus strongly on providing consistent challenge for these pupils through their daily lessons and having very high expectations of all learners. This is augmented by a programme of enrichment activities and underpinned by careful monitoring of the progress of more able learners. These schools understand the need for primary and secondary schools to work together to ensure that pupils who achieve highly in primary school do not repeat work and regress at the start of secondary school. In these schools, teachers understand what constitutes effective pedagogy for more able learners. They use this expertise, combined with their detailed knowledge of each learner's abilities, to match activities to meet the needs of each individual. They question learners skillfully, probing and extending their understanding.

Only a few schools arrange for teaching assistants to address the specific needs of more able pupils, for instance by deploying teaching assistants to develop pupils' thinking skills through challenging literacy and numeracy tasks. In the best cases, leaders consider the deployment of teaching assistants to address the specific needs of pupils and the local context of their school. For example, in Alltwen Primary School, teaching assistants run a reading intervention project that encourages parents to attend a 'reading café' with their children and learn how to support pupils' literacy skills at home.

A majority of schools provide enrichment opportunities which target particular abilities or talents and which broaden the horizons of more able learners. These opportunities are particularly valuable in schools that serve areas of high deprivation. In many cases, these extra experiences are offered in partnership with external agencies. For example, young people may attend masterclasses at a local university, or special interest clubs, such as astronomy, or study trips to leading universities.

Promoting equity and wellbeing

The Welsh Government's 'Education in Wales: Our national mission' states that "each learner must be respected and challenged to achieve the best they are capable of ... while being supported to overcome barriers that inhibit their learning" (Welsh Government, 2017b, p.31). There are specific groups of pupils in Wales who historically have underachieved or struggled with their wellbeing. We refer to some of these vulnerable groups in the following pages to highlight strengths and areas for improvement.

Pupils disadvantaged by poverty

PISA results for 2018 suggest that, internationally, pupils disadvantaged by poverty achieve less well than their peers at school. However, the size of this effect is relatively smaller in Wales. For example, pupils’ reading scores are not as closely related to their socio-economic background as in most other OECD countries (Sizmur *et al.*, 2019). Even so, mitigating the impact of poverty on pupils’ educational attainment remains a major challenge for schools in Wales.

In Wales, we use the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals as an indicator of how well pupils disadvantaged by poverty perform. Around 69,000 statutory school age pupils in Wales are eligible for free school meals, which is around 18% of pupils (Welsh Government, 2019m). Although the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals improved between 2007 and 2016, the performance of pupils not eligible for free school meals has also improved at a similar rate (see figure 10). Making comparisons between recent years and performance up to 2016 is difficult due to major changes in performance indicators at key stage 4, and further changes were introduced in 2018. Irrespective of these changes, the gap in performance between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers has remained broadly the same for more than a decade.

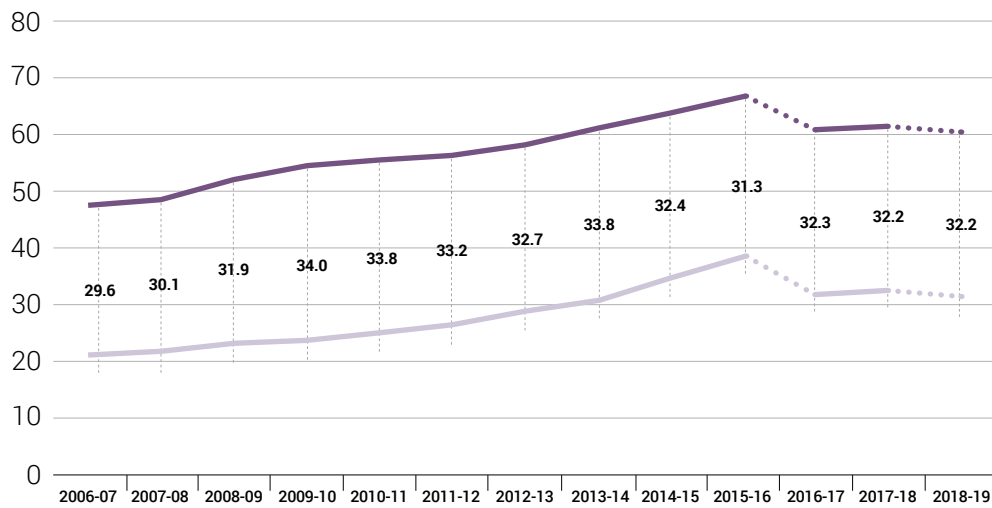


Figure 10: Percentage of pupils achieving the level 2 including English/Welsh and mathematics, by free school meal (FSM) eligibility, 2006-2007 to 2018-2019

Eligible for FSM
Not Eligible for FSM

(StatsWales, 2018; Welsh Government, 2019h)

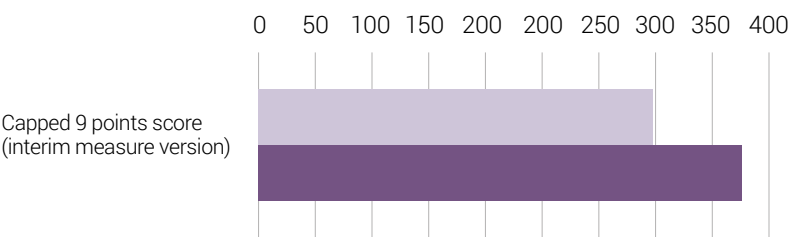
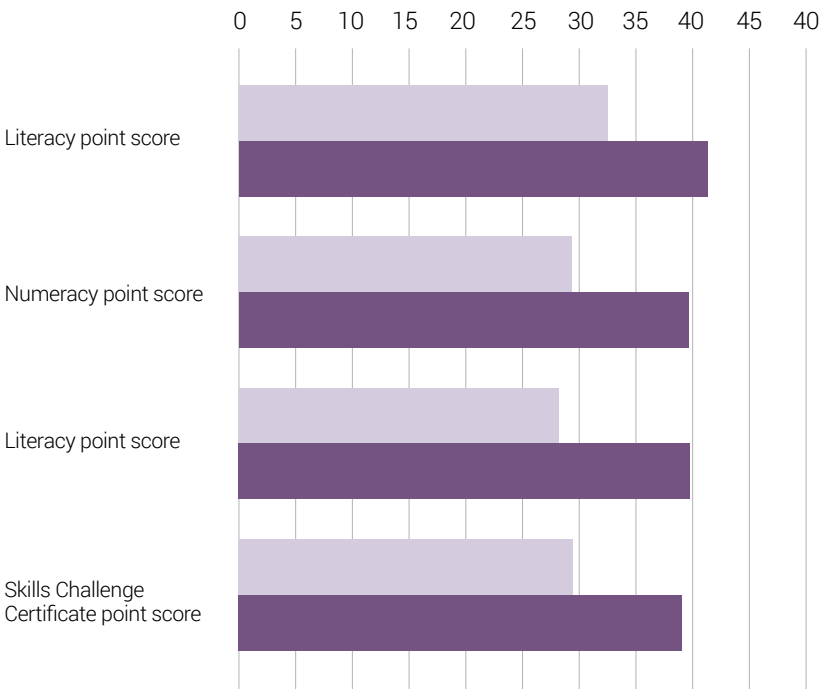


Figure 11: Average capped 9 points score (interim measure version), by free school meal eligibility, 2018-2019

Eligible for FSM
Not Eligible for FSM

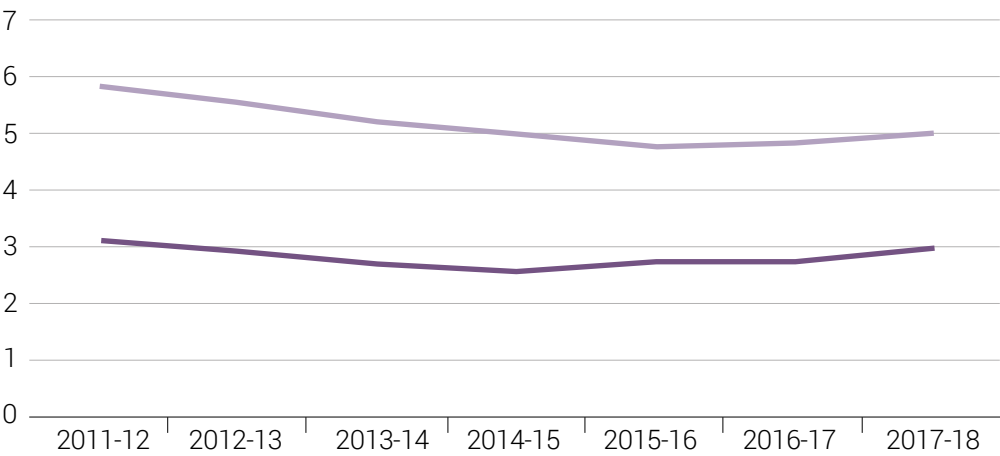
(StatsWales, 2019h)

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(StatsWales, 2018, 2019g)

The picture is similar with school attendance. In recent years, the difference in attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals in comparison with their peers has remained broadly the same (Welsh Government, 2019a). This difference is typically three percentage points in primary schools and five percentage points in secondary schools (Welsh Government, 2019a).



(Welsh Government, 2019a)

Figure 12: Average point scores in interim key stage 4 performance measures, by free school meal eligibility, 2018-2019

Eligible for FSM
Not Eligible for FSM

Figure 13: Percentage point gap in attendance rates between pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils not eligible for free school meals, 2011-2012 to 2017-2018

Primary attendance gap
Secondary attendance gap

Pupils eligible for free school meals are far less likely to have an overall attendance of 95% or above (Welsh Government, 2019a). School attendance and educational outcomes are closely correlated, so improving attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals remains an important issue. Although rewards for good attendance can help, the best schools focus on inspiring teachers to build strong relationships with pupils and provide engaging activities to meet their needs. In these schools, pupils value learning and want to be in school regularly.

Over the last three years, around two-thirds of primary and secondary schools use targeted funding, such as the Pupil Development Grant, appropriately to mitigate the impact of poverty. For instance, they introduce effective strategies to improve the wellbeing of pupils disadvantaged by poverty or support individual pupils with interventions to help them with aspects of their learning. In schools where disadvantaged pupils achieve well, leaders are highly committed to improving the educational and life chances of pupils disadvantaged by poverty.

Strong schools recognise that they cannot address disadvantage caused by poverty alone. They work with families, communities and a range of partners to reduce the impact of poverty on vulnerable pupils. For instance, they run food banks for families and offer advice and counselling for parents in difficult circumstances. One of the many strengths of Pencaerau Primary School's work with parents is a successful partnership with Cardiff University whereby parents can take selected access courses that enable them to take courses at foundation stage⁸. Ysgol Maes Hyfryd special school has links with over 20 local work providers⁹. This provision has enabled pupils to attend work experience placements and has also resulted in a number of them achieving part-time jobs at these placements. All placements are in the local area and many support community initiatives such as Buzz community cafe, Sidewalk independence project and Age connects cafe. All pupils benefit from a school having strong relationships with parents and the local community. In 2020, we will publish a thematic report on community-focused schools. In these schools, leaders employ staff to co-ordinate provision and evaluate the impact of the work. They do not rely on short term 'catch up' approaches to support pupils in key stage 4, but aim to develop critical thinking skills that will benefit pupils throughout school and remain with them for the future. In a few schools, a successful approach to addressing the impact of poverty is based on understanding their local context, including knowledge of individual families, and an awareness of effective practice and research. They use this information to tailor strategies that support sustainable improvements for their pupils. For example, Bishop Hedley Catholic High School created an enrichment programme called 'Opening Minds'¹⁰. The programme helps pupils to develop important life skills and supports the introduction of the new curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to engage in activities that they have not done before that challenge their thinking. The programme has allowed learners to take ownership of their development and has improved wellbeing and attitudes to learning.

⁰⁸ Read more in our effective practice case study: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/supporting-pupil-wellbeing>.

⁰⁹ Read more in our effective practice case study: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/creating-family-links-between-home-and-school>

¹⁰ Read more in our effective practice case study: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/using-enrichment-programme-improve-skills>

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Pupils with special educational needs

About 100,000 pupils have special educational needs (SEN) in Wales, which is around 22% of pupils (Welsh Government, 2019m). Many of these pupils have their needs met within mainstream nursery, primary, secondary or all-age schools. A few pupils with SEN have their needs met in specialist classes within a mainstream school, maintained special schools or independent schools¹¹.

In nearly all mainstream schools, systems to track the progress of pupils with SEN are based largely on national frameworks such as the foundation phase, national curriculum or examinations such as GCSEs. End of key stage assessments based on these frameworks show that outcomes for many pupils with SEN are below those of their peers and lower than expected from their starting points. At the end of the foundation phase, typically only around half of pupils with SEN achieve the expected outcome compared with over nine-in-ten of their peers (StatsWales, 2019i). By the end of key stage 4, only around two-in-ten pupils with SEN achieve at least five level 2 qualifications including English and mathematics compared with around seven-in-ten of their peers (StatsWales, 2019j).

Issues around attendance and exclusion from school continue to have a negative impact on the ability of pupils with SEN to make progress. Pupils with SEN typically have higher rates of persistent absenteeism and overall absence than other groups of pupils apart from those eligible for free school meals (Welsh Government, 2019a). Similarly, the rate of permanent and fixed-term exclusions is considerably higher for pupils with SEN than for pupils without (Welsh Government, 2019j). For example, a child at School Action+ is 16 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than a child with no SEN (Welsh Government, 2019j).

For many of these pupils, progress in relation to their individual starting points or the personal goals contained in individual education plans provides more realistic indicators of progress and achievement. Many pupils with SEN make strong progress against these measures, during their time in primary and special schools. As pupils grow up, this picture becomes less positive, with pupils with SEN making good progress in around a third of secondary schools inspected over the last three years.

In schools that are most successful in supporting pupils with SEN, leaders establish an inclusive ethos that sets high aspirations for all pupils, regardless of their level of ability or need. A strong emphasis on promoting the wellbeing of all pupils ensures that pupils with SEN participate equally in all aspects of school life. They take on positions of responsibility within the school that help them to develop their independence and build their confidence in learning. In these schools, the SENCo works closely with teachers and support staff across

¹¹ Read more in our effective practice case study: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/using-enrichment-programme-improve-skills>

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the school to ensure that all staff understand and address the needs of pupils, and leaders provide well-planned professional learning for staff. A strong strategic approach to raising outcomes for these pupils ensures that there are robust processes to evaluate the school's provision for SEN and plan for future improvements.

In most of these schools, rigorous arrangements to identify pupils' needs ensure that they receive timely support through a range of interventions that are closely matched to their needs. Staff track and review progress and wellbeing regularly. They set challenging targets for pupils that relate well to their personal needs and future aspirations, and ensure that learning experiences include meaningful opportunities for pupils to address these. These schools build good working relationships with parents and carers and with a wide range of external agencies that help them plan the provision for their pupils and review their progress. They establish close links to other schools that enable the school to share practice and ensure the transfer of information to support the effective transition of pupils from one phase of their education to another.

In schools where there are shortcomings in the provision for pupils with SEN, this is often because arrangements for the assessment and tracking of individual pupils' progress are not strong enough. In these schools, teachers' understanding of SEN in general and of the specific needs of the pupils they teach in particular is too limited. Too few schools prioritise whole school training on SEN for all staff or do enough to develop inclusive whole-school approaches to pupils with SEN. This means that individual teachers lack the confidence to manage pupils' needs or lack an understanding of the strategies needed to support them. They do not differentiate or adapt their teaching approaches well enough to meet the needs of pupils with SEN or use strategies suggested in individual education plans (IEPs). Good practice is not shared between teachers and they do not have good enough understanding of pupils' needs and progress. This hinders their ability to plan and implement appropriate strategies to support these pupils.

Promoting wellbeing

Our report 'Healthy and Happy: School impact on pupils' health and Wellbeing' (Estyn, 2019b) found that around two-thirds of primary schools and a third of secondary schools in Wales have an inclusive whole-school approach to supporting pupils' health and wellbeing. These schools aim to make sure that the everyday school experience of pupils is consistent with messages given about health and wellbeing in lessons, assemblies and school policies. They develop pupils as healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society – one of the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. They have:

Excellence, equity and wellbeing

Please see figures 7 to 9 on pages 33-34 for more information



policies and practices to ensure that pupils make good progress in their learning



leaders who ‘walk the talk’ about supporting pupils’ health and wellbeing



a nurturing culture, where positive relationships enable pupils to thrive



an inclusive community and ethos



detailed knowledge about pupils’ health and wellbeing that influences policies and actions and policy



a broad and balanced curriculum, including discrete, evidence-based learning experiences that promote health and wellbeing



supportive pastoral care and targeted interventions for pupils that need additional support



environment and facilities that promote good health and wellbeing, such as space to play, socialise and relax at break times



close partnerships with parents and carers



continuing professional learning for all staff that enables them to support pupils’ health and wellbeing



effective links with external agencies

Questionnaire responses from pupils in schools inspected in the current cycle show that almost all pupils in primary schools have someone they could talk to if they are worried or upset at school. However, pupils in secondary schools are five times more likely than pupils in primary schools to disagree or strongly disagree that they “have someone to talk to if they are worried or upset at school”. Most pupils in primary schools think that “if any bullying happens, the school will deal with it well”, but by key stage 4 around a third of pupils disagree or strongly disagree with this.

Poor wellbeing is a factor in the underachievement of groups of vulnerable pupils. For example, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’ attendance has improved over the past few years, but remains too low and contributes to poor attainment for these pupils¹². A majority of schools and local authorities have pastoral support plans for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils to support them in attending school. Many parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils state that one of the main reasons for their children not attending secondary school is the fear of being bullied. However, only around half of schools’ anti-bullying and equality policies take account of the particular needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, for example in recognising how their culture and traditions may affect their attendance. Cardiff’s Traveller education service provides strong support for pupils and their families during the transition from primary to secondary school, and this has resulted in a notable increase in pupils attending secondary school.

Research has shown that being a young carer can adversely affect school attendance, achievement and mental health¹³. Many education providers do not know which of their learners have a caring role and therefore the provision for young carers varies widely. Providers that are most effective in meeting the needs of young carers have systems to identify these learners and track their wellbeing needs. The most effective schools make good use of pupils’ one-page profiles as part of SEN provision to record what is important to and for children. This is helping to give young carers a voice and enables schools to target the right support to meet their individual needs. There are awards schemes that provide secondary schools, colleges and PRUs with useful resources and toolkits to shape their provision to meet the needs of young carers. For example, Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority funds a Carers Support Project to work in partnership with schools to implement the Young Carers School Award, which has raised awareness of young carers in the area and improved the provision for them¹⁴. However, overall few education providers make good enough use of the resources available that can help them improve their support for young carers¹⁵.

¹² Read more in our report ‘Provision for secondary school-aged Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’, Estyn (2019c)

¹³ For example, see <https://carers.org/key-facts-about-carers-and-people-they-care>

¹⁴ A full case study on Rhondda Cynon Taf’s Carers Support Project features in our report: ‘Provision for young carers in secondary schools, further education colleges and pupil referral units across Wales’ (Estyn, 2019d)

¹⁵ Read more in our report ‘Provision for secondary school-aged Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’, Estyn’s (2019c)

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Many lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender (LGBT) pupils, and those questioning their sexual identity or gender, feel vulnerable in school. For example, a Stonewall report (2017) found that around half of these pupils face bullying in school. In a very few schools, pupils act as ambassadors for gender equality. For example, pupils in Bassaleg School have formed a Queer and Straight Alliance group to promote individual rights. The group supports pupils to feel safe, confident and passionate about speaking out about their experiences to help others. This has supported the school's vision of developing a culture where equality and diversity are celebrated¹⁶. We will publish a thematic report in 2020 on how well schools support LGBT pupils.

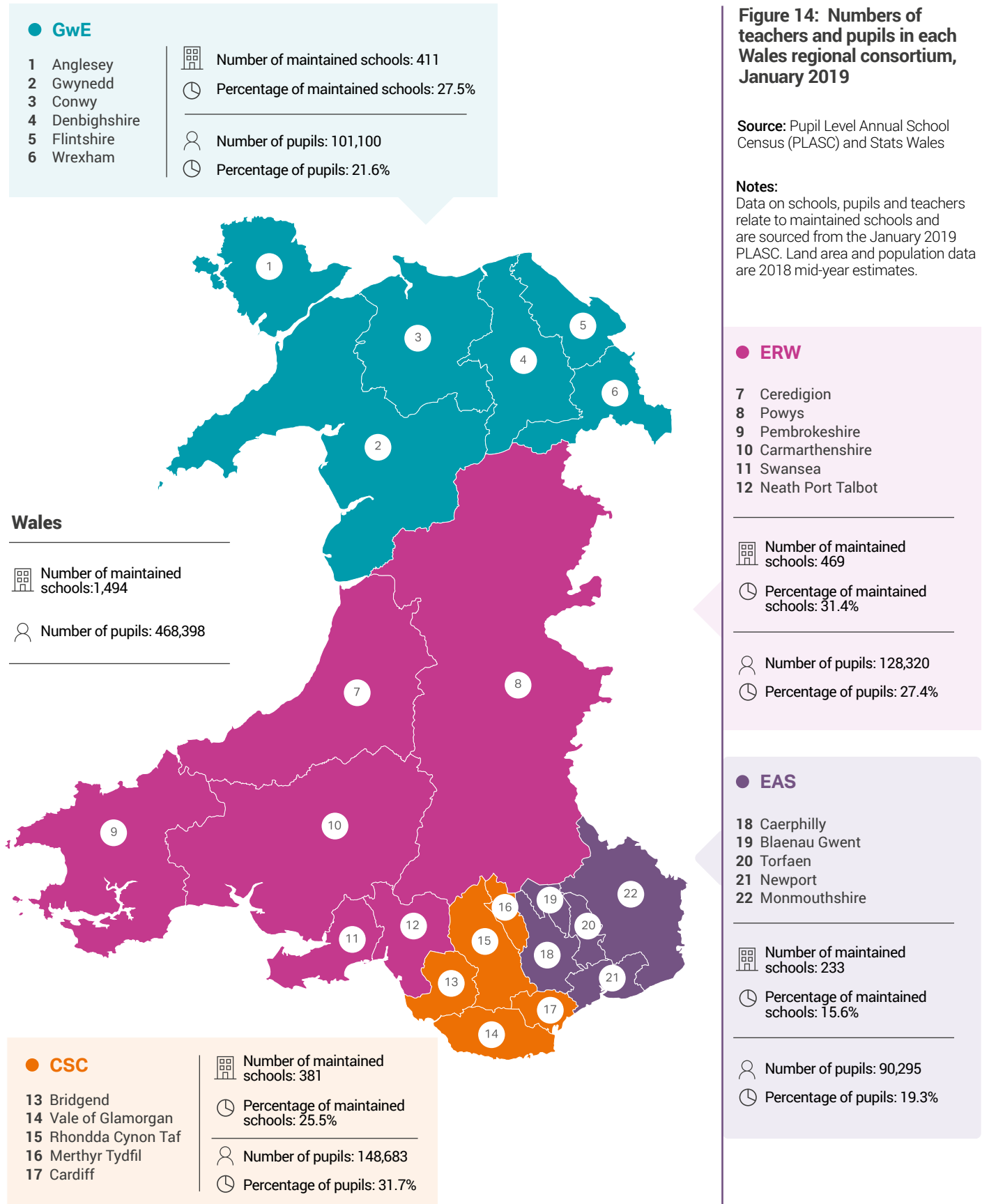
The Welsh Government sponsored training on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is having a positive impact on the work of schools across Wales. Generally, schools that provide well for pupils with adverse experiences understand the damaging impact of these experiences on pupils' life chances. Many schools have trained key staff to deliver helpful social and emotional intervention programmes for vulnerable pupils, including those with ACEs¹⁷. In primary schools, there are usually strong arrangements to ensure children with ACEs and other vulnerable pupils have calm, nurturing and supportive spaces to go to when they are feeling anxious or upset. While secondary schools may also provide similar spaces, they are primarily seen as for the youngest pupils or those with special educational needs.

The best schools make the most of external support available to them. All secondary schools host an independent counselling service that is funded by the local authority. Primary schools generally struggle to access counselling or other therapeutic services for their pupils in times of need. In 2020 we will publish a report on how well schools and PRUs build emotional resilience in learners.

¹⁶ Read more in our effective practice 'Using school programmes to support equality and diversity'.

¹⁷ Read more in our report 'Knowing your children – supporting pupils with adverse childhood experiences' (Estyn, 2020)

Supporting a self-improving system



Supporting a self-improving system

Local authority and regional consortium support for schools

Local authorities in Wales have a statutory responsibility for the performance of their schools, and powers to intervene in schools causing concern. They also provide a range of services that support the education of children and young people, such as youth services, counselling and sports activities. Expenditure on these local government education services has decreased in real terms over recent years and local authorities have prioritised funding for schools while managing overall budget reductions (StatsWales, 2019a).

Local authorities work together through four regional consortia to provide school improvement services that challenge and support schools (see figure 14).

Over the last three years, local authorities and regional consortia have improved their knowledge of individual schools' strengths and areas for improvement. Using this knowledge, school improvement staff are supporting and challenging schools better, particularly schools causing concern. The regional consortia have prioritised supporting schools to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy. Support for schools to develop pupils' digital competence is comparably weaker. For schools causing concern, school improvement staff are not always focused enough on improving the quality of teaching.

Regional consortia work closely with the Welsh Government to support schools on curriculum reform. Their support includes providing professional learning for teachers and school leaders, and for identifying and facilitating schools to support other schools. Most activity has so far focused on supporting schools to understand the curriculum reform process by engaging with the development of the draft curriculum and on supporting senior school leaders in managing change. Each region has approached providing support for schools to prepare for curriculum reform in different ways, and has designed its own tools to measure and support engagement with curriculum reform. These tools are used to identify strengths in practice and priority areas for development.

As part of the Welsh Government's ALN reform programme, five ALN transformational leads have worked with local authorities to support their work in reforming processes for pupils with additional learning needs. The ALN leads provide local authorities with advice, support and challenge as they prepare for the implementation of the reforms. Local authorities have developed local plans to help schools, non-maintained settings and further education institutions in their local authority area to prepare for change. The Welsh Government recognised the scale of the challenge that ALN reform presents and the Minister for Education announced in September 2019 that implementation of the new ALN system would be delayed and start, on a phased basis, from September 2021 rather than 2020, in order to "provide time for further dedicated training and development" (Welsh Government, 2019n).

Supporting a self-improving system

School organisation

There have been many successful school reorganisations in recent years. This year, there have been 55 school reorganisation proposals under the School Organisation Code (Welsh Government, 2018e), considerably more than in the previous two years. Of these, 31 were received in the autumn term prior to the publication of a new Welsh Government School Organisation Code that came into effect on 1 November 2018, which is more proposals than for the previous year as a whole, when local authorities submitted 29 proposals. Around a third of this year's proposals were for increasing capacity in individual schools, including increasing the age range to allow for more nursery pupils. A few local authorities submitted proposals as part of a review of education in a particular area, which accounted for a further third of submissions. In addition, a few local authorities submitted proposals to reorganise SEN provision, for example by relocating, re-designating and opening new learning resource centres¹⁸. In line with recent trends, two proposals reorganised education provision by opening all-age schools. Around a third of all proposals were linked to increasing Welsh-medium education, for example by changing the language status of five dual stream primary schools to Welsh medium in Carmarthenshire.

In most of these cases, Estyn agreed that the proposal was likely to at least maintain education standards. School reorganisation programmes should be primarily about school improvement rather than a resource management exercise that is separate from the interests of learners. In some cases, local authorities make broad generalisations about the benefits of reorganisation without evaluating the impact on learner outcomes in the particular situations.

Currently, a range of strategies such as schools closures, amalgamations, federalisation and the removal of redundant buildings and demountable classrooms are being employed across Wales to rationalise school places and improve school buildings. Local remodelling of primary sector provision has replaced many unsuitable and inefficient buildings with appropriate new provision, often serving wider areas than before. Federations of schools and all-age schools are proving increasingly popular options for remodelling education provision.

These school reorganisation strategies often need substantial financial investment and political commitment. Welsh Government funding is often a catalyst for assisting local authorities to re-structure their school estate. The introduction of the 21st Century Schools programme requires local authorities to be more strategic in applying Welsh Government capital funding. Many local authorities have been reluctant to take decisions on school rationalisation despite a significant decline in pupil numbers within some areas of their authority. This reluctance is often due to strong local opposition from communities and their local political representatives.

Where reorganisations work well, school leaders are involved closely in the preparation period before a new school opens, often for at least a year in advance. This allows them to co-develop the vision with other leaders and teachers and to ensure that pupils' learning is not disrupted. Where new schools have not been successful, particularly secondary schools, it is often because this preparatory work was weak in the year before the school opened.

¹⁸ A learning resource centre is a classroom or classrooms based within a mainstream school for pupils with complex needs. This enables the school to make sure that these pupils' individual needs are supported while providing opportunities for them to take part in mainstream activities and lessons and to socialise with their peers.

Supporting a self-improving system

Schools increasingly work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies to meet a range of community needs. Such use is aligned to developing the community focus of schools and can result in surplus areas within a school being used as the base for other services. Where this happens there are opportunities for closer multi-agency working with the police, library services, health or social services. Although such practice is increasing, it is still unusual to see surplus capacity used in this way.

Federated schools

The number of federated schools has grown steadily over the past few years. Federation in Wales is a formal and legal agreement by which between two and six schools share governance arrangements and have a single governing body. Federations can involve a mix of maintained schools which are either nursery, primary, special or secondary schools. At the start of September 2019, there were 34 federations across Wales, containing around 5% of all maintained schools. Most of these federations consist of primary schools. In most cases, governing bodies and local authorities enter into federation to increase the likelihood of securing effective leadership and the long-term viability of schools. This is particularly the case for small schools, for schools in rural or otherwise isolated positions, for Welsh-medium schools, and for schools where headteacher recruitment is particularly challenging. The role of the headteacher in a federation is more attractive as it often means that they have a reduced teaching commitment if any, and become 'executive headteachers' with responsibility for leading more than one school.

The revision of the Welsh Government School Organisation Code, which came into effect in November 2018, makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools and establishing a procedural presumption against their closure. The code notes that "this does not mean that a rural school will never close but the case for closure must be strong and all viable alternatives to closure must have been conscientiously considered by the proposer, including federation" (Welsh Government, 2018e, p.11). Since the introduction of this new code, there has been an increase in the number of schools forming a federation.

In 2019, Estyn (2019a) published a thematic report on the common features of effective federation. Where federation is most successful, governing bodies, senior leaders and local authorities have a clear vision of what they wish to achieve through the federation process. Their vision focuses sharply on outcomes for pupils. They are explicit from the outset about what federation does and does not involve and they communicate this clearly to staff, parents and pupils. They quickly establish leadership structures that support their vision for the federation.

In a few cases, federations use staff expertise to support the progress of specific groups of learners, such as those with social, emotional and behavioural needs. But overall, senior leaders do not take full enough advantage of the staff expertise available across the federation to enhance learning experiences for all pupils and to ensure that the progress of particular groups of pupils is rapid enough, including the more able or those who are disadvantaged.

In a minority of federated schools, teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively with their peers from the other schools. This has a

Supporting a self-improving system

positive impact on pupils' social skills and sense of wellbeing. In nearly all cases, federation has a positive impact on the transition experience for many pupils as they move from key stage 2 to key stage 3. In most cases, federated schools do not use ICT effectively to support pupil collaboration across school sites.

The quality of support that local authorities provide governing bodies to assist them through the federation process is variable. In the best cases, local authorities ensure consistency of support across all schools in the federation, for example through the deployment of the same challenge adviser to each school. However, there is not enough support for headteachers that will prepare them to lead a federation.

Federation frequently results in budget efficiencies for schools, such as through sharing administrative staff. In federations of smaller schools, managing two or three separate budgets and the pooling of resources can be a challenge for governing bodies and for headteachers.

All-age schools

All-age schools provide education for pupils from age three or four up to 16 or 19 years old. In January 2019, there were 19 all-age schools in Wales. The sector continues to grow with a further two schools planned to open in September 2019 and further plans and consultations in at least another five areas. The sector is diverse in terms of the different number of sites for each school, the wide range of pupil numbers in different phases, the urban as well as rural locations of the schools, and in language medium.

A particular feature of all-age schools is the continuity in care and support for pupils as they progress through the phases of a single school. Even so, all the all-age schools inspected so far receive at least a half of their Year 7 cohort from external primary schools, so there is a difference within the pupil cohort post-Year 7 in the extent of the continuity in care and support that pupils have received.

In 2020 we will publish a report on leadership, provision and performance in all-age schools, which will focus on the benefits and challenges of the all-age model.

Cymraeg 2050: a million Welsh speakers

In August 2017, the Welsh Government published its strategy, 'Cymraeg 2050: a million Welsh speakers' (2017a) with overall targets of a million people speaking Welsh by 2050 and 20% of those speaking Welsh every day. Education has an important role to play in achieving these targets. A key aim of the government's strategy is to expand Welsh-medium provision in the early years as an entry point into Welsh-medium education in schools. Around 21% of Year 1 pupils are educated in Welsh-medium settings, and this figure has remained broadly the same in recent years. 'Cymraeg 2050' includes a target to increase this proportion to 30% by 2031 and 40% by 2050.

Local authorities in Wales have published statutory Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) since 2014. These plans have provided a useful and structured framework for local authorities to develop their

Supporting a self-improving system

Welsh-medium education provision (Estyn, 2016). There have been weaknesses in the way many local authorities implement their WESPs and this is one reason for the slow progress made against many of the targets in the Welsh Assembly Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy (2010). More recent plans demonstrate a stronger commitment by leaders to supporting Welsh-medium education.

A few local authorities have very effective provision for language immersion for pupils joining Welsh-medium or bilingual schools with little or no prior Welsh. They offer opportunities for a new cohort of pupils to develop their skills in Welsh and provide a sound linguistic basis for them to participate fully in bilingual education and to take advantage of the experiences offered.

The proportion of pupils who do not continue in Welsh-medium education between the primary and secondary phases of education has reduced over time. For example, 10% of pupils assessed in Welsh first-language at the end of key stage 2 in 2013 were not assessed in 2016 at the end of key stage 3. This compares with nearly 18% in the period 2008-2011 five years earlier. Overall, however, around 20% of pupils who are in Welsh-medium education at the end of the foundation phase do not continue to develop their Welsh language skills to their full potential during their time in statutory education and do not gain a GCSE qualification in Welsh (first language) at the end of key stage 4. Similarly, too many pupils in bilingual secondary schools in a minority of local authorities do not receive enough opportunities to continue to develop and apply their Welsh language skills in subjects across the curriculum. These schools do not plan carefully enough to develop pupils' language skills, including promoting the advantages of pursuing courses through the medium of Welsh.

English-medium schools have an important contribution to make towards realising the 2050 targets and to ensure that learners from all backgrounds have the opportunities to develop strong Welsh language skills. The 'Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022' guidance (Welsh Government, 2019b) emphasises that the teaching and learning of Welsh is integral to the new curriculum and offers a valuable opportunity for English-medium schools to focus more on their Welsh language provision. There are significant implications for the professional learning required for staff to meet the challenge of these increased expectations. Teachers who are not specialists in language teaching methods often teach Welsh in English-medium primary and secondary schools. There is often a weak understanding in many of these schools of what constitutes effective approaches to the teaching and learning of Welsh.

Self-evaluation and planning for improvement

In the most effective schools, there is a well-established culture of continuous improvement where all staff contribute to the ongoing evaluation of standards and provision. In these schools, leaders establish a clear understanding of their school's strengths and priorities for improvement through a wide range of evaluative activities. They use this understanding to identify specific improvement priorities, plan relevant actions and monitor their implementation.

Supporting a self-improving system

In the inspection cycle 2010-2017, the weakest aspect of leadership in schools was self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Although most schools have an established cycle of self-evaluation activities, in a third of primary schools and half of secondary schools, leaders do not evaluate pupil outcomes or the effectiveness of their provision well enough. In particular, they do not focus closely enough on the impact of teaching. This makes it difficult for them to identify aspects of teaching that need to improve or to plan and secure those improvements. In the first two years of the current inspection cycle, the situation has improved slightly in the primary sector. In secondary schools, the proportion that have shortcomings in their arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning remains broadly similar. Of the primary and secondary schools placed in a statutory category over this period, three-quarters were given a specific recommendation to strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning.

In 2018, Estyn was asked by the Welsh Government to work with school practitioners, regional consortia, the OECD and other partners to support the co-creation of a National Evaluation and Improvement Resource (NEIR) for use in primary, secondary and special schools. The first stage of this project took the form of a wide-ranging consultation, focused on identifying the factors that foster effective self-evaluation and improvement processes or limit them. In successful schools, self-evaluation and improvement processes are:

- consistently focused on achieving the best standards and wellbeing for all pupils
- an ongoing process that is an ingrained part of school culture, not an 'one-off' event
- linked closely with professional learning
- an aspect of the school's work that involves all staff, not just senior leaders
- sustainable and manageable
- honest, frank and transparent

Where self-evaluation and improvement planning processes are ineffective, it is often because they are:

- focused too much on providing evidence for an external audience
- an annual event rather than an ongoing process
- concentrate on the quality of documentation rather than the impact of actions
- the sole responsibility of senior leaders and do not involve all staff
- recording actions and checking compliance to school policies (often through a 'tick-box' approach) rather than evaluating improvement
- bureaucratic and burdensome
- based on too narrow a range of evidence

Supporting a self-improving system

During the first phase of the project, the working group developed a range of tools, approaches and prompts for professional dialogue, to provide a practical resource that can be used by any school, to strengthen this aspect of their work. The resource is aligned with other aspects of education policy, such as curriculum reform and the national mission. Phase two of the project started in autumn term 2019 and focuses on piloting, testing and developing the resource. Schools, alongside their regional consortium, are piloting aspects of the NEIR and developing the tools and approaches that will sit within it.

There are often also weaknesses in local authorities' work to evaluate the effectiveness of their services on supporting schools to improve. They do not use the range of information they gather to identify what strategies are working well, and what they may need to change.

Post-16 education and training

Post-16 reform

As well as the reforms in compulsory education, post-compulsory education and training (PCET) is also undergoing a period of change following the Hazelkorn report 'Towards 2030: A Framework for Building a World-Class Post Compulsory Education System for Wales' (2016) and the subsequent technical consultation 'Public Good and a Prosperous Wales – the next steps' (Welsh Government, 2018d).

The resultant reform will, subject to legislation, establish the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) as a single, strategic authority responsible for overseeing all aspects of post-compulsory education and training by 2023. The rationale for setting up the Commission is to strengthen and simplify the post-16 sector in Wales to make learning opportunities more relevant and responsive to the needs of learners. It will be important that these reforms allow the post-16 opportunities and qualifications to build on the new Curriculum for Wales for compulsory education.

As well as being the regulator and funder for both further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions, the commission will be responsible for apprenticeships, adult learning and mainstream school sixth form delivery through local authorities. In addition, the commission will be responsible for Welsh Government funded higher level research and innovation and regulate quality of education and training in the tertiary education, training and research sectors in Wales.

Curriculum and learning experiences in post-compulsory education and training

Nearly all learners progress from school to access A levels, vocational courses or apprenticeships in schools, colleges or work-based learning providers (Welsh Government, 2017d). However, depending on where a young person lives in Wales, there are differences in the opportunities they can access in terms of choice, level of study and language medium.

In a few cases, there are strong working relationships between schools, colleges and work-based learning providers. However, incomplete information and advice remains a significant barrier to pupils in making informed choices from the full range of post-compulsory education and training options available.

Strategic planning and delivery of 14-19 provision is variable across colleges and local authorities. Funding arrangements for 14-19 provision are complex and the most effective colleges have good communication and relationships with schools and local authorities to make sure that their offer matches local needs. In many cases, committed staff and individual relationships drive how provision is developed rather than a formalised commitment at strategic level. In the best examples, 14-19 provision is part of the college's or local authority's strategic planning, and there are well-established links between the college, the local authority and schools. For example, at one large college group, the principal of each constituent college site has direct responsibility for 14-19 provision and has good links with a counterpart at the local authority. In partnerships with local authorities in its area, there is a dedicated and jointly-funded link co-ordinator with office space at the college, to liaise and manage day-to-day activity.

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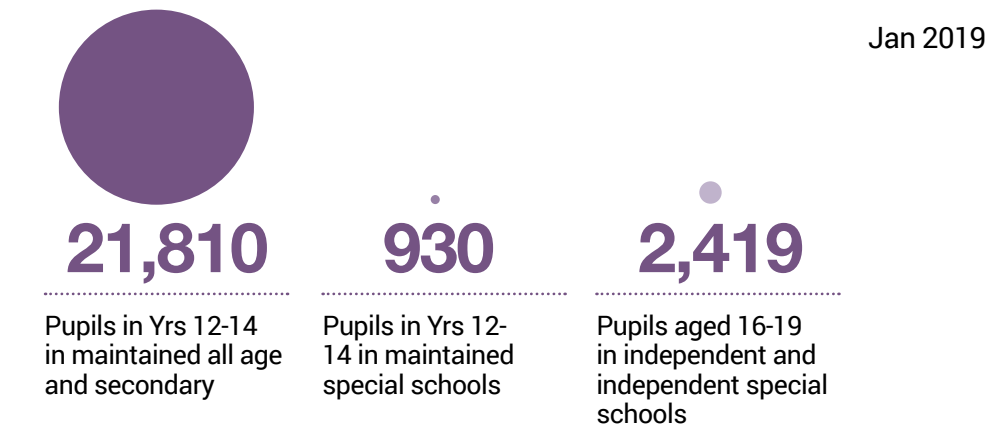


Figure 15: Numbers in post-16 provision in Wales

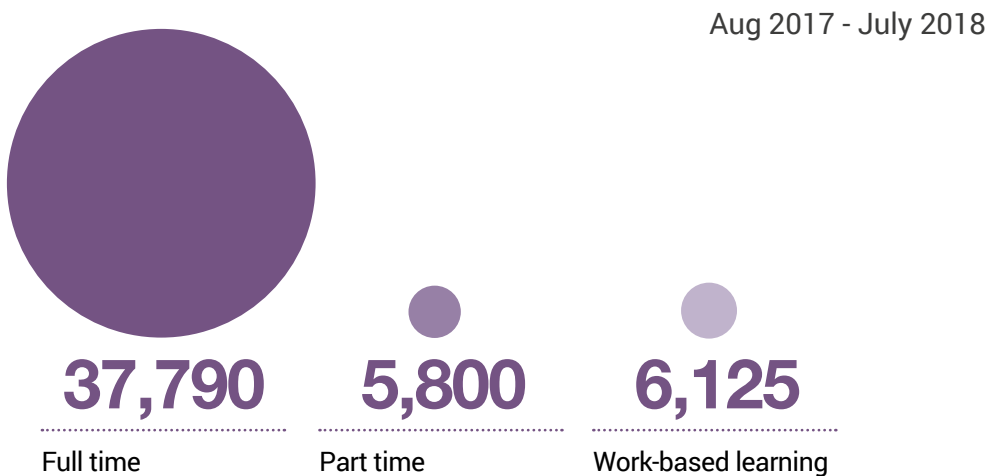


Figure 16: Further education colleges unique learners - up to and including age 19 at the start of the academic year

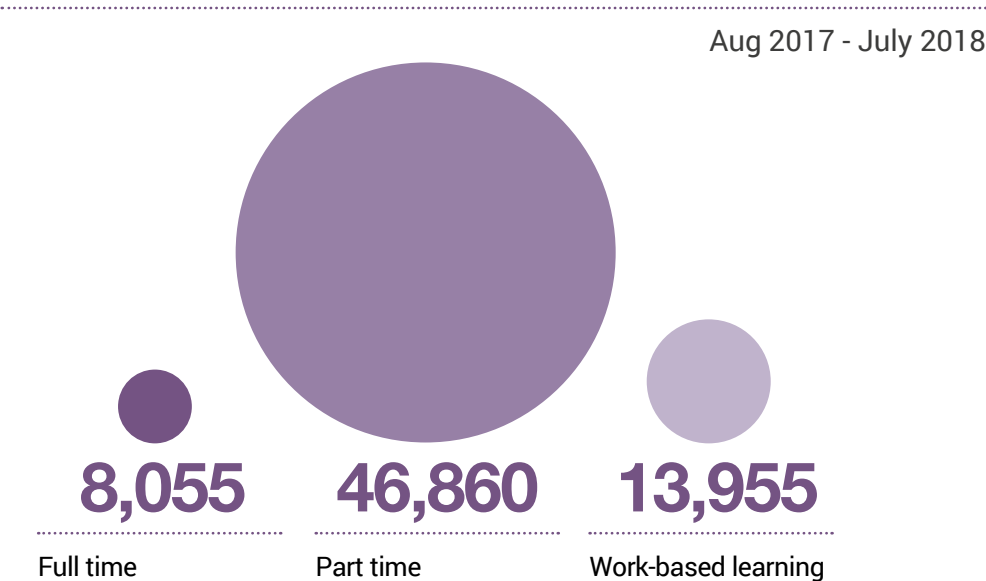


Figure 17: Further education colleges unique learners - age 20 and over at the start of the academic year

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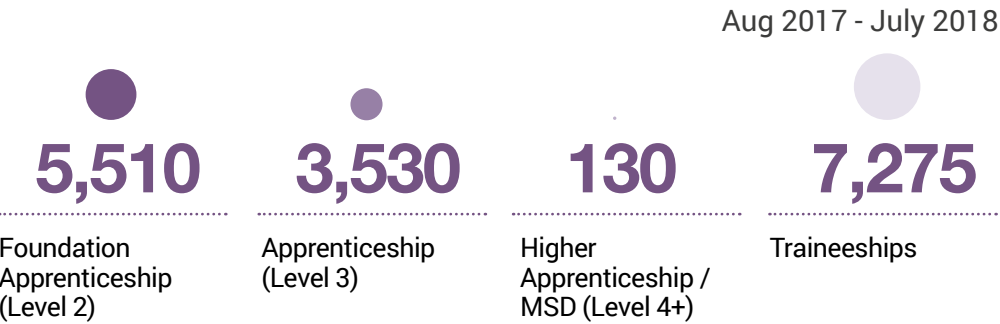


Figure 18: Work-based learning unique learners - up to and including age 19 at the start of the academic year

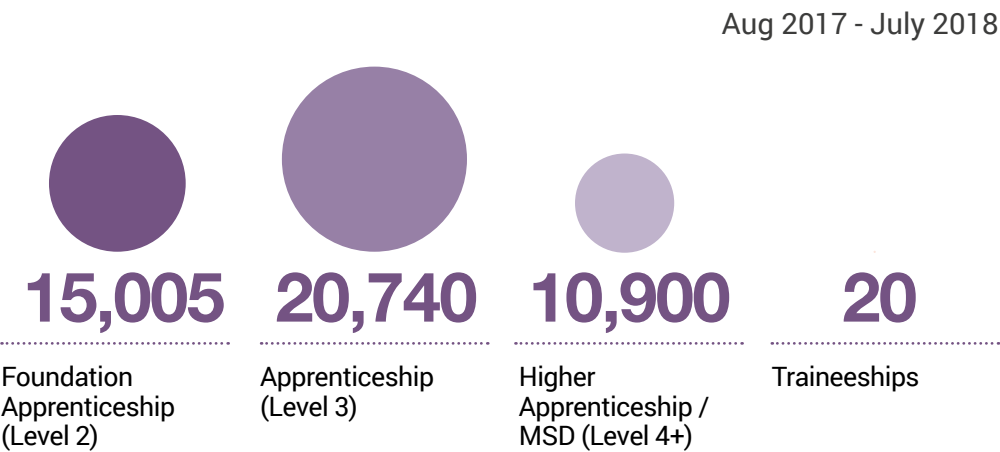


Figure 19: Work-based learning unique learners - age 20 and over at the start of the academic year

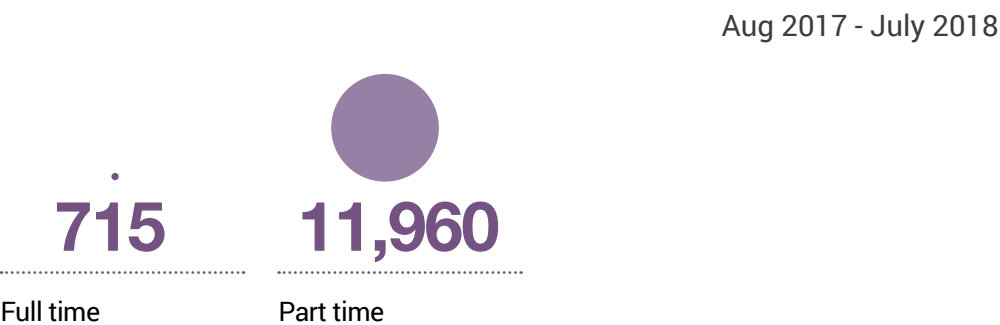


Figure 20: Local authority community learning - unique learners

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Case study: LINC Conwy and Arfon partnerships

LINC Conwy was established in 2011 and involves seven secondary schools and one further education college in the Conwy area. The Arfon partnership involves six secondary schools and two further education colleges in the Arfon and surrounding area. Both partnerships were established to increase opportunities for bilingual and Welsh-medium provision and to increase the range of options available to post-16 learners in the local areas in North Wales. They enable learners to study from a range of AS, A level and vocational courses at any of the centres involved.

For more information, please read our case study in **A levels in sixth forms and colleges** (Estyn, 2018a)

In other partnerships, the local authority negotiates directly with the college for the scale, scope and payment of the provision, so that individual headteachers do not need to negotiate directly with the college. In these partnerships, the college tries to minimise the costs to schools and maximise the impact of funding it receives, for example by not top-slicing income, by charging rates that only just meet costs, or by increasing the charge at a below-inflation rate.

In the less effective examples, provision is generally limited in quantity and poorly co-ordinated. Provision is not planned strategically to meet the needs of learners or the local area. Arrangements between colleges, schools and local authorities may be ad hoc and depend on the commitment of local managers and staff, rather than being supported by a well-planned structure or through clear memoranda of understanding.

The most effective partnerships between schools and colleges help support the transition from schools to post-16 learning. For example, a minority of further education colleges have developed and introduced a 'junior apprenticeship programme' that provides education and vocational training to school pupils, including those who have been excluded from school or who have poor behavioural or attendance records. This full-time programme typically consists of construction, hairdressing or motor vehicle programmes that lead to level 1 or 2 qualifications. Learners also undertake Essential Skills Wales qualifications in communication and number skills as well as participating in sports and enrichment activities. These learners remain registered at their secondary schools, but receive their education exclusively at the college. Although the term 'junior apprenticeship' is used, the programme is not part of the Welsh Government's national apprenticeship programme and is funded as a separate 'creative solutions' grant to colleges.

Estyn will publish a thematic report in 2020 on the effectiveness of partnerships and joint planning between secondary schools and colleges for their 16-19 provision.

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A level provision

A level courses are offered by school sixth forms and by further education colleges in Wales. The range of subjects offered at A level varies according to geographical location, staff expertise, language medium, provider size and whether or not there are partnerships between centres. In general, colleges and large schools offer a broader range of subjects than smaller providers, most of whom depend on partnership arrangements to offer a wide range of subjects. In addition to the generally popular subjects¹⁹, many colleges and schools with large sixth forms deliver low take-up AS and A level subjects such as philosophy, electronics, geology and the classics. Colleges and schools generally use the Welsh Baccalaureate award to broaden the skills and experiences of their A level learners. They enrol nearly all A level learners onto the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate qualification. Colleges across Wales are increasingly making pastoral sessions and the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate available to learners in Welsh. However, very few colleges deliver A level subjects bilingually or in Welsh.

While most learners who choose to study A levels are offered a number of A level subjects, the choices for individual learners can be restricted by a number of factors. This is often the case in areas or centres where post-16 options other than A levels are limited. These factors include centres requiring learners to study more subjects than they wish to and centres not offering particular subjects due to a lack of subject expertise or poor results in a subject over time. In a few cases, learners are reluctant to travel to other centres. Many centres stipulate, often appropriately, minimum grades for studying certain subjects. This particularly affects learners of relatively modest achievement at GCSE because their choices are restricted by entry requirements and leave them with a limited range of options that may not match their needs or interests. These factors lead to a few learners choosing a course they have not studied before, such as psychology, without fully understanding the demands of the subject or choosing subjects in which they have little interest.

Class sizes vary greatly across centres, from one to about 30 learners. In very small classes, it is difficult for learners to learn from each other, although they can benefit from the time staff can give them. Conversely, very large classes pose challenges in terms of teacher workload and it is difficult for teachers to give individual learners sufficient attention.

Many centres offer a wide range of enrichment opportunities to their A level learners, including cultural and academic activities as well as sports and hobbies. More able learners benefit from dedicated events and activities that nurture their curiosity and stretch their understanding. In most schools and colleges these activities include participation in the Welsh Government funded Seren programme established in 2015 to support more academically able young people in Wales to gain access to

¹⁹ Subjects such as mathematics, English literature, biology, history, chemistry, religious studies

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leading Welsh, UK and International universities. The Seren Network was originally established in a direct response to the need to halt the decline in the number of successful applications being made by students in Wales to attend Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In the best cases, schools and colleges provide dedicated additional support for learners applying for entry to university courses that have wider entry requirements or entry examinations. Such support takes the form of university visits and guest lectures as well as mentoring, mock examinations and interviews. Learners enjoy meeting like-minded young people and having the opportunity to have additional sessions on a specific field that is of interest to them. They appreciate the opportunities to attend summer schools at leading universities in the UK, the US and China. Those aspiring to study a science-based subject at university, such as medicine or dentistry, have found the programme particularly helpful. Learners value the support they receive to apply to university. Cambridge made the highest number of offers to state-educated Welsh students in 2019, an offer rate of 31%, and applications to Oxford have increased by 13% since 2016. In 2019, the Seren programme was extended to learners in Years 8 to 11.

Vocational provision

The further education colleges in Wales deliver a comprehensive range of vocational courses at different levels across many subject areas. They use a range of information to inform curriculum planning, including consideration of annual recommendations received from Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) to reflect regional skills needs. In addition to these recommendations from RSPs, many colleges plan their course offer on the basis of the previous year's recruitment or the current demand from existing learners rather than an analysis of current or future skills and employer needs. Progression pathways to the next level are available on many courses. Very few courses are delivered in Welsh or bilingually and there are too few opportunities for learners to develop Welsh as an employability and life skill.

In nearly all colleges, the delivery of many vocational courses is enhanced through the provision of realistic work environments such as hair and beauty salons, training restaurants or motor vehicle and engineering workshops. Apart from a few courses that require work experience as part of their qualification, many colleges do not work well enough with employers to provide meaningful programmed work experience or other useful work-related experiences for learners.

Although colleges are generally successful in supporting learners to achieve their qualifications, they do not always do enough to develop their life skills. Many learners complete courses without developing the key employability and social skills often identified by employers. This means that in some cases learners are not sufficiently prepared for the demands of the industry they have trained in. As a result, these learners tend to leave the industry after securing employment and have to re-train in another vocational area.

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Apprenticeship provision

Most work-based learning providers in Wales deliver a wide range of apprenticeship programmes across many learning areas, including higher apprenticeships. These apprenticeships are delivered to meet the growing demand of employers and learners. This year has seen the launch of the degree apprenticeship programme. Currently, this programme is delivered in the two priority areas of engineering and advanced manufacturing, and information technology.

Apprenticeships are generally in demand at level 2 and level 3, and many higher apprenticeships are offered at level 4. Health and social care, business administration, engineering and manufacturing technologies, and construction and the built environment continue to have a high demand at level 2 and level 3. The most successful training providers work with employers to match learners carefully to the training programmes that best suits their job roles. They also use feedback from employers to improve and update provision. In the best cases, learners are programmed for both on and off-the-job training. In a minority of cases, on and off-the job activities are not matched carefully enough to assessment opportunities and requirements.

There remains a significant variation in the quality of the coaching and mentoring that learners receive from their employers in the workplace. This aspect of learner development is important for ensuring learner support and successful progress through the apprenticeship, particularly for higher apprenticeship learners.

Providers are attempting to work more closely with schools in their local geographical areas to promote apprenticeships. There is also still considerable scope to raise awareness of apprenticeships with learners, teachers and parents as a viable and suitable option to undertaking A levels or attending further education or university.

A right to lifelong learning – skills provision for second chances

In 2019, the Minister for Education committed to exploring how the Welsh Government could deliver a right to lifelong learning for Wales. Community-based adult learning partnerships offer a wide range of literacy, numeracy and digital skill courses along with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) through which learners can develop their basic skills. These courses are usually free to learners. Most community-based adult learning partnerships take good account of learner needs and work together effectively to share resources, minimise duplication of classes and ensure progression opportunities.

Those working in adult learning partnerships have a strong commitment to providing learning for hard-to-reach learners, such as the long-term unemployed, single parents, minority ethnic groups, those with physical and mental problems, the isolated, the abused and the elderly as well as those with poor experiences of statutory education.

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Most adult learners have a range of commitments in their lives and, as a result, most community-based adult learning partnerships work hard to ensure that an appropriate level of courses takes place in venues at different times of day to meet adult learners' differing needs. The venues are usually easily accessible to most learners. However, siting and timing of classes are often challenging where the partnership covers a large rural area and where public transport runs infrequently.

Many community-based adult learning partnerships work well with voluntary organisations, or with other organisations such as prisons, to provide tailored courses to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

Most community-based adult learning partnerships offer a broad range of classes linked to developing learners' interests, for example furniture upcycling, international cookery classes, languages and art classes. The community-based partnerships are responsive to updating their curriculum offer each year. Learners usually pay the cost of non-certificated general interest and activity courses in full. In other cases, senior leaders identify long-running courses in which learners are making limited progress in new learning, but attend regularly for social reasons. In many cases, they help these courses to become clubs, which appoint and pay their own tutors, and by providing venues where the club can meet at an appropriate cost. Many older learners continue to attend regularly at the interest courses and clubs and this helps them to maintain their wellbeing through active participation in a social group.

In adult learning in the community, adult learners often enrol on literacy, numeracy and digital skill courses to improve their skills prior to entry into work or to revive their skills if they have been workless for a period of time. They may also be learners who are already working, but who would be able to access managerial posts with higher-level skills in literacy and numeracy. Overall, adult learners develop their skills well and successfully complete their courses and qualifications at good rates. Many learners gain accreditation through their studies.

The range of opportunities for learners in the justice sector has improved year on year in most prisons in Wales. In the prisons that Estyn inspected this year, leaders and managers use labour market information effectively to develop a broad range of opportunities to help learners gain skills that will help them progress into work. For example, a useful partnership with an employer, who has developed a warehouse training facility in the prison, enables learners to receive employment interviews on their release. Call centre facilities in two prisons provide valuable opportunities for learners and a specialist railway maintenance programme in one prison gives learners opportunities of employment with a rail employer. One prison has refined its construction multi-skills training in partnership with a construction company to provide customised training in dry-lining skills, with the partner employer offering opportunities to progress directly into employment when prisoners are released. Learners in vocational training in prisons have good opportunities to gain qualifications recognised by employers. Most also have opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills alongside their vocational training.

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Cymraeg 2050

Post-compulsory education and training providers have a key role to play in sustaining and developing learners' Welsh language skills to meet the growing need for a bilingual workforce as set out in the 'Cymraeg 2050' Strategy (Welsh Government, 2017a). The extent to which local authorities, further education colleges and work-based learning providers plan their Welsh-medium or bilingual post-16 education and training varies too much. There is a need to encourage more Welsh-speaking learners to continue some or all of their learning in Welsh. In 2019, the Coleg Cymraeg Cendlaethol launched its 'Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan' (2018), which sets out the steps it will take to develop learners' awareness, understanding, confidence or fluency. The plan identifies the need to significantly increase the post-16 workforce's bilingual skills. Currently, only 7.7 % of work-based learning practitioners and 15.2% of further education teachers are able to work through the medium of Welsh (Education Workforce Council, 2019).

In further education colleges, many learners who learn in Welsh or bilingually have good oral Welsh language or bilingual skills (Estyn, 2017c). They speak confidently and correctly, and show a good grasp of vocabulary and subject terminology. However, around a third of learners say that they are only fairly confident orally at best, despite following courses in Welsh or having attended Welsh-medium schools. In the better examples, learners and their teachers converse informally in Welsh during classes and around the college. In a few cases in work-based learning training providers, reviews and assessment are undertaken in Welsh, but this is often dependent on the geographical location and the provider having Welsh-speaking staff.

In Estyn's inspection reports on further education and work-based learning providers, a common recommendation in recent years has been to improve the focus on developing learners' Welsh language skills as an employability skill and to encourage learners to use and develop their language skills in the workplace. Across the post-16 sector, leaders and managers have not clearly linked the benefits of using the Welsh language to employment opportunities, despite competence in the Welsh language being in demand in a number of geographical regions and learning areas. This is notably the case in health and care sectors, especially in the care home sector. It is also a very desirable employment skill for learners on vocational programmes who visit the homes of Welsh-speaking and bilingual customers to undertake work.

Following recent structural changes at national level, the Welsh for Adults sector is beginning to make an important contribution towards helping deliver some of the aims of the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050' Strategy (2017a), which sets out a long-term approach to achieving the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Providers are now developing provision across Wales to support courses for the workplace and the family, and to extend the use of technology in support of learning.

Learners in the two Welsh for Adults providers inspected between 2017 and 2019 acquire the Welsh language more quickly and effectively than pupils at the corresponding levels in English-medium secondary schools. Tutors at these

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providers succeed in ensuring that lessons focus well on improving standards of oracy and, as a result, most learners become increasingly confident in their use of Welsh, particularly understanding and speaking the language.

Teaching and training

Overall, the quality of teaching and training is good or better in all further education colleges and many work-based learning providers.

In many colleges, teaching and learning mentors have been introduced to improve the quality of teaching, training and assessment. These staff usually undertake their role with a remission from their teaching commitments. Examples of the type of work they undertake include working to support inexperienced or underperforming staff, facilitating reflective practice sessions with groups of staff, leading good practice showcase events, or developing pedagogy with teachers delivering higher education courses within further education colleges.

Most colleges plan worthwhile opportunities to develop the teaching and assessment skills of their staff. A few teaching staff participate in cross-college activities to share best practice. In general, colleges make good use of their internal resources, such as teaching and learning mentors, to support underperforming staff and departments. Most work-based learning providers place a strong focus on developing the core teaching and assessment skills of staff, reflecting increased recognition of the integral nature of teaching to the assessors' role. In both colleges and work-based learning providers, only a very few teachers, trainers or assessors undertake industry placements to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date.

In the majority of college and work-based learning providers, line managers observe teaching and learning. These observations then feed into individual performance reviews. The majority of providers no longer use graded observations, but typically identify those teachers below a quality threshold and in need of additional support. In the best cases, individual professional development activities are identified as part of this process. Many colleges use 'learning walks', for the purpose of gaining a quality overview. These walks include class visits and talking to learners, and give a useful snapshot of the quality of teaching and learning.

In many cases, colleges and work-based learning providers do not have a detailed overview of the impact of their professional development activities. In most cases, individual events have a user evaluation form, but few colleges and providers encourage staff to reflect on the training they have undertaken. Senior leaders generally gauge the impact of professional learning via practitioner reflection, lesson observations, learner surveys and provision review. Very few providers clearly link learner feedback via questionnaires and surveys to the effectiveness of teaching, training and assessment. Only a few teachers undertake learning walks or are involved in peer observation activities and they do not benefit from this valuable learning opportunity. In a few providers, managers do not use the information gained from these processes to develop a clear picture of their strengths and areas for improvement.

Professional standards and professional learning

The Welsh Government (2017c) published a set of professional standards for further education teachers and work-based learning practitioners in Wales in 2017. These were developed in collaboration with representatives from the post-16 sectors and recognise the goal of 'dual professionalism' in the role of practitioners in the post-16 sectors, as both subject and vocational specialists as well as experts in teaching, learning and assessment.

The professional standards are helpful to further education and work-based learning staff in recognising the skills required to be an effective teacher, trainer or assessor. Significant challenges remain, especially for work-based learning staff as they have a diverse and wide range of skills. These staff carry out a multitude of tasks including training, assessment, progress reviews, and essential skills delivery, safeguarding and mentoring.

Most colleges and training providers have reviewed the professional standards and are beginning to incorporate them into their professional learning policies and practices, for example by linking staff training and professional development days to themes in the standards. At present, there is relatively little supporting material available to help providers interpret the standards or to use them in developing practice. For example, no teaching qualifications have yet been developed based on the standards. A few providers have identified that the post-graduate certificate in further education programme has not kept up-to-date with the significant changes in education and training. As a result, they have reviewed the delivery of the programme and are working with their university partners on updated content to meet the changing requirements of teaching and learning in the post-16 sector.

The Welsh Government has recognised the need to further develop the national approach to professional learning in post-16 education and training and commissioned a recent scoping study (Welsh Government, 2019d).

Historically, professional learning in the post-16 sector has been a function of the human resource department and most emphasis has been placed on the individual's compliance with corporate professional development requirements. In many colleges and work-based learning providers, the responsibility for professional learning has now transferred to the quality function. This has allowed a change from a mainly corporate compliance approach to more of a quality improvement focus with development activities tailored to individual and team requirements and being more closely matched to job roles and departments.

Across colleges and work-based learning providers, including sub-contractors, staff are appropriately registered with the Education Workforce Council. Only a very few, generally smaller, providers use the Professional Learning Passport as the main record keeping system. Most providers and their sub-contractors use their own well-established systems. These systems are usually maintained and updated by the provider's human resource department and are linked to the member of staff training and performance management records. Teachers, trainers and assessors show a wide variation in their awareness and understanding of the professional standards.

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Equity and wellbeing

Many providers work in culturally diverse geographic areas. In the best cases, providers have formed helpful relationships with local community representatives. This relationship has been useful in providing up-to-date information about apprenticeships to the local community. Even so, the number of black and minority ethnic and female learners choosing to enter training via the apprenticeship route remains low (StatsWales, 2019c). In a very few cases, providers work well to identify role models to share information about apprenticeship programmes.

Although the majority of providers make employers aware of the benefits of employing learners who have a disability, the take up rate remains low (StatsWales, 2019b). In the best cases they share information about adaptations and modifications that can be undertaken to support learners in the workplace. In many work-based learning providers, black and minority ethnic learner recruitment is similar to the local level of population in the area. Many providers have encouraged greater recruitment by using a diverse range of marketing and media channels, working with community groups in areas with the higher black and minority ethnic population.

Across all post-16 sectors, most adult learners of English for speakers of other languages make strong progress in developing the skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. At entry level, learners quickly gain confidence in speaking and write simple sentences correctly. At more advanced levels, learners speak English relatively fluently with correct pronunciation and intonation. They are able to refine the language they use effectively in accordance with the situation and audience. They have a good understanding of how to adapt their writing for different purposes. Where full-time learners have the opportunity to attend courses related to a job, for example, hospitality courses, adult learners of English for speakers of other languages learn and apply their linguistic knowledge well. In the best examples, the provision of English for speakers of other languages is used very effectively to engage learners into further education or training.

As in other sectors, colleges and work-based learning training providers are experiencing significant increases in the demand from learners for support with mental health issues and often struggle to meet demand in as timely a way as possible. Currently, too many learners drop out of programmes in the very early stages, often before a full assessment of needs has been undertaken and support put into place. On apprenticeship programmes, delays in diagnosing and meeting support needs also contribute to the number of learners who do not complete their frameworks in a timely manner. Although attendance is generally good in most colleges and training providers, on a few programmes too many learners arrive late for sessions and do not show the necessary attitudes and skills to demonstrate employability and work readiness.

The recent Estyn thematic report on [‘Provision for young carers in secondary schools, further education colleges and pupil referral units across Wales’](#) (2019d) found that provision for the learner varies widely across providers. Where provision is effective, providers have a named lead member of staff for young carers to make sure that a high level of care, support and guidance is

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in place for this group of learners. They also use an information management system well to track and report on the progress that these learners make compared with their peers in order to minimise the risk of early withdrawal and non-completion.

Leading education and training reform

Many further education colleges have grown significantly since the publication of the Webb report 'Promise and Performance' (2007), which made a series of recommendations about the future of the further education sector. Growth has been achieved mainly through merger of further education colleges and, more recently in a few colleges, through acquisitions of previously independent training providers in both Wales and England. A few further education colleges have also merged with higher education institutions although continuing to operate as subsidiary organisations with their own corporate identity.

Governance arrangements in further education institutions have also been strengthened following the publication of the 'Independent Review of Governance Arrangements for Further Education Institutions in Wales' (Humphreys, 2011). The resultant legislative changes enhanced the autonomy and decision making abilities of further education institutions by removing and modifying existing legislative controls on them.

As the scale of operations and financial turnover in further education colleges have risen, colleges have increasingly adopted new organisational structures and redefined key senior roles. For example, a minority of colleges now operate under a group structure incorporating several different colleges or divisions, often with a separation of the roles of chief executive officer and college principals. This separation usually reflects the increasing involvement of college senior leaders in external local, regional and national groups alongside other senior figures from the public and private sectors, such as economic forums and skills partnerships.

Similarly the structure of the work-based learning sector and the number of providers has undergone significant change. This is linked mainly to changes in Welsh Government contracting arrangements, which have progressively reduced the number of primary contract holders. Nevertheless, many of the previous contract holders continue to operate under partnership and sub-contracting arrangements within consortia arrangements led by the prime contract holders.

The Welsh Government has recently consulted on proposals for restructuring the delivery and funding of community-based adult learning in Wales. In recent years, reductions in funding of the partnerships have meant that many senior and operational leaders have either moved into new jobs or have left the sector. This reduction in expertise is providing strategic leaders with a significant challenge in assuring the quality of the service in general and the quality of teaching in particular, as there are fewer operational leaders to carry out the work. In July 2019, the Minister for Education announced a two-stage approach by first introducing a revised funding model that ensures an equitable distribution of funds across Wales, focusing planning on essential skills provision, and

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restructuring the existing community-based adult learning partnerships to align with the regional skills partnerships. The second stage will involve developing a national strategic body for community-based adult learning (Welsh Government, 2019o).

Most further education colleges and many work-based learning providers have well-established self-evaluation processes, including an appropriate cycle of quality assurance activities. Nearly all view the production of annual self-evaluation reports and associated development plans as being useful. They use a wide range of first-hand evidence to identify their main strengths. A minority of providers are less effective in identifying key areas for improvement and, as a result, are overly positive in their overall evaluation of some aspects of their performance. For example, a minority place too much emphasis on learner outcomes data when evaluating standards and identifying areas for improvement and do not take full account of the standards from observations and scrutiny of learners' work.

Where self-evaluation processes are particularly strong, providers make good use of a comprehensive range of performance indicators and useful quality probes to evaluate most aspects of their performance. They adopt an openly self-critical approach, give full consideration to the contribution made by any sub-contractors and delivery partners and reflect this appropriately in their evaluations. A minority of providers have effective arrangements in place to moderate and validate findings of self-evaluation processes. For example, a few providers involve peer inspectors from other providers or other external stakeholders in processes such as quality reviews and moderation or validation panels.

Further education colleges are beginning to integrate the use of recently introduced 'consistent performance' measures developed by the Welsh Government into their self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. In mainstream 14-19 courses, course quality is often measured primarily by learner outcomes. Arrangements to measure the other improvements made by learners or the distance they have travelled from their starting points remain underdeveloped, especially on vocational programmes. Few providers measure the overall quality of individual programmes including the standard of teaching and learning and the development of learners' communication and numeracy skills.

Although self-evaluation processes are generally strong, the effectiveness of improvement planning processes varies too widely between providers. A majority make sure that most important shortcomings are addressed through carefully targeted strategies and improvement actions supported by appropriate timescales and milestones. They are also clear on the allocation of specific responsibilities for implementation and monitoring. A minority of providers focus on actions that are generic and do not develop robust plans for implementation and follow-up. Arrangements for sharing good practice between departments and across sub-contractors or delivery partners are also often underdeveloped.

Section 2

Sector summaries: Non-school settings for children under five

2

Context

All local authorities in Wales fund part-time education for three-year-olds, and occasionally for four-year-olds in settings as well as in schools. Although local authorities do not maintain these settings, they are responsible for ensuring that they provide good quality foundation phase education. This includes providing leaders and practitioners with advice and support. Settings that provide early education include day care and sessional care providers. Estyn is required to inspect early education, and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) has the duty to inspect the quality of care at these settings. In January 2019, Estyn and CIW began jointly to inspect non-school education settings for children under five using a new, joint inspection framework. These joint inspections consider the quality of care provided for all children up to the age of 12 and the education of three and four-year-old children that do not receive education in a maintained setting. The new inspection framework comprises of six themes in three key areas: themes 1 and 2 consider children's outcomes, themes 3 and 4 consider how well practitioners contribute towards these, and themes 5 and 6 consider the quality of leadership in ensuring good outcomes for children.

Sector summaries:

Non-school settings for children under five

The number of settings offering part-time education has again reduced. This year there were 569 providers of education in non-school settings for three or four-year-olds, a fall from 593 last year and from 737 in 2010. We inspected 26 settings during the autumn term under Estyn's 2010 inspection framework. Overall, the proportion of these settings judged good or better in the autumn term was similar to the proportion for 2017-2018. Of the 26 settings inspected, seven had an excellent judgement for at least one key question or quality indicator, with three settings judged as excellent across all key questions.

Joint inspections since spring 2019

During spring and summer, we inspected 66 settings under our new joint inspection framework with Care Inspectorate Wales. Around two-in-ten are small settings with fewer than six three-year-old children. In these settings, under the 2010 framework in order to avoid identifying individual children, inspectors reported on provision and leadership only. The same reporting principle applies in our joint inspection arrangements. Inspectors report on all themes with the exception of theme 2, which focuses on funded three or four-year-old children's learning.

Learning

Standards are good or better in around eight-in-ten settings. This is slightly lower than the percentage identified last year. In settings where standards are good or excellent, most children make strong progress in their learning from their starting points. They develop their literacy, numeracy, physical and personal and social skills effectively.

Where standards are excellent, most children make particularly strong progress from their starting points. They communicate clearly and enthusiastically, building an extensive and rich vocabulary. For example, they recall recent events and insert relevant detail well. They use mathematical vocabulary accurately in an increasing range of situations. For example, they compare their height to that of a sunflower, stating whether they are taller or shorter. They are confident to take managed risks and develop their physical skills to a high level. For example, when participating in daily physical activities they stretch like a giraffe and snap like a crocodile.

In settings where standards are good or better, most children speak confidently and make themselves understood when discussing their ideas or when telling adults what they already know. They listen well and follow instructions effectively, for example when creating a jungle scene using mud, jelly and broccoli. More able pupils use more mature language patterns and a greater range of sophisticated language purposefully. For example, when describing how to build a shelter for their dinosaur, they talk about its long skinny neck and thick spiky tail. In Welsh-medium settings where for most children Welsh is not the language of the home, many make good progress in developing strong oral skills.



Sector summaries:

Non-school settings for children under five

These pupils readily use basic sentence structures, common phrases and an increasing range of vocabulary well to converse and join in with songs and nursery rhymes. In a very few Welsh medium settings where standards are adequate, pupils who speak Welsh at home often do not make enough progress in developing their Welsh oral skills and frequently revert to speaking English during sessions. These children are not sufficiently confident when discussing in Welsh and, as a result, their extended responses in sentences are often limited.

In English and Welsh-medium settings, most children develop sound early reading skills and listen attentively to the stories read to them by adults. They show an interest in books and talk eagerly about their characters, for example by suggesting how to help the teddy bear that got lost in the snow. Most children enjoy mark making and experiment confidently using a range of equipment. They create marks purposefully and understand that writing has meaning, such as when 'writing' shopping lists in the farm shop or in the kitchen. More able pupils use recognisable letters when attempting to write their name, for example when they self-register or when writing their name on a picture they have drawn for a friend.

Standards of Welsh in English-medium settings continue to improve. In many of these settings, children respond appropriately to basic instructions in Welsh. They understand simple questions during daily routines and repeat single words or simple phrases, such as the weather, confidently. They sing a wide variety of action songs well at group time and name a few colours and numbers in Welsh. Even so, in two-in-ten of these settings, children's use of Welsh is limited.

In settings where standards are good, most children develop their numeracy skills well. They make good progress in their counting skills. For example, they say numbers in order to ten and count objects to five accurately when counting cups at snack time. Most children use mathematical vocabulary appropriately across a range of learning experiences, for example using 'taller' and 'shorter' when building a tower from pegs and then measuring it against a giraffe. Many apply their numeracy skills well in other learning areas, for example when sorting different coloured toy animals into groups and then counting the number in each group with accuracy. They begin to recognise and use two and simple three dimensional shapes in their learning, for example when building a rocket. In a few settings, where standards are excellent, more able children add simple numbers together correctly, such as three and six to make nine, usually by using appropriate equipment to help them. Children in around one-in-ten settings do not use their problem-solving skills effectively enough in their learning.

In many settings, children use information and communication technology (ICT) well to enhance their learning and to develop their communication skills effectively. They access and use a range of ICT equipment such as tablet computers confidently. For example, they take a photograph of a slug in the outdoor area to record what they have found and to prompt discussion. Most children use battery operated toys effectively to enhance their play, such as a toy till when pretending to be a shopkeeper.



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However, in three-in-ten settings, children do not always use the ICT equipment independently or with the support of an adult to enhance their learning. Their access to ICT equipment is limited and they do not use it to develop their communication skills sufficiently.

In many settings, children develop their physical skills well using both the indoor and outdoor learning areas effectively. They demonstrate good gross motor skills when crawling under arches or throwing large balls into containers in the outdoor area. Most children develop sound fine motor skills, for example when gripping shells with tweezers and when using a small paint brush with care to make 'sheep shapes' in shaving foam.

Standards are adequate in around two-in-ten settings. In these settings, a minority of children, particularly the most able, do not make enough progress in line with their stage of development. They do not always focus well enough on what adults say and are easily distracted by what is happening around them. Although the majority of children in these settings make suitable progress in literacy, a minority do not develop their mark making skills in line with their stage of development. Children's numeracy skills are often less well developed and the majority do not make enough progress over time. In addition, these children do not apply their skills well enough in other areas of learning and their problem-solving skills are often underdeveloped.

When settings plan well for the development of children's creative skills, many children enjoy opportunities to express themselves through music, dance and other art. However, in many settings, children's creativity skills are often limited due to constraints of provision. For example, everyone paints the same painting or makes the same clay model under adult direction. This inhibits their ability to think for themselves and use their imagination freely.

Wellbeing

Standards of wellbeing are a strength in this sector. In most settings, standards of wellbeing are at least good and are excellent in a very few settings. In these settings, nearly all children show exceptional motivation, enjoyment and interest in their learning, and most concentrate very diligently during tasks. They demonstrate high levels of engagement and are extremely confident when making choices as they move between adult-focused and child-led learning tasks. For example, children choose from a wide-range of resources in the creative area independently to recreate a scene from a fireworks display. Where wellbeing is good, nearly all children settle well as soon as they arrive at the setting and behave well. Most enjoy taking part in a range of learning experiences and have fun when tackling tasks independently. They sustain interest in activities and move confidently to another activity when ready.

In most settings, children understand the importance of good hygiene and how to stay fit and healthy. Most children develop their independence well, such as selecting fruit and pouring their drink at snack time. They also develop their independence further by taking on responsibilities such as 'Helpwr y dydd' and tidying up after activities.

In the very few settings where standards of wellbeing are adequate, a few children have difficulty persevering and lose interest quickly. They become restless and this disrupts other children.

Cylch Meithrin Hermon

Staff at Cylch Meithrin Hermon use puppets to help children understand their emotions. The puppets allow the children to develop their personal and social skills by thinking about how their actions affect the feelings of the other children.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Cylch Meithrin Ynyshir & Wattstown

Children at Cylch Meithrin Ynyshir & Wattstown are allowed to choose when they had their snack break to help improve their wellbeing and behaviour. They also encouraged the children to serve themselves independently, so they learn about the importance of hygiene and gain responsibility for clearing up and recycling.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Provision

Provision is good or better in three-quarters of settings inspected this year. There is excellent practice in a very few settings. In these good or better settings, practitioners plan a wide variety of purposeful learning experiences, which stimulate children's interests and build successfully on prior learning. They make good use of children's ideas when planning topics and activities, which motivates them to learn. Many of these settings provide worthwhile opportunities for children to develop their communication skills through a range of interesting learning activities both indoors and outdoors. In particular, practitioners encourage children to join conversations and pose searching questions such as 'How do worms see if they don't have eyes?' They also provide a range of exciting opportunities for children to develop their understanding of writing for different purposes, such as when recording appointments in a veterinary practice. Many settings build on children's numeracy skills well through a suitable range of stimulating practical experiences that allow them to develop a strong understanding of mathematical concepts. A good example of this is when children were asked to rebuild Babushka dolls and place them in order of size. In settings where planning for literacy and numeracy is not as strong, practitioners do not plan the development of these skills progressively enough. In addition, in around one in seven settings, practitioners do not plan to develop children's problem-solving skills effectively enough. As a result, children in these settings do not always build on prior learning effectively or receive enough opportunities to reinforce their skills and knowledge.

Most Welsh-medium settings plan well for the development of children's Welsh language skills and support those who are new to the language effectively. In a very few settings, practitioners do not always encourage children who speak Welsh at home to practise their Welsh throughout the session or reinforce language patterns and vocabulary rigorously enough. In English-medium settings, the development of children's Welsh language skills continues to improve. Many practitioners support children's Welsh language development by singing songs and using Welsh words and phrases throughout the session. In around one in ten settings, practitioners do not plan well enough to develop children's Welsh language skills or encourage its use outside formal group situations effectively enough.

Planning for purposeful use of ICT to develop children's communication skills remains an area for development in around three-in-ten settings. In these settings, practitioners focus on providing equipment for children to use rather than considering how it can be used to enhance learning. Where practitioners develop children's ICT skills well, they focus on how it can be used to develop children's communication skills. They ensure purposeful opportunities for children to use ICT equipment across areas of learning to enhance their experiences and to allow them to talk about their learning. For example, practitioners planned a series of activities that enabled children to photograph wildlife at a local pond and to discuss the features of insects and how they made them feel. This then provided the inspiration for creative work on insects.

Cylch Meithrin Crymych

Cylch Meithrin Crymych has forged close links with partners from the local area. They visit local shops, which allows children to develop their oracy and social skills. Visits also improve awareness of using money for real purposes and shows the children that many goods are available locally.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup

Practitioners at Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup use routine activities to introduce Welsh language and phrases. This helps children to develop their understanding and responses progressively.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Generally, planning for developing children's creative skills is not given a high enough priority in many settings. Activities tend to be overly directed by practitioners and this leads to children producing similar pieces of work. Too often there are only limited opportunities for children to explore and experiment with a range of resources when working creatively.

Many settings provide suitable opportunities to develop children's physical skills, for example by providing equipment such as balance trails and hard surfaces to ride bicycles and large toys. But practitioners do not always consider the different stages of children's development when planning physical activities or value the importance of young children developing good gross motor skills before they can master fine motor skills.

In settings where teaching is extremely effective, practitioners have exceptionally high expectations of children and have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the foundation phase curriculum and how young children learn best. They provide superb opportunities for children to experiment, and facilitate creative learning through purposeful play. Where teaching is good, practitioners understand when to intervene in children's learning and when to allow them to experiment with their own ideas. In the best examples, practitioners model play in the role play corner to help the children learn, for example when pretending to board and fly an aeroplane. They ask questions that encourage children to think for themselves and move their learning on. Practitioners in these settings use effective assessment methods to assess children's development and progress and plan the next steps in their learning. However, in around one in six settings where teaching is not as effective, practitioners do not identify children's needs well enough to plan suitably for their learning. As a result, too many learning experiences do not challenge or support them effectively enough, nor do they build sufficiently on their skills and knowledge. In a few settings, practitioners dominate and control learning experiences and activities too much, which limits the opportunities for children to become fully engaged in their play, try new things out, and develop their own ideas.

Most settings ensure good standards of care, support and guidance for their children. Practitioners support their independent and self-help skills well through a range of useful daily routines and activities. For example, snack time teaches children how to take responsibility for preparing and serving refreshments as well as helping them to socialise and interact with others. They ensure that children develop a good awareness about their own community, culture and beliefs as well as those of others across the world. Many settings now recognise the importance of providing an exciting and stimulating outdoor learning environment for their children. This allows practitioners to plan purposeful learning experiences and play opportunities to develop their skills across all areas of learning. Even in settings with limited outdoor areas, practitioners are becoming ever more resourceful in their approach to overcoming this, for example by using the local beaches or parks to allow children to explore and develop their physical skills. As a result, practitioners now plan for outdoor learning more effectively to develop children's skills and to make learning fun and exciting.

Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup

Practitioners at Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup provide fun, stimulating activities that build upon children's interests and questions. A performance area was introduced to develop children's language and confidence when talking to others or when singing and using musical instruments.

For more information, please read our **case study**



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Open Door Family Centre

Staff at the Open Door Family Centre wanted to encourage children to become independent learners and develop their resilience and confidence by making their own decisions and taking risks. They have created a safe environment for the children to try new things out independently.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Sector summaries:

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This year again, inspectors identified important shortcomings relating to safeguarding in a few settings. In these settings, practitioners and leaders do not follow safeguarding policies and procedures well enough. Leaders in one-in-ten settings do not ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place to safeguard children and staff. In a very few settings, leaders do not always adhere to safe recruitment practices when employing staff. We write to settings with important shortcomings relating to safeguarding to ensure that they address them.

Leadership and management

Standards of leadership and management are good or better in a majority of settings and excellent in a very few inspected this year. In settings where leadership is good, leaders set high expectations and convey a clear understanding of what they want to achieve. They communicate effectively with staff, establish a strong team spirit and ensure that everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities. A common feature among the very few excellent settings inspected this year is that leaders create a culture of shared ownership, resulting in a strong drive for improvement and very high expectations. As a result, all staff take responsibility for improving children's standards and wellbeing.

In effective settings, leaders listen to the advice and opinions of others like parents and advisory teachers effectively to help them reflect on their performance and practice. This ensures that leaders have a better understanding of the setting's performance, its strengths and areas for development. In the very few settings where leadership and management are excellent, leaders focus on monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and encourage all practitioners to take responsibility for improving their own performance. However, self-evaluation procedures needed to improve in around three-in-ten settings inspected this year. In these settings, although leaders understand the role of these processes in bringing about improvement, monitoring procedures are weak and leaders do not always review progress against agreed outcomes effectively enough. As a result, they are not always able to identify key strengths and areas for improvement within their settings.

Many leaders support practitioners to improve the performance of their staff through appraisal and supervision policies and practices. In the more successful settings where inspectors highlighted excellent practice, leaders ensure that all practitioners have access to a wide range of training opportunities that link closely to the setting's priorities for improvement and personal development needs. Leaders in these settings assess the impact of the training regularly. This ensures that all practitioners make the best use of what they have learnt to improve provision, and to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. In addition, leaders value the importance of strong induction practices to ensure that any initial training that may be required is implemented as soon as possible. For example, they initiate training to upskill practitioners who are less confident, using Welsh to help them teach basic vocabulary and speech patterns to children in English-medium settings. In less successful settings, leaders do not implement their performance management policies effectively enough.



Open Door Family Centre

Leaders at the Open Door Family Centre worked together to establish clear managerial roles and new strategies. This helped staff to understand their own roles and responsibilities, and work together to achieve their goals.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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As a result, these leaders do not identify targets for improvement for all staff or review their performance in a timely manner. This impacts negatively on the quality of support and training provided to staff and the quality of provision at these settings.

Most settings communicate clearly with parents and guardians and support them well to become more involved in their children's learning and to have a better understanding about their care and development. Leaders in these settings work well with a range of partners, including local authority advisory teachers and representatives of organisations they are affiliated too. They use their advice and expertise well to help review the work of the setting and to support practitioners in their work. There continue to be many useful partnerships between settings and the local community, mainly through the use of visitors and visits to places of interest. This has a positive effect on the children's learning experiences and enables them to learn about their local community, for example by visiting the emergency services to learn about people who help us and when planting flowers in the village with the help of a community group. In the most effective settings, leaders ensure strong links with local schools to help children when they move on to the next stage of their education. Children visit the schools on several occasions to watch concerts and take part in singing sessions, and to meet their new teacher during their last term in the setting. Teachers from the schools also visit the settings regularly, for example to read stories to the children and to discuss their needs with practitioners.

In most settings, leaders provide children with a wide range of interesting and stimulating resources to support their learning. Practitioners plan exciting and purposeful outdoor learning experiences increasingly well to allow children to explore and discover for themselves as well as developing their physical skills. Most settings manage their finances well and are becoming more resourceful in how they fund their work, for example by applying for grants and through organising events with parents and the local community. Again this year, in the majority of settings inspected, local authorities continue to retain the Early Years Development Grant to fund training and resources. However, the funding is not always targeted well enough to develop the needs of individual settings. As a result, practitioners do not always receive training that meets their professional needs or the setting's priorities for improvement.

Little Stars Day Nursery

Leaders at Little Stars Day Nursery use a skills matrix to identify individual and group training needs. This ensures a consistent approach across the nursery.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Follow-up activity

During autumn 2018 (the final term of the Estyn 2010 framework, prior to joint inspection commencing), we identified excellent practice in around a quarter of settings. This is substantially more than over the same period last year. In particular, we saw exceptional leadership with a strong focus on professional development, leading to consistently high standards of learning and wellbeing.

Around three-in-ten settings inspected during this final period need a follow-up visit from the local authority or from Estyn, including a very few settings that require focused improvement. This is a slight decrease on last year. We will monitor their progress against recommendations from the core inspections following procedures prior to joint working. In settings requiring monitoring by Estyn, leaders generally did not have high enough expectations to ensure that children make good progress and benefit from stimulating learning experiences. In the very few settings requiring focused improvement, leaders did not act on their development plans appropriately or use advice effectively to improve standards and provision.

This year, nearly all settings that required monitoring by the local authority at the beginning of the year progressed well against their recommendations and we removed them from the follow-up category. All settings monitored by Estyn and the three settings in the focused improvement category at the beginning of the year made good progress and no longer need follow-up activity.

In joint inspections with CIW, inspectors identified excellent practice in a very few settings. In these settings, highly effective leadership was an outstanding feature, leading to especially high standards of care and development and effective teaching and learning.

Since January 2019, we have changed our arrangements for follow-up as part of our joint working with CIW. There are now two categories of follow-up – these are ‘progress review’ and ‘focused improvement’. Under these new arrangements, inspectors found that around three-in-ten settings need a follow-up inspection visit. Most of these settings require monitoring by inspectors (progress review) and a very few are in need of focused improvement. Of the settings in need of monitoring by inspectors, around six-in-ten do not have strong enough procedures for bringing about improvements in standards and provision, or for ensuring that their policies and procedures support the setting’s work well enough. Where there was a judgement on standards, children in around six-in-ten settings do not make good enough progress in developing their skills. This is often because practitioners do not succeed in meeting all children’s needs well enough when they plan, and particularly the needs of older and more able children. In the very few settings requiring focused improvement this year, leaders do not ensure that important policies and procedures to keep children safe are in place and that all practitioners follow these consistently. They do not provide enough support for practitioners so that they have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities and develop their professional expertise effectively.



Section 2

Sector summaries: Primary schools

2

Context

In January 2019, there were 1,247 primary schools in Wales. This is 25 fewer than in January 2018, when there were 1,272 (Welsh Government, 2019m). The number of primary schools working as federations is increasing with 65 primary schools working within 29 federations. The number of primary school pupils has fallen from 277,910 in January 2018 to 275,478 in January 2019 (Welsh Government, 2019m).

Between September 2018 and July 2019, 188 schools were inspected. The findings from all inspections have informed this report.

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Standards

Standards are good or better in around eight-in-ten primary schools. This proportion is similar to last year. The proportion of schools with excellent standards has continued to increase with one-in-ten schools receiving the highest judgement.

In high performing schools, nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs or who are eligible for free school meals, make at least good and often very good progress as they move through school. In weaker schools, pupils do not generally make enough progress from their individual starting points, particularly in relation to their acquisition and application of skills. Often, in these schools, pupils who are more able and those with additional learning needs do not make the progress they could.

In many schools, girls develop their literacy skills more quickly than boys, although in the very best schools there is little difference in the performance of boys in comparison with girls. Pupils eligible for free school meals make progress in line with their peers and make at least good progress by the end of Year 6. Pupils with additional learning needs often make strong progress from their individual starting points and achieve well. In less successful schools, more able and/or less able pupils do not achieve well enough or make the progress they could.

In around one-in-ten schools, pupils acquire and apply their language skills particularly well. This underpins their capacity to access wider learning at a high level, for example to sift information to find what is relevant to the task and to make sense of what they are being asked to do. They apply language and mathematical skills exceptionally well in real-life contexts, for example to pitch their ideas to local business people or to estimate pollution levels in the oceans using their knowledge of percentages.

In schools where standards of language are good or better, most pupils speak confidently and clearly when presenting their ideas or when working collaboratively with others. For example, foundation phase pupils discuss strategies when building obstacle courses in outdoor areas. They use vocabulary well to add detail when speaking about specific subjects. However, pupils rarely apply higher-order thinking skills within their oral work, for example when debating issues. Most pupils write well for a range of purposes using a variety of genres in literacy lessons and in their work across the curriculum. In nursery classes, they use a variety of material to make marks and learn that marks convey meaning. As they move through the foundation phase, they progress from writing simple words and phrases to writing for different purposes. They spell frequently occurring words accurately and use basic punctuation well. In key stage 2, they develop a strong understanding of the purpose of their written work and effective spelling strategies, and they punctuate and organise their work well. In a minority of schools, pupils develop useful editorial skills that help them to improve the quality of their work, for instance in response to teachers' feedback. But this is not common practice, even in good schools. Pupils' editorial work is often limited to correcting spellings or amending basic grammatical errors. Pupils who write well towards the end of key stage 2 often struggle to know how to extend their skills further and remain at



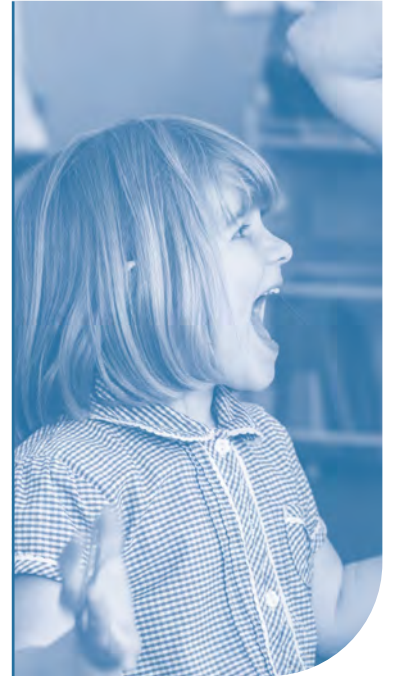
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the same level for too long. Most pupils develop good reading skills and positive attitudes to reading from an early age. They develop a secure understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds at an early age and progress to apply reading skills independently in their work across the curriculum. In the highest achieving schools, pupils benefit from a rich diet of reading, which informs the quality of their language work, particularly their writing. As a result, they make better vocabulary choices and structure their writing for specific effects well. In schools where standards have important aspects that require improvement, there are gaps in pupils' skills and in the way that pupils use their skills. In these schools, pupils often have a restricted vocabulary when speaking, lack comprehension and higher-order reading skills, have a limited understanding of the characteristics of different styles of writing, and make unambitious vocabulary choices.

Generally, most pupils in English-medium schools have positive attitudes to learning Welsh. In a very few schools, where Welsh is embedded in the school's day-to-day work and ethos, pupils make strong progress in learning and using the language both in Welsh lessons and in their work in other subjects. Pupils often contribute to setting expectations about using Welsh across the school. In these schools, pupils make very good progress in their speaking skills and use the language confidently, for example in response to questions. They use the past, present and, occasionally, the future tense appropriately and have a good command of vocabulary that is relevant to day-to-day learning and their topic work. Most make sound progress in developing Welsh reading skills by the end of key stage 2. In too many schools, pupils' Welsh speaking skills are weak, and Welsh does not have a high enough profile. Pupils often develop a suitable understanding of basic questions and vocabulary in the foundation phase, but this good early progress stalls in key stage 2. Pupils lack the capacity to speak confidently. This often reflects the weak quality of provision and the limited confidence of teachers in speaking the language in a range of situations. In schools where standards of Welsh are weak, teachers do not focus sufficiently on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. The standard of pupils' writing in Welsh is not always a true reflection of their Welsh language competence, grammatical understanding or writing ability. They tend to rely too heavily on writing frameworks, which reduces much of their writing to a copying exercise.

Standards in mathematics are good or better in many schools. In these schools, pupils in nursery and reception know and join in confidently with a wide range of number songs and rhymes. They use practical equipment confidently to develop their understanding of concepts, for instance comparing sizes of objects using the correct associated vocabulary. Where young pupils become successful mathematicians, they enjoy mathematical experiences and activities from an early age including solving real-life problems, for example when sorting socks from a washing machine into pairs. Older foundation phase pupils identify the mathematics required for tasks, make decisions with growing independence and simplify tasks, for example by breaking problems down into manageable steps or by using facts they already know, such as $3 + 3 = 6$ to work out that $300 + 300 = 600$. They make sensible predictions and are beginning to explain their thinking using correct mathematical language. In key stage 2, most pupils understand and apply their knowledge of number well in the context of



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mathematics lessons and, where provision allows, in their work across the curriculum. Pupils use mental and written strategies well to solve multi-step problems. In a few instances, pupils use strategies effectively to check their answers. For instance, they apply the inverse operation to confirm that they have calculated a fraction of a total correctly. However, more able learners do not always make as much progress as they could. They generally complete tasks correctly, but do not often receive a level of challenge that leads them to extend themselves fully. Very few more able pupils attempt work at the limit of their ability where they start to make mistakes, and few apply their skills independently in a broad enough range of contexts. In schools where standards of mathematics are not as strong, foundation phase pupils lack confidence in using numbers and do not seek equipment, such as blocks or measuring resources, independently that could support their task and develop their thinking. They tend to complete pages of similar sums in isolation and do not relate their mathematical thinking to practical tasks or real-life problem solving well enough. In key stage 2, pupils generally make suitable progress in developing their skills, for example in number, shape and measure. They develop procedural skills that enable them to answer questions, but do not always develop skills that enable them to check whether their answers are reasonable. Pupils in these schools do not always have well-honed mental maths skills. This limits their capacity to solve problems quickly, and their application of numeracy skills across the curriculum continues to be a weakness.

This year there have also been improvements in pupils' use of ICT skills and in the range of skills they use. Where ICT skills are good or better, pupils use a wide range of competencies, such as developing and using databases, to support their work across the curriculum. In a few instances, pupils use ICT exceptionally well to enhance learning. In schools where standards of ICT are not as strong, pupils tend to have a narrow range of ICT skills and do not use ICT to support their learning in other curriculum areas.

Additional factors contribute to the differences between pupils' standards and progress in the most and least successful schools. These include pupils' capacity to work independently, for example to refine or extend pieces of written work, and the inconsistency of progress from one year group to the next or from one key stage to the next.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Standards of pupils' wellbeing in primary schools across Wales are good or better in around nine-in-ten schools. They are excellent in almost two-in-ten schools. Where standards of wellbeing are high, pupils develop a very strong understanding of values, such as honesty, fairness and equality, and they apply these in their day-to-day work and to interactions with others at school, for instance when debating the importance of equality in society. Many pupils learn the importance of their role in contributing to society, for example through charity work or by participating in local community engagement initiatives.

Many pupils show high levels of engagement in learning. They are keen to undertake new challenges and they talk positively about their learning experiences and progress. Many undertake challenges enthusiastically and show pride in what they do when working individually or in groups.

St Julian's Primary School, Newport

Pupils at St Julian's Primary School have become more independent in their use of IT, thanks to the school's digital competence framework. Pupils are using IT more purposefully and are better applying their digital skills in class.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



St Mary's C in W Voluntary Aided School

Pupils at St Mary's Church in Wales School visit a local care home each week for a joint choir rehearsal with the residents. The school aims to give back to the community and improve the health and wellbeing of the older adults.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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They sustain effort and concentration well to complete tasks, consider and present alternative solutions to problems and explain their reasoning well. They understand that making mistakes is an important part of the learning process and work positively to address any errors they make and learn from any misconceptions they have. However, in around a half of schools, pupils' independent learning skills remain an area for development. In these schools, pupils do not routinely transfer prior learning from one subject area to another or improve the quality of their work independently.

Pupils' behaviour in most primary schools is very good. Most pupils demonstrate care for their fellow pupils and show respect for adults. Overall, working relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils are very positive in primary schools. This important feature ensures that most pupils feel safe and happy at school. In a few schools, pupils develop skills to support their own wellbeing. For example, they understand the importance of talking about their feelings and of how this can help them.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of the importance of eating healthy food, drinking plenty of water and taking regular exercise, though not all act on this knowledge. Most understand how to stay safe, including when using the internet. Where levels of wellbeing are very high, pupils often have a well-developed understanding of the rights of children and take positive action to uphold these. In a few instances, pupils apply their understanding of their rights particularly well to identify things they would like to learn more about.

In most schools, pupils take on additional responsibilities by participating in a variety of pupil voice groups, such as the school council. In a few instances, where the school's culture allows, pupils working on these groups are highly influential in shaping important aspects of the school's work. They represent their fellow pupils very well to ensure that the school listens to their views and acts upon them, where appropriate. They bring about practical change to the school and wider environment, as well as the skills and dispositions of pupils and staff, and influence positively the quality of teaching and learning. Overall, pupils that contribute to pupil voice groups value the experience that such opportunities offer. However, in many schools, pupil voice groups do not have enough real influence on important matters that affect them. In too many schools, even where pupils achieve well overall, pupils do not have enough influence over what and how they learn.

Most pupils attend school regularly and understand the importance of doing so. Nevertheless, there is a continuing trend of lower attendance, with increased numbers of pupils who are persistently absent, in schools serving areas of social disadvantage. These absences make it more difficult for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to make progress and achieve the standards that they otherwise might during their primary school years.

Ysgol y Foryd

Ysgol Y Foryd supports pupils' progress and development as independent learners by using assessment for learning strategies. Staff teach the pupils to face challenges and use mistakes as learning opportunities.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llwynderw

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llwynderw have embedded children's rights into its culture, raising pupils' wellbeing. Pupils have a sense of ownership of their school and contribute to its improvement.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



St Joseph's RC Primary, Newport

Pupils at St Joseph's RC Primary School are encouraged to take on a wide range of responsibilities to improve their leadership skills. Children from Year 2 to Year 6 make up the School Parliament.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching and learning experiences are good or better in approximately three-quarters of primary schools. They are excellent in around one-in-ten schools. Around two-in-ten schools received adequate judgements. Instances of unsatisfactory teaching and learning experiences are rare in primary schools.

This year, inspectors have identified that more schools where teaching and learning experiences are good or better are adopting a creative approach to the curriculum and are providing engaging learning experiences that inspire and motivate pupils. The use of 'rich tasks' and real-life tasks, and the development of links to creative art, drama and dance projects, is a growing trend in preparing for the new curriculum. In the best examples, planning takes full account of pupils' interests and individual needs, is flexible, and builds on pupils' prior learning very effectively. As a result, nearly all pupils apply themselves fully to their tasks, concentrate for extended periods and show a high level of motivation. In the best examples, the curriculum is broad and balanced and takes good account of the need to nurture pupils' creative, physical and entrepreneurial skills. These schools often use a wide range of learning contexts to develop and extend pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

In many schools, teachers create learning experiences that offer suitable levels of challenge for pupils. Careful planning and effective use of ongoing assessment ensure that most pupils receive suitable levels of challenge in their learning. In a few instances, teachers use assessment particularly well to respond to pupils' needs and to support them to make strong progress, for example by adapting the difficulty of questions or tasks to challenge more able learners. Overall, teachers are beginning to provide increasingly effective opportunities to link learning to real-life contexts. They are also beginning to plan experiences that align with the four purposes set out in the new curriculum for Wales. They are adapting approaches to teaching by developing pupils' skills to assess and improve their own learning, and by using the outdoor learning environment to promote pupils' curiosity and active learning. These teachers have high expectations of all pupils and use strategies such as questioning successfully to challenge pupils further to deepen their understanding of key concepts.

Many teachers provide useful feedback to pupils during lessons to challenge misconceptions they have and to support them in improving their work. They also provide useful, reflective written feedback. This practice is effective when marking has a clear purpose, identifying what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve and when teachers give pupils time to reflect and act on the feedback. However, even in schools where teaching and learning experiences are strong, teachers do not always use these feedback strategies well enough to promote pupils' skills as independent learners. For example, they do not always have high enough expectations of pupils when they edit their own written work following feedback. In around a quarter of schools, teachers do not use assessment to inform learning well enough, the pace of learning is too slow, and pupils



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spend too much time completing or repeating low-level activities. In these cases, teachers generally provide too much scaffolding for learning, which limits pupils' independence and hinders their learning.

In most schools, positive working relationships between staff and pupils combined with engaging learning experiences mean that instances of poor behaviour are rare. When the need arises, staff generally use behaviour management strategies well to support pupils to reflect upon their behaviour and to consider how they might change their actions in the future.

Provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills continues to be too variable in English-medium primary schools. Many schools have strategies to promote the use of Welsh such as 'helpwr heddiw'. In most foundation phase classes, adults use the Welsh language regularly in their interaction with pupils. As pupils move through key stage 2, the majority of schools do not build well enough on pupils' early acquisition of the language. There is too little emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. Very few schools incorporate Welsh effectively into other areas of the curriculum or into the daily life of the school. Factors that influence the quality of Welsh language provision include teachers' capacity and confidence to use the language. Often, the most significant factor in the quality of Welsh language provision at a school is the high importance that leaders attach to teaching the Welsh language. In schools where this is the case, standards of Welsh and the Welsh ethos of the school flourish.

In around seven-in-ten schools, teachers understand and deliver the pedagogy of the foundation phase effectively. This is an improvement from last year when only around a half of schools were providing active and experiential learning, particularly in Years 1 and 2. They ensure a good balance of adult-initiated and child-led activities and make effective use of the indoor and outdoor environments to provide high-quality learning experiences. In the remaining schools, teaching is often too formal and there is too much emphasis on preparing pupils for tests or in 'readying' them for key stage 2. This leads to a disproportionate emphasis on overly direct teaching of literacy and numeracy skills and a lack of opportunity for pupils to develop or apply these skills. In schools where provision is weak, teachers' use of the outdoor environment is ineffective and they plan tasks that could just as easily be completed inside.

Many teachers across Wales engage in or with educational research to improve their professional practice. In schools where this works well, teachers receive dedicated time to take part in peer observations and action research, and they use research findings to inform the decisions and strategy for their school. A series of case studies within [Improving teaching](#) (Estyn, 2018c) exemplify the impact of this work. The impact of the research is variable. Where the purpose and parameters for engaging in or drawing upon research are unclear, practitioners do not focus sufficiently on the impact that research-driven changes in pedagogy have on outcomes for pupils.



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Care, support and guidance

The standard of care, support and guidance of pupils is at least good in nine-in-ten primary schools. It is excellent in almost two-in-ten schools. In these schools, leaders and staff understand that getting this aspect of the work right is very positive for pupils' overall progress and wellbeing. They ensure that pupils receive the timely care, support and guidance to help them thrive in school.

Nine-in-ten primary schools establish an ethos and culture where all members of the school community are valued equally and feel safe from harm. These schools nurture positive attitudes in pupils towards learning and living healthy lives. They teach pupils to understand their rights and to value diversity in school and in society more widely.

In nearly all primary schools, relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Leaders, teachers and other staff generally know the pupils, their needs and interests well. They draw on this knowledge successfully, for example to adapt the tone of their interaction with individual pupils or to plan specific activities. Nearly all primary schools have positive approaches to behaviour management and to developing pupils' social and emotional skills. These arrangements contribute positively to the friendly and caring atmosphere that is evident in most primary schools.

Nearly all schools provide opportunities for pupils to take on additional responsibilities through participating in pupil voice groups. The extent to which schools empower such groups varies greatly. In around two-in-ten schools, the work of pupil voice groups is highly influential. In other schools, these groups do not have sufficient autonomy and schools do not attach enough importance to enabling learners to influence school life. Many schools promote a community spirit successfully through encouraging pupils to give of their time, effort and their talents, for example by creating a community choir for children and senior citizens.

In around nine-in-ten primary schools, staff support learners to understand the importance of perseverance to complete tasks. In around half of schools, staff support pupils to develop well as independent and confident learners. They teach pupils strategies and skills that enable them to reflect on how they might overcome a challenge or improve their work. In the remaining half of schools, staff do not invest enough time in nurturing these skills.



Sector summaries:

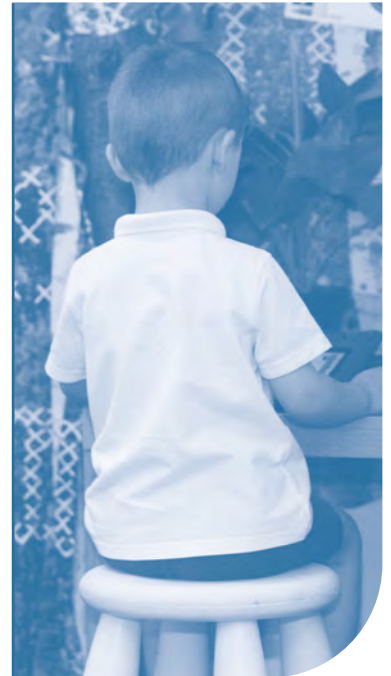
Primary schools

Most schools gather and monitor an appropriate range of information about pupils' progress and wellbeing. In around eight-in ten schools, staff use this information well to identify pupils that require additional support and to inform their approaches to providing extra help, for example to assist them in selecting the most suitable intervention strategy or the most suitable external agency to engage with.

Nine-in-ten schools work effectively with partners to enhance the care, support and guidance of pupils. In primary schools, relationships and communication with parents are often a strength. This partnership is particularly effective in helping parents to support their child to learn at home or, in cases where pupils' needs are greater, in enabling parents to access agencies that offer more specialised help. In around two-in-ten schools, there are outstanding home school relationships. This is often a particular strength in schools serving disadvantaged communities. Over three-in-ten schools that serve pupils from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds in Wales provide excellent care, support and guidance for pupils. In these instances, initiatives such as the development of family engagement officers are highly effective. They enable schools to become a positive hub of community activity and a gateway to services that are needed by pupils and their families. These schools work hard to nurture ambitious learners and families, for example by providing access to cultural events such as theatre visits.

Nearly all schools have good arrangements in place to support pupils to understand the importance of healthy eating and drinking. Most provide pupils with regular opportunities to exercise through formal physical education lessons, activities such as the 'daily mile' and a range of extra-curricular activity clubs.

Nearly all primary schools comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. Safeguarding arrangements in nearly all schools meet requirements and give no cause for concern.



Glenboi Primary School

Glenboi Community Primary School appointed a Family Engagement Officer to promote family involvement, which has had a very positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning and wellbeing.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Sector summaries:

Primary schools

Leadership and management

Leadership is good or better in eight-in-ten primary schools. It is excellent in nearly two-in-ten schools. Many traits of effective leadership and management in schools that receive good or better judgements have remained the same over recent years. These include establishing a shared vision for the wellbeing of pupils, the progress they make, and the standards they achieve. In these schools, there is usually a sustained commitment to making this vision a reality through a culture of high expectations, close collaboration between staff, and a readiness to innovate. For example, in English-medium schools where the standards of Welsh are good or better, leaders ensure that the Welsh language and culture have a prominent status in all aspects of the school's work. Similarly, effective leadership is highly influential in schools that are making good progress in laying the foundations in preparation for the new curriculum for Wales. In these schools, leaders provide teachers with confidence and opportunities to try out new ideas and approaches to engage pupils successfully in their learning. In the very best schools, leaders focus primarily on raising the standards that pupils achieve through fostering highly effective teaching and engaging learning experiences. Increasingly, the best leaders promote professional learning that responds to the needs of staff as individuals and groups. They encourage and support teachers to take account of relevant research findings to enhance their classroom practice and pupils' learning. Such a learning culture helps staff to feel valued and empowered. Important features of this culture include involving pupils in identifying what and how they would like to learn. The best headteachers and senior leaders distribute opportunities for leading initiatives among their staff at all levels. This enables schools to accelerate progress in more areas of their work and to nurture the leadership skills of a wider group of staff.

Effective leaders consider a range of evidence when evaluating the difference that new approaches make to their pupils. In schools where there are shortcomings in leadership, the opposite is often true, and leaders' evaluation of the school's work is limited and leads to a flawed picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Common weaknesses include placing too much emphasis on writing overly detailed reports for external audiences for accountability purposes. These reports do not always reflect the quality of the school's work honestly enough and do not make a direct impact on improving the school's provision or on raising pupils' standards.

Where leadership is ineffective, there is often a lack of a strategic focus on improving teaching. These leaders do not understand well enough the link between effective teaching and effective learning. In a few instances, leaders struggle to identify strengths and shortcomings in teaching. This limits their capacity to improve the quality of teaching at individual or whole-school level. In these schools, leaders rely on generic and unhelpful tick sheets when making judgements about teaching. Arrangements to quality assure the work of leaders involved in evaluating teaching are weak. This drives a culture where leaders focus on compliance with agreed protocols rather than considering the impact on pupils' progress.

Ysgol Bryn Tabor

Pupils at Ysgol Bryn Tabor are encouraged to share their opinion about school life. They're asked to bring in three objects to represent what they would like to learn more about.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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In these schools, classroom practice does not benefit from being the focus of well-planned professional learning or staff meetings. Where such professional learning does take place, leaders do not promote a culture of reflection to support staff to consider the quality of their work. For example, leaders regularly allocate time and resource to well-intentioned activities, such as peer observations or 'learning triads', and teachers generally welcome these experiences, but when these activities lack purpose they do not result in improved quality of teaching and learning.

Follow-up activity

Around two-in-ten primary schools inspected this year require further monitoring by inspectors through follow-up. This proportion is similar to last year. This year, four schools require special measures, one requires significant improvement and 31 schools require Estyn review following their core inspection.

In all of the primary schools requiring statutory follow-up this year, the quality of leadership and management is unsatisfactory and requires urgent improvement. In these few schools, senior leaders do not provide effective strategic direction to the school. For example, too often their monitoring does not focus sharply enough on the quality of learning and the impact of classroom practice. As a result, the quality of teaching across the school over time is too variable. Where leaders' monitoring identifies underperformance in the quality of classroom practice, leaders do not always challenge and support their staff well enough to bring about the required improvements.

In some of the schools identified as requiring special measures this year, the provision for teaching and learning experiences, or care, support and guidance, is also unsatisfactory and requires urgent improvement. Often, teachers' and leaders' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough, and staff morale is low. As a result, in these schools, pupils' achievement and standards of wellbeing are at best adequate and need improvement. The curriculum does not engage learners well enough and teachers provide too many low-level activities that are not thought through well enough to enable pupils to develop and practise important skills.

In September 2018, eight primary schools remained in special measures following core inspections in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. Following monitoring visits, five of these had made enough progress against the recommendations and were removed from special measures. Generally, primary schools in special measures take around two years to make the required improvements.

Most of the schools requiring significant improvement make the necessary improvements in around a year to 18 months. This year we monitored the four schools identified as needing significant improvement during the summer term of 2017 and removed them from further follow-up activity. We also removed four of the seven schools placed in significant improvement last year from further monitoring. In one school, we identified that progress was too slow, and we identified that the school needed special measures. In addition, one school requires a further period of time in order to embed recent improvements and changes to the school's leadership.



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Around one-in-six primary schools inspected this year require Estyn review. This proportion is a little higher than last year, when one-in-seven required Estyn review. In these schools, pupils generally achieve adequate standards, and in around one-in-five of these schools standards are good. In about three-quarters, wellbeing and attitudes to learning and care, support and guidance are good. However, in many cases, teaching and learning experiences in schools requiring Estyn review are adequate and need improvement. The quality of teaching is often inconsistent and teachers do not always meet all pupils' needs successfully. Often, the curriculum is not planned well enough to ensure that pupils acquire the skills they need progressively. In all of these schools, the quality of leadership and management is adequate and needs improvement. Leaders' actions are not always well-focused enough to identify whether the school's provision is consistently good, and whether all pupils make the progress that they could, given their starting points. For example, leaders' monitoring does not always evaluate sharply enough where pupils make the best progress and why.

We have continued with our streamlined procedures to monitor all schools placed in Estyn review through a desk-based review. Inspectors visit a sample of these schools, including schools where the evidence suggests that progress in addressing the recommendations is not urgent enough. This year, over half of schools placed in Estyn review during 2017-2018 have made enough progress and do not require continued follow-up activity. However, we found that two schools inspected in 2016-2017 had not made enough progress against their recommendations and identified these as requiring significant improvement.

At the end of the academic year 2018-2019, there are eight primary schools in special measures, five requiring significant improvement and 43 requiring Estyn review.



Section 2

Sector summaries: Secondary schools

2

In January 2019 there were 187 secondary schools in Wales. This is eight fewer than in January 2018 and is largely due to schools amalgamating into a new secondary school or a new all-age school (Welsh Government, 2019m).

In 2018-2019, 29 schools were inspected. The findings from all inspections have informed this report.

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Secondary schools

Standards

Standards are good or better in nearly half of secondary schools. In these schools, many pupils make strong progress in developing their understanding, knowledge and skills. In the few best cases, pupils think deeply and critically about subject-specific concepts. They use their subject knowledge skilfully to develop their ideas in familiar and unfamiliar contexts. These pupils are able to make reasoned predictions, draw conclusions and form analogies. At the end of key stage 4, many pupils in these schools perform well in their examinations, reflecting their progress during their time at secondary school.

In sixth forms, many pupils make strong progress in their knowledge and understanding. They gain a sound understanding of complex concepts and develop their ability to apply their learning to new situations. A few learners struggle with their studies, particularly those with modest levels of prior attainment. Around one in five Year 12 pupils fail to progress from AS to A levels. These learners often transfer to a more appropriate route such as a vocational course, employment or training.

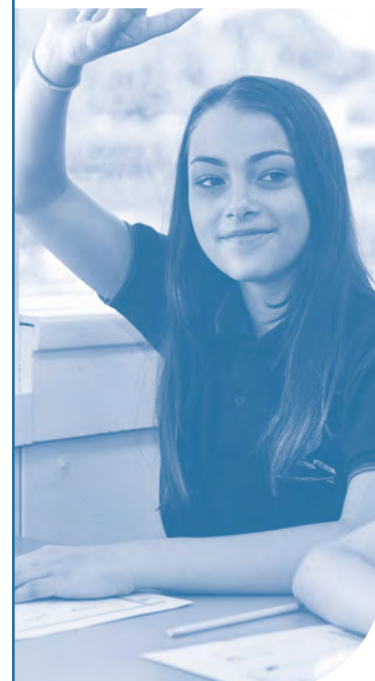
A levels in sixth forms and further education colleges (Estyn, 2018a)

This reports on standards, provision and leadership of GCE Advanced Levels (A levels) in school sixth forms and further education colleges. It considers a range of factors, such as standards at A level and how these are measured, the quality of teaching and assessment, the nature of the A level curriculum offer and strategic leadership, including partnership working.



In six-in-ten schools, pupils eligible for free school meals make good progress from their starting points. However, this group of pupils continues to perform below other pupils.

Girls continue to outperform boys and the gap between the two increased slightly in most indicators in 2019 (Stats Wales, 2019g). The difference between the two genders is especially stark in developing literacy skills, particularly writing. Fewer boys than girls develop an interest in reading for pleasure. In many cases, boys present their ideas well verbally and girls show less confidence in their verbal responses than boys do. In lessons, there is no appreciable difference in how boys and girls develop their numeracy skills. In general, boys display positive attitudes towards completing mathematical tasks. However, girls outperform boys in GCSE mathematics. Boys' performance in science, which requires high levels of literacy and numeracy as well as subject knowledge, is lower than that of girls.



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A majority of pupils listen and respond to others carefully. They use a wide range of general and subject-specific vocabulary and communicate their ideas clearly. They respond well to their teachers' or peers' questions and offer reasoned responses. In the few best cases, pupils engage well with one another in lively, well-natured discussions. They exhibit curiosity and ask as well as answer questions.

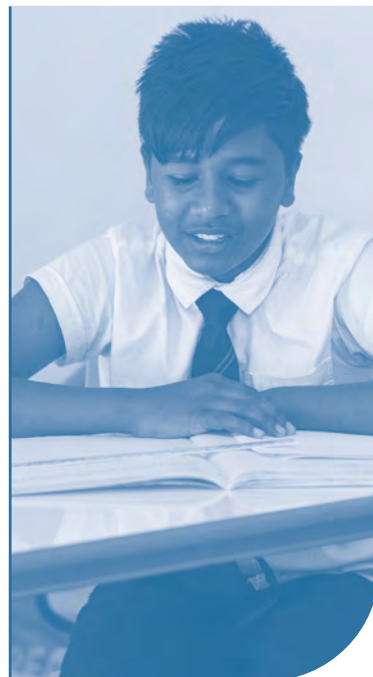
In seven-in-ten schools, pupils read a range of texts to enhance their learning suitably. A majority read aloud competently with appropriate expression. They skim and scan texts to gain an overview or search for specific information competently. A minority of pupils develop well their ability to deduce and infer meaning. They synthesise and analyse material skilfully, for example when evaluating the impartiality of a range of sources about Nelson Mandela and apartheid in history lessons. In the best examples, pupils read texts that challenge their ideas, for example when analysing the concept of responsibility in Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'. In a minority of schools, pupils do not read frequently enough to gain understanding in subjects other than in English or Welsh.

In a majority of schools, pupils write suitable extended pieces for a variety of audiences and purposes across subjects. A majority of pupils organise their writing into paragraphs systematically and communicate their ideas clearly. A few write with increasing sophistication and produce creative and engaging pieces of writing. A minority of pupils, particularly boys, are unable to communicate their ideas coherently. These pupils do not understand how to structure their writing. They make frequent errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation and do not check their writing to ensure that it makes sense.

Many pupils use their numeracy skills across the curriculum suitably. In general, graph work is completed to a high standard, especially in science lessons. A majority of pupils have a sound understanding of proportion and when to use specific techniques to answer questions or solve problems. However, in a minority of schools, pupils do not use their problem-solving skills frequently enough, including in mathematics lessons. In these schools, they tend to use only very basic numeracy skills and do not develop these further across subjects. In a few cases, pupils undertake contrived numeracy exercises that do not develop their subject understanding or their numeracy skills.

In a few cases, pupils in English-medium schools develop their command of Welsh well as they transition from primary school. They gain a wide vocabulary and communicate with increasingly accurate pronunciation as they move through the school. However, in many cases, pupils' progress in Welsh is slow in secondary school. While they are often able to answer written examination questions appropriately, many pupils have poorly developed verbal skills. They are often unable to understand or reply to simple questions or statements orally.

In Welsh-medium schools, most pupils become fluent Welsh speakers. Many also develop their ability to write Welsh well and gain a firm grasp of syntax and grammar. However, too many pupils do not use Welsh when discussing their work or in informal situations. In bilingual schools, the majority of pupils tend to use English in social conversations and in class discussions, often due to the need to avoid excluding those not fluent in the language.



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This limits their fluency and inclination to use the language. In a few cases, pupils develop their ICT skills well across the curriculum. They use features of software such as the ability to create formulae in spreadsheets, programming robots to negotiate a maze in their design technology lessons, and interrogating databases to inform their understanding of issues around global migration. In these schools, pupils are also beginning to develop an understanding of the skills that underpin digital technologies. In many schools, pupils use ICT in a more limited manner. For example, they use simple word processing or make basic slide presentations. These types of activity do not develop or extend the range of their ICT skills. In particular, pupils do not use more challenging applications such as spreadsheets to handle data or produce mathematical models.

In a majority of cases, especially in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, a majority of pupils develop their creativity very well. The pupils who develop these skills the furthest are those who take advantage of opportunities to take part in cultural events such as a school Eisteddfod, art or music competitions, and drama productions.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In around one-in-ten schools, pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are excellent. In these schools, nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance rates are very high. Most pupils are enthusiastic, resourceful and independent learners. They treat each other with respect and develop a strong sense of responsibility and citizenship. In these schools, the school council is proactive and has a wide impact on pupils' experiences such as influencing the curriculum and teaching.

In seven-in-ten schools, pupils display positive attitudes to their work. In these schools, most pupils are well motivated and show high levels of resilience when tackling difficult tasks. In these schools, pupils attend after-school revision sessions, often during weekends and holidays. While this generally has a positive impact on their examination results, pupils often feel that pressure from schools to attend these impacts negatively on their wellbeing. In a minority of schools, pupils lack independence and resilience, and lose concentration too easily.

In many schools, pupils understand well the importance of good attendance. However, in a few schools, poor attendance contributes to poor outcomes in learning and wellbeing. In the majority of schools, pupils develop their social skills well and treat others with respect and courtesy. Behaviour is good in around six-in-ten schools. In these schools, most pupils are confident in how school leaders respond to incidents of bullying. However, in a minority of schools, poor behaviour from at least a few pupils disrupts their learning and that of others. Just over one-in-ten pupils do not feel safe at school as a result of frequent poor behaviour from other pupils or bullying.

Many pupils develop a sound understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. However, many of these pupils struggle to apply this learning to their own lives. They make unhealthy food choices and do not engage enough in exercise.

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe felt not enough pupils were being represented on their school council. They decided to create six different councils, with each working on specific priorities.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Sector summaries:

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Most sixth-form pupils enjoy their studies, although many find the demands of their courses stressful. In general, they provide good role models for younger pupils and, in many cases, help support their learning and wellbeing.

Teaching and learning experiences

In the few best examples, teachers show passion for their subject and use in-depth knowledge to plan learning experiences that capture pupils' interest and stimulate their curiosity. They encourage and support pupils consistently and offer them high levels of challenge. They use questioning skilfully to examine pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding. In these cases, teachers are not usually wedded to a particular teaching style. When planning their lessons, they consider their methods carefully to suit the topic and ensure that they bring out the best in their pupils.

In schools where teaching is at least good, most teachers secure positive working relationships and have good subject knowledge. Many offer clear explanations and provide suitable encouragement. They plan their lessons carefully to capture pupils' interest and include a variety of approaches over time. There is an appropriate level of challenge for all pupils, including the more able and those with additional learning needs. In these schools, teachers make effective use of questioning to check pupils' understanding. In a minority of cases, teachers ask probing questioning to challenge pupils' understanding and develop their ability to respond verbally.

In schools where there are significant areas for improvement in teaching, many of the shortcomings are the result of poor planning. These shortcomings include:

- a lack of challenge, particularly for the more able
- teachers offering pupils too much help or 'scaffolding' that limits their independence
- an inappropriate pace to learning activities
- poorly structured or contrived literacy or numeracy activities
- poor support for pupils with additional learning needs
- teachers persisting with strategies that are not working because they feel that they need to use them to comply with school policy

In most lessons, teachers monitor pupils' progress closely and help them improve their work through skilful and sensitive questioning that promotes thinking, reflection and problem solving. However, the quality of written comments on pupils' work is too variable. In the most useful examples, leaders encourage a strategic approach to marking pupils' work. In these cases, teachers do not mark every piece of work in detail. Rather, they devote their attention to tasks that demand an extended response from pupils and offer them feedback focused on specific skills, knowledge or understanding. They follow this up with opportunities for pupils to improve specific aspects of their work and ensure that they complete these. In too many cases, teachers mark work exhaustively but do not offer meaningful advice or give pupils opportunities to improve aspects of their work. This practice is time consuming and does not bring about improvement in pupils' skills or subject understanding.

Cwmtawe Community School

In Cwmtawe Community School, pupils take ownership, and feel involved in creating the curriculum. They are encouraged to research appropriate courses and consider potential career pathways.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Cydnabod
Rhagoriaeth
Recognising
Excellence

Cardiff High School

Investment in learning and teaching has helped Cardiff High School to create a new vision for improvement, with emphasis on leadership and professional learning. To achieve this vision, teachers are empowered to provide a balance of support and challenge in their classrooms.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Cydnabod
Rhagoriaeth
Recognising
Excellence

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In the majority of schools, there are suitable projects or initiatives to help pupils settle when transferring from their primary school. Around two-in-ten schools design their curriculum to build effectively on pupils' experiences at key stage 2. In these cases, leaders from secondary schools meet regularly with their counterparts in their primary feeder schools to adjust their schemes of work to ensure that they build on pupils' prior learning. However, in many cases, subject leaders do not do this and consider that moderation of work with their primary feeder schools alone is sufficient to ensure smooth progression. This approach often leads to pupils working at too low a level at the start of Year 7 or simply repeating work previously covered in key stage 2.

Many schools are discussing aspects of Curriculum for Wales with their staff and/or pupils. At this stage, this consultation involves gathering feedback about the draft curriculum as well as discussions and evaluations about the current curriculum. A majority of schools are engaging in interesting small-scale projects linked to Curriculum for Wales, for example planning revised learning experiences for Year 7 and Year 8 pupils, strengthening transition arrangements with partner primary schools or building stronger links with community groups and organisations to strengthen the experiences that they offer to their pupils.

A few schools place little emphasis on key stage 3 and have reduced the curriculum time allocated to two years, starting the key stage 4 curriculum in Year 9. This allows a greater focus on the acquisition of qualifications but reduces opportunities for schools to plan creatively and offer a broad curriculum for pupils. In a minority of schools, pupils are required to work towards qualifications that will enhance the school's performance indicators. This practice takes time and focus away from qualifications that pupils and employers value, and does provide pupils with valuable learning experiences.

Most schools set less able pupils in smaller class sizes, allowing teachers to spend more time catering for individual pupils' specific needs, although this can lead to large top set groups, which can restrict the interaction that the most able pupils have with their teacher. Many schools plan suitable additional or flexible curriculum pathways for specific groups of pupils such as for those at risk of disaffection or for more able pupils. However, the number of vocational pathways available to pupils is generally constrained, covering a limited range of curriculum areas.

In many schools, the options offered in key stage 4 and key stage 5 maximise the opportunities for pupils to select appropriate qualifications. However, in a few schools, the curriculum is designed with an eye on the impact on performance indicators, for example starting GCSE courses in Year 9 and collapsing the timetable for pupils to study additional qualifications. Overall, the range of choice in key stage 4 has diminished in recent years and more time has been given to core subjects. Only a few schools have been successful in promoting uptake of modern foreign language or music courses.



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In many schools, there is suitable provision for developing pupils' literacy across the curriculum. In these schools, departments plan useful opportunities for developing pupils' oracy, reading and writing across the curriculum. A majority of departments ensure that there are relevant opportunities for pupils to refine their extended writing and improve the accuracy of their written work. In a minority of schools, planning for the co-ordinated development of pupils' literacy skills, especially writing, is not effective enough.

The majority of schools plan appropriately for the development of pupils' numeracy across the curriculum. In the main, the most beneficial activities are planned by science, technology and geography departments. These departments provide pupils with authentic and challenging opportunities to solve problems. In general, many of these departments plan well to ensure that pupils develop their graph skills. In a few cases, departments offer pupils activities that include a relatively low level of challenge, for example completing basic bar charts, then colouring them in. In a minority of schools, opportunities to solve problems using numeracy are too limited. There is effective literacy and numeracy intervention for groups of pupils in most schools.

Only a few schools plan suitably to develop pupils' ICT skills across subjects. In many schools, barriers to developing this provision include:

- insufficient up-to-date ICT equipment
- a lack of confidence among staff to develop pupils' ICT skills
- poor planning across the curriculum to develop ICT skills

In English-medium schools, most pupils follow an appropriate qualification path for Welsh, although opportunities for pupils to practise their Welsh in contexts other than their Welsh lessons remain limited. Often, there is too much focus on pupils' technical understanding of grammar at the expense of ensuring that pupils can understand spoken Welsh and offer suitable verbal responses to questions. In Welsh-medium schools, nearly all pupils are entered for the GCSE first language qualification. This contributes well to the development of their ability to communicate in writing and orally.

Care, support and guidance

In the best examples, schools offer high quality care, support and guidance for their pupils. In these schools, there is an extremely caring and supportive ethos that promotes pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning effectively. Staff support pupils' personal development in the classroom and beyond to help them achieve their full potential.

Bassaleg School

Bassaleg's vision is to develop a culture where equality and diversity are celebrated. They do this with a range of programmes, which are created by the pupils.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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In the majority of schools, there are useful systems for tracking pupils' academic progress and behaviour together with suitable arrangements for dealing with any potential issues or underperformance. In these schools, staff use a wide range of strategies, including engaging with parents and outside agencies, to address any issues. In a minority of schools, systems for tracking pupils' performance do not lead to effective interventions. This is either because information from teachers' assessments is inaccurate, pupils' targets are insufficiently challenging, or staff focus too much on pupils in Year 11. These shortcomings mean that staff do not tackle gaps in pupils' understanding in a timely manner. When combined with poor teaching, these shortcomings have a substantial impact on pupils' performance.

Pupil support at Ysgol Bae Baglan

Bringing four very diverse schools together into a brand new all-age required high quality, seamless support and wellbeing for all pupils, but especially for those with additional learning needs. Tailored interventions address the needs of individual pupils very successfully and with great sensitivity. The philosophy and work practice stem from the fundamental belief that every pupil can make a valued contribution, in all aspects of their lives, be it their social, civil and educational development.

In many schools, there is useful personal and social education programme that covers themes such as citizenship, social skills, anti-radicalisation, substance misuse, mental health, sex and healthy relationships. In a few cases, schools do not cover the whole range of issues important to young people's lives such as dealing with mental health issues well enough, and the quality of learning experiences is not good enough. In nearly all schools, arrangements to promote the importance of healthy eating and drinking are suitable. Many schools offer pupils suitable careers advice and guidance when choosing courses for key stage 4 or key stage 5. However, in a few cases, schools do not offer pupils unbiased advice. This results in pupils following unsuitable courses.

Many schools employ a wide range of useful strategies to communicate with parents. These include using social media platforms, parents' evenings and specific focused evenings, on topics such as staying safe online or curriculum changes. In many cases, reports to parents on their child's progress are useful and informative. However, in a few instances, the structure and content of reports are confusing and unhelpful to parents.

In most schools, collaboration with external support agencies and services is beneficial and complements the school's support for vulnerable pupils. This has a positive impact on improving pupils' resilience and wellbeing.

Bishop Hedley High School

The innovative Enrichment Programme addresses the development of important life skills and supports the introduction of the new curriculum for Wales through a whole-school experience for pupils. It is designed to provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to consider and gain expertise in the skills and attributes they will need and want to possess as they make their way in the world.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Sector summaries:

Secondary schools

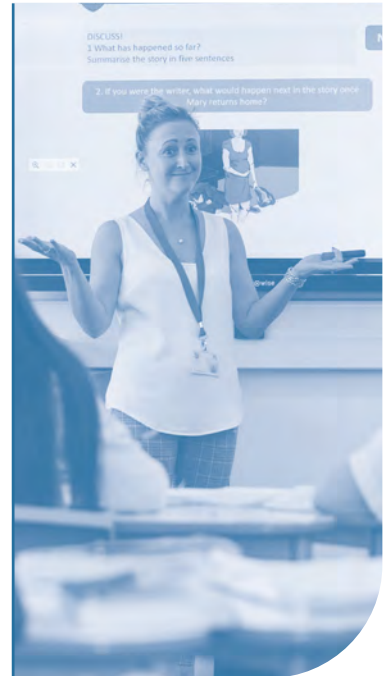
In many schools, there is a comprehensive behaviour policy that is implemented suitably by most staff. In the best examples, leaders focus on values that they are trying to promote rather than the rules themselves. Most secondary schools operate internal facility arrangements for supporting pupils exhibiting very challenging behaviour in lessons. In many cases, these arrangements ensure that these pupils continue to make progress in their work. In the best examples, staff support pupils well and they return swiftly to their lessons. They engage pupils in productive discussions about any issues they may have and help them plan to avoid repeating any poor behaviour. However, in a few cases, pupils remain in these rooms, isolated from their peers, for extended periods including lunchtimes and break times. This can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and does not lead to improved behaviour.

Many schools have high expectations of pupils with additional learning needs and support their learning well. The additional learning needs co-ordinator understands pupils' needs well. They discuss the best way of supporting specific pupils thoroughly with the pupils, their parents and support agencies to formulate useful learning plans. In these schools, teachers use these well to adapt their teaching and ensure that these pupils make suitable progress against challenging targets. In the best examples, teachers work closely with learning support assistants to plan the most appropriate learning strategies for these pupils. However, in a few cases, learning plans are too generic, do not offer enough challenge to pupils and do not give useful guidance to teachers. As a result, these pupils do not make enough progress in their subject knowledge or skills.

In many schools, arrangements to promote good attendance are effective. In these schools, leaders consistently emphasise the link between high attendance and good academic achievement. They have high expectations around attendance and communicate these regularly with pupils and parents. However, rates of unauthorised absence increased slightly in the last academic year and pupils eligible for free school meals remain more likely to be absent (Welsh Government, 2019a). In a very few schools, leaders are not successful enough in engaging with parents or pupils to ensure good attendance.

Leadership and management

Leadership is good or excellent in nearly four-in-ten schools. In the best examples, the senior leadership team work together successfully to communicate a clear vision based on a culture of high expectations for all pupils. Staff, pupils and the governing body embrace fully the school's aims and expectations. Leaders place a strong emphasis on teaching, but do not demand unthinking compliance with school policy. Instead, they expect teachers to draw on a wide range of strategies and select the appropriate method for their class and the topic under consideration. Leaders at all levels have a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school and evaluate different strategies objectively in light of their impact on learning and on pupils' wellbeing. Leaders in these schools evaluate the quality of teaching through a range of different activities and tend not to offer judgements on individual lessons. Rather they engage in a professional dialogue with staff about aspects that deserve sharing with other staff and areas for improvement.



Sector summaries:

Secondary schools

Leaders in these schools set ambitious targets for pupils and plan assiduously to achieve these. In these schools, there is a common sense of purpose and extensive collaboration focused on continuous improvement. Staff feel valued and trusted.

Where leadership is good or better, leaders are supportive, caring and encouraging but also challenging when necessary. Leaders in these schools understand positive aspects well and those needing improvement. They foster positive relationships with parents and the community. Paperwork is kept to a minimum, but important aspects to ensure accountability are done well. Systems to manage the performance of staff are applied consistently and inform a well-considered programme of professional learning. There is a strong culture of objective evaluation and planning for improvement. In these schools, leaders appraise the impact of the school's work continuously and respond swiftly to any aspects that require improvement. They understand how well pupils perform in relation to other similar schools and set ambitious goals. Governors are well informed and have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They play an influential role in setting the school's strategic direction.

Where there are shortcomings, these are mostly because leaders are unable to identify areas for improvement in teaching across the school. In a few cases, leaders focus so much on improving examination outcomes that they do not place enough importance of securing pupils' broad education or their social and personal development. In a few schools inspected this year, poor behaviour and bullying have not been tackled by leaders.

In a minority of schools, procedures for self-evaluation tend to focus on compliance with the school's policy instead of evaluating the impact of their provision on pupils' progress. In too many instances, schools judge the quality of teaching across the school by counting the number of lessons judged to be 'good' or better. They do not link teaching with its impact on learning closely enough. In a minority of schools, leaders and governors have a poor understanding of the performance of their school in comparison with other similar schools. In a minority of cases, leaders do not collect information about pupils' wellbeing in a strategic manner. As a result, they do not have a sound understanding of existing issues and are unable to plan for improvement. Often, there are too many priorities for improvement in whole school development plans.

In a majority of schools, leaders use findings from self-evaluation well to plan and evaluate professional learning activities. They plan their programme of professional learning carefully to ensure that any training aligns closely with individual, departmental, school and national priorities. They give time for individual departments to reflect on any training given and modify their practice in a way that best suits their subject. In these schools, there is a constant focus on improving teaching and on planning the most worthwhile activities for pupils. However, in a minority of schools, leaders do not plan well enough for professional learning. Often, staff are only offered opportunities to ensure up-to-date knowledge of examination requirements. In a few cases, staff do not receive this essential training. In these schools, there is a lack of focus on improving teaching. Instead,

Cwmtawe Community School

Cwmtawe Community School has a strong professional development programme for staff at all stages in their careers. Training programmes, job shadowing, coaching and sharing effective practice are all used. The programme gives staff the experience to take ownership of their teaching.

For more information, please read our **case study**



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Cowbridge Comprehensive School

Cowbridge Comprehensive School has a professional learning programme. It is shaped to ensure that all staff are able to address improvement successfully. This approach has created a culture of collaboration and an understanding of the importance of continuous learning.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Cydnabod
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Sector summaries:

Secondary schools

staff rely on providing pupils with after-school revision sessions, sometimes at weekends and during holidays, to ensure good outcomes. This strategy impacts negatively on staff morale and their wellbeing.

In schools with weak leadership, meetings involving senior leaders and middle leaders often focus heavily on operational matters and do not consider strategic matters such as the impact of whole school or departmental strategies on outcomes. In addition, leaders in these schools lack focus on national priorities, such as developing pupils' ICT, literacy or numeracy skills, pupils' grasp of Welsh or the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals.

All schools inspected this year report the need to make difficult financial decisions due to reduced budgets. Often these result in increasing class sizes or a loss of learning support assistants. Through prudent spending decisions, around seven in ten schools succeeded in managing their budget well. Just over a three-in-ten secondary schools inspected this year have not succeeded to do this and are operating in a budget deficit. In a few cases, these are very large and, although they are operating under licence by the local authority, it is unclear how these schools will succeed in eliminating their deficits.

Follow-up activity

Of the 29 secondary schools inspected this year, about six-in-ten require some level of follow-up. Thirteen schools were placed in Estyn review, three are in need of significant improvement and two require special measures.

At the beginning of the autumn term, seven schools were in special measures. One of these schools made good progress against its recommendations and was removed from the category following a monitoring visit. Another two received their first visit following its core inspection. This visit focused on ensuring that the school had a suitable post-inspection action plan in place. The other four schools had made insufficient progress against their recommendations and remain in special measures. In these schools, leaders at all levels do not have enough impact on pupil outcomes. In particular, they do not focus closely enough on the extent to which teaching has a positive impact on standards, progress and pupils' engagement in their learning.

There were ten schools requiring significant improvement at the beginning of this academic year. Estyn carried out visits to monitor the progress of eight of these schools. Five had made enough progress to be removed from this category. One school had made limited progress against its recommendations and was judged to require special measures. Two schools had made progress against their core inspection recommendations, but not enough to remove them from this category.

Sector summaries: Secondary schools

In November, we reviewed the progress of eight schools in Estyn review. We evaluated the progress reports submitted by the schools and their local authorities to consider progress against the recommendations as well as undertaking analysis of key stage 4 outcomes. Following the review, four of these schools were judged to have made enough progress and did not require further monitoring by Estyn. Of the remaining schools, one remains under Estyn review. The other three schools received a monitoring visit. One school was judged to have made enough improvement and was removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn review. Two schools had not made enough progress against the recommendations from their core inspections and were judged to be in need of significant improvement.

At the end of the academic year 2018-2019, there are nine schools in special measures, nine requiring significant improvement and 23 under Estyn review.

2

Context

Maintained all-age schools provide education for pupils in the foundation phase through to key stage 4, and sometimes include a sixth form. In January 2019, there were 19 maintained all-age schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019m). The sector continues to grow with a further three schools having opened in September 2019 and consultations under way in different regions that could see another five all-age schools being established. The sector is very diverse in terms of the number of sites for each school, and the range of pupil numbers in different phases.

This year, Estyn inspected three maintained all-age schools. The schools range from over 1,500 pupils to 900 pupils, each on one site. Each school receives pupils into Year 7 from other partner primary schools. Two schools provide education for pupils aged 3 to 19 years and one school educates pupils from the age of 3 to 16 years.

Sector summaries:

Maintained all-age schools

Standards

Across the three schools, many pupils make swift progress in their personal and social skills and make secure progress in their literacy skills, knowledge and understanding during their time at school. In one of the schools inspected this year, pupils make less progress in the primary phase and there are important areas for improvement. In all the schools inspected, pupils in the secondary phase benefit from the wide range of learning experiences and make good progress.

Girls' performance in many indicators compares favourably with that of girls in similar schools. At the end of key stage 4, boys' performance in 2018 is generally lower than the average for boys in similar schools.

In two of the schools, where standards are good, nearly all pupils listen attentively and make good progress in developing their oracy skills in both English and Welsh. During their time at the school, most pupils develop as confident readers in both languages. Many pupils are able to skim and scan various reading texts successfully to find information and analyse evidence. Most pupils develop early writing skills successfully and, at key stages 3 and key stage 4, many pupils write at length for a range of purposes.

Most pupils in the primary phase make good progress in their mathematical development. Many secondary age pupils apply their numeracy skills well across a range of subjects. Overall, most pupils' ICT skills are developing well across these schools. This is more positive than in secondary schools inspected this year and may be due to more coherent planning for progress and ensuring continuity across key stages in an all-age school.

Many pupils show strong creative skills in lessons, for example when designing and making products in technology, creating pieces of high quality artwork or performing as part of an instrumental group.

Where standards are adequate, the majority of pupils do not use a rich enough vocabulary to express themselves. They do not have sufficiently developed reading skills and only a few more able pupils use higher order skills such as inference with confidence. Although the standard of pupils' writing in key stage 3 and key stage 4 is appropriate, across the foundation phase and key stage 2 most pupils do not use their literacy skills well enough across the curriculum. In addition, the ICT skills of the majority of pupils in key stage 3 do not build sufficiently on the firm foundation set in key stage 2.

Over the last three years, the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has varied but, overall, is slightly lower than that of their peers in similar schools. Pupils with special educational needs make at least strong progress against their targets by the end of key stage 4. In one school inspected, many of these pupils make exceptional progress.



Sector summaries:

Maintained all-age schools

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In all three schools inspected this year, nearly all pupils feel safe in school and know whom to turn to with their concerns. Nearly all pupils understand clearly the importance of exercise and eating healthily. Many pupils develop positive attitudes to regular exercise and participation in extra-curricular physical activities is high.

Most pupils have a positive attitude towards their learning. They work together enthusiastically in pairs and groups. Most pupils behave well in classes and around the school. In one school, nearly all pupils show very strong independent learning skills and take ownership for their own learning. They understand how they learn and are motivated well to learn. Many show high levels of resilience when facing challenges with their work and are able to solve problems. A strong feature is pupils' willingness to undertake leadership roles and responsibilities such as being digital leaders and language mentors. Their work contributes extensively to the school's life and work and promotes Welsh heritage and culture effectively. Many pupils contribute to a wide range of charity and community work that develops them as ethical and tolerant citizens exceptionally well.

Teaching and learning experiences

In two schools inspected, the good working relationships between teachers and pupils are a key strength. This is often because teachers have good knowledge and understanding of pupils and their backgrounds and use this information well, particularly when planning. Many teachers plan lessons effectively, provide a suitable level of challenge and set high expectations. They have a clear focus on developing pupils' skills, use relevant and interesting resources and engage pupils' genuine interests. Many teachers provide useful verbal and written feedback that enables pupils to improve their work. In one school, teaching is not effective enough. Teachers over-direct pupils' learning and do not have high enough expectations. In addition, a few teachers do not question effectively enough or ensure that pupils respond to their advice well enough to improve their understanding or quality of their work.

Generally, the three schools provide a broad and balanced curriculum from 3-18 years old. They provide pupils with a wide range of learning experiences. One school in particular has adopted an innovative and experimental approach in preparation for the new curriculum. Although in its early stage of development, pupils benefit from stimulating experiences to develop their creative and thinking skills.

All three schools inspected plan purposefully to develop pupils' skills across the curriculum. A particular feature of this approach is teachers' planning in collaboration within areas of learning. Planning for the development of pupils' ICT skills across the school is not comprehensive enough and, as a result, pupils in the secondary phase do not build well enough on the firm foundations laid in the primary phase.



Sector summaries:

Maintained all-age schools

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are a strong feature in all the schools inspected. All three schools have been asked to submit a case study about how their provision has impacted positively on pupils’ wellbeing and attitudes to learning. All three are inclusive with a caring ethos, placing a high priority on the wellbeing of each pupil.

All schools have robust and comprehensive systems to track academic progress, attendance and wellbeing. Leaders use tracking information well to make informed decisions about how to support pupils experiencing difficulties or those underachieving. Arrangements for pupils with additional learning needs are strong. Schools tailor interventions carefully and sensitively to address the needs of individual pupils. They monitor the impact of the interventions carefully and adapt the provision as required. Through training of staff, work with external agencies and parents, the schools ensure that pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress during their time at the school.

Support for pupils with emotional, health and social needs is a particular strength in each school. In two of the schools, support is exceptional. A strong feature in these schools is the wrap-around support for pupils and their families who experience challenges. Pastoral teams work effectively with external agencies to ensure that support is specific and meets the needs of the individual well. Early identification of pupils at risk of underachieving helps schools to provide early and efficient provision to ensure that pupils are happy to be in school and are given every opportunity to succeed. As a result, pupils take great pride in their school. The schools provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils to participate in cultural events, creative arts projects and activities in their local community. Personal and social education programmes successfully develop pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural attitudes. The schools provide pupils with many opportunities to express their opinions, and leaders consider their views effectively to inform changes to the curriculum and school life.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good in all three schools inspected this year. Leaders have secured solid foundations for an all-age school in their early stages of development. Wellbeing and care, support and guidance have been their priorities when amalgamating schools serving different communities.

In all three schools, leaders have been successful in establishing a clear vision for their school and communicating this effectively with staff, parents and stakeholders. Lines of accountability are clear and leaders work well together across all phases. Robust leadership has had a positive influence on important aspects of the school’s work, in particular attendance, wellbeing, quality of teaching and curriculum planning. Governors are enthusiastic and dedicated. They have a sound awareness of their responsibilities and provide effective support and challenge. Leaders generally have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas

Ysgol Bae Baglan

Ensuring the level of care, support and guidance is a strong feature at Ysgol Bae Baglan. The school appreciates that not all pupils work in the same way and have created a pupil support network.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Ysgol Bro Teifi

Ysgol Bro Teifi created a system to identify their pupils’ needs so they could provide continuous provision for them. The system helps to track progress, behaviour, attendance and wellbeing.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Ysgol Bro Morgannwg

Pupils and staff at Ysgol Bro Morgannwg have a strong sense of pride in their Welsh Community. Staff encourage the use of the Welsh language throughout the school. There is a ‘Welshness Committee’, which promotes the social use of the Welsh language.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Sector summaries:

Maintained all-age schools

for improvement in their school. Leaders at all levels analyse data well and draw on other first-hand evidence such as lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work to plan for improvement. At times, the focus of self-evaluation and improvement planning has veered too much towards key stage 3 and key stage 4 rather than across the whole school. As a result, leaders do not always have a secure enough understanding of the shortcomings in the primary phase, nor do they identify clearly enough where good practice exists that could be shared across the school.

All three schools have created a strong ethos and culture of continuous professional learning. They provide rich opportunities for staff to expand and refine their professional knowledge and work well with other schools and providers to expand provision for staff professional learning.

Leaders manage their school's resources well. Two out of the three schools have a deficit budget with a plan agreed by the local authority to eliminate the deficit within the next two years. All three schools make good use of grant funding, including the pupil development grant, to support pupils. This has had a positive impact on progress, attendance and wellbeing of pupils eligible for free school meals and other vulnerable groups. All the schools benefit from new purpose-built accommodation that provides a stimulating place for pupils to learn.

Follow-up activity

None of the all-age schools inspected this year were placed in follow-up. In each school inspected, areas of good practice were identified and the schools were asked to provide a case study. Each case study related to pupils' wellbeing and the care, support and guidance provided. One all-age school remains in Estyn review and one all-age school monitored this year remains in need of significant improvement.



2

Context

In January 2019, there were 41 maintained special schools in Wales, the same as in 2018 (Welsh Government, 2019m). The schools provide for pupils with a range of needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The number of pupils attending maintained special schools continues to increase. In January 2019, the number of pupils in special schools across Wales was 4,982 compared with 4,831 last year (Welsh Government, 2019m).

This year, we inspected three maintained special schools. One of these is an all-age school providing for pupils aged 3 to 19, another providing for pupils aged 7 to 19 and the other providing solely for secondary age pupils aged 11 to 19. The findings from all inspections have informed this report. The findings are broadly in line with those of previous years.

Sector summaries:

Maintained special schools

Standards

Standards in the three schools inspected this year are good or better. In one school, standards are excellent. Pupils in this school respond extremely positively to its highly inclusive and supportive ethos. As a result, nearly all pupils make consistently good progress in many important areas of their learning and personal development that support their future lives very effectively. A few pupils at the school who have particularly complex needs consolidate their skills and sustain their level of achievement extremely well in relation to their targets. This outcome represents an exceptional achievement for these pupils.

In all three schools, most pupils make strong progress against their learning goals in their individual education plans. They generally settle quickly to tasks and recall prior learning effectively. Most pupils develop their communication skills well and make effective use of these in relevant contexts. Pupils with the greatest communication difficulties use a wide range of communication skills and devices such as gesture, symbols and assistive technology to communicate their needs aptly and to make choices. Many pupils make strong progress in developing and applying their numeracy skills, such as more able pupils calculating profit margins confidently for enterprise activities.

Almost all older pupils leave their school with at least one recognised qualification and move on to further education or training. Most learn important life skills that prepare them well for this transition, and for independent living.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In the three schools inspected this year, wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good or better.

Most pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. They generally settle quickly to their work, engage well with activities and show great resilience in their learning despite the many difficulties that they face. For example, in the few cases where pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties become disengaged, they discuss their difficulties, and co-operate fully with teaching and support staff to return to their learning in a timely manner. Overall, pupils' positive attitudes to learning help them to improve their work and secure stronger outcomes.

Most pupils are well behaved, tolerant and respectful. They respond well to the caring atmosphere of their school and form trusting working relationships with staff. This helps to boost their confidence, especially when trying new tasks or different ways of working. Pupils' enthusiastic participation in activities such as fund raising for local charities or promotion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child helps them to become ethically informed citizens and to feel valued as members of their school community.

Sector summaries:

Maintained special schools

Teaching and learning experiences

The quality of teaching and learning experiences in all three schools is good or better. Each school provides a broad, flexible and highly relevant curriculum to stimulate and challenge the full range of pupils successfully. A strength of this provision is the flexible way that the schools plan and group pupils to ensure that they meet their needs particularly well, such as grouping by stage of development, rather than age. This responsive approach towards curriculum planning makes a positive contribution to pupils' progress over time.

Where teaching is a strength, staff use their detailed knowledge and understanding of individual pupils' abilities and interests skilfully to plan engaging tasks that challenge and stimulate them. Teachers are confident in using this knowledge to adjust lesson plans or adapt tasks sensitively to provide for pupils' changing needs and behaviours. They make effective use of a range of strategies and resources to engage pupils, such as sensory rooms, rebound therapy, and working in outside areas to meet their needs well. Support staff are valuable role models and they work effectively as a team to enhance pupils' learning and ensure that they make worthwhile progress. For example, in one school, both teaching and support staff use 'wow walls' to provide detailed feedback, celebrate success and encourage pupils to extend their learning.

Where the quality of teaching is not strong, this is usually because teachers do not plan carefully enough to ensure that pupils develop their independence skills or to meet the needs of more able pupils.

The three schools plan a range of stimulating opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. In one school, the provision for Welsh language development and activities to celebrate Welsh culture are not ambitious enough.

Care, support and guidance

The care, support and guidance for pupils are good or better in the three schools, with one school's provision being excellent. Where provision is exceptional, the school provides exemplary levels of care in a highly inclusive environment. This ethos and practice enable pupils, whatever their level of disability or the difficulties they face, to access learning and make progress successfully. The school's robust arrangements for assessment, monitoring and tracking ensure that staff understand pupils' needs extremely well from the day that they join the school. Highly effective partnerships with parents and a wide range of external agencies such as health and social care enable the school to provide valuable support to meet pupils' ongoing health and learning needs extremely well.

Trinity Fields School & Resource Centre

Staff and governors at Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre work together to embed pupil participation throughout the school. The school council plays an important role and allows pupils to become leaders and use their voice.

For more information, please read our **case study**



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Sector summaries:

Maintained special schools

In the three schools, the provision for enhancing pupils' personal development is strong. For example, they plan and deliver personal and social education programmes effectively to provide pupils with a range of age-appropriate information. This information covers important areas such as healthy living, relationships, online safety, and radicalisation. These programmes are co-ordinated well with other areas of provision, such as pupils championing an increase in healthy meal choices through the school council.

In one school, staff regularly gather a suitable range of assessment information to inform targets in pupils' individual education plans, but they do not specify clearly enough the next small steps for improvement.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in one school inspected and good in the other two. In the school where there is very strong, sustained performance and practice, leadership roles are shared successfully across staff such as through task and finish groups. This approach helps to build staff leadership skills and their commitment to the school's inclusive vision and values. The school's leaders have formed highly successful partnerships with local schools that have enriched pupils' learning experiences and improved their outcomes, as well as helping to enhance the local authority's provision within primary and secondary schools.

The three schools have comprehensive arrangements to support staff professional learning. Activities range from staff discussing ideas about effective practice as part of an internal peer observation programme through to sharing their expertise with schools across the region. Other opportunities include mentoring for aspiring leaders and training for teaching assistants to develop specialist skills. These activities help staff to improve their own practice and the overall quality of the provision.

Each school has developed coherent and robust self-evaluation processes. Leaders gather a suitable range of first-hand evidence on standards and provision, including teaching, that provides them with a useful evidence base to evaluate their school's work. In one school, leaders do not always analyse information from self evaluation skilfully enough to identify strengths and prioritise areas for development with realistic targets for improvement.

Follow-up activity

This year, no schools require follow-up as a result of their core inspection.

During the year, one school inspected in the previous inspection cycle has been removed from requiring Estyn review and another has been judged to have made sufficient improvement and no longer requires special measures. A further school remains under Estyn review.



Trinity Fields School & Resource Centre

The outreach teacher and a home-school support worker at Trinity Fields School work in partnership with parents and carers. Together they create strategies that can be supported at home, like bedtime routines.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



2

Context

In January 2019, there were 36 independent special schools in Wales, four more than in January 2018. Independent special schools educate pupils from 3 to 19 who have a wide range of needs, including autistic spectrum disorder and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of the schools are small and pupils usually live in children's homes attached to the schools. A minority of these schools also educate day pupils or pupils who reside in children's homes not attached to the school, and these placements are funded by local authorities.

In addition to full inspections, Estyn carries out regular monitoring inspections of independent special schools, normally every 12 to 18 months. This year, we inspected seven independent special schools and carried out monitoring visits to 21 schools. The findings from all inspections and visits have informed this report.

Sector summaries:

Independent special schools

Compliance with Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

In inspections of independent special schools, we judge the extent to which the school complies with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 (National Assembly for Wales, 2003).

Six of the seven independent special schools inspected and just over three quarters of schools visited as part of the monitoring process complied with all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. Where schools had shortcomings in compliance with regulations, these related to the quality of education provided, the welfare, health and safety of pupils, the suitability of proprietors and staff, and the provision of information. All schools who do not meet regulations are required to submit a plan to the Welsh Government to show how they will make the required improvements. Estyn monitors compliance with the regulations at the next monitoring visit.

Standards

Standards are notably more positive this year than in recent years. In six of the seven independent special schools inspected this year, and in three-quarters of the schools visited as part of monitoring, pupils make at least good progress in their learning in relation to their starting points and abilities. Many pupils develop their literacy skills well. For example, they improve their reading skills effectively from their baseline scores and develop more secure writing skills. Many pupils consolidate and improve their numeracy skills and become more confident in applying these across the curriculum, and in relation to real life contexts that support their future independence well, such as budgeting and travel.

In these schools, pupils make particularly strong progress in developing relevant communication and social skills. They listen carefully to each other and to teaching staff, and answer questions confidently using subject specific language accurately. Many pupils develop their thinking and problem-solving skills well. For example, they plan and prepare their own meals or apply the skills they learn in school to work experience placements in the community. This helps them to become more independent in their daily lives.

In one of the schools inspected and in around a quarter of the schools visited this year as part of monitoring, pupils make inconsistent progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Generally this is because they do not use these skills regularly enough in real-life situations or apply them purposefully in subjects across the curriculum. In these schools, the presentation of pupils' written work is poor, and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to achieve qualifications that support vocational progression or future learning pathways.

Sector summaries:

Independent special schools

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In all of the schools inspected this year, and in nine-in-ten of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, many pupils make at least good progress in improving their standards of wellbeing and their attitudes to learning. In these schools, pupils develop productive working relationships with staff who support them very effectively to develop their self-esteem and resilience when faced with challenges in learning. As a result, many pupils learn to manage their anxieties successfully and improve their behaviour in relation to their individual needs.

Many pupils attend school regularly and are punctual for lessons. In lessons, they work effectively both independently and with their peers. They take pride in their work and are eager to share their achievements and the progress they have made in their learning with visitors. In these schools, many pupils develop their leadership skills appropriately and contribute constructively to the life of the school and the local community.

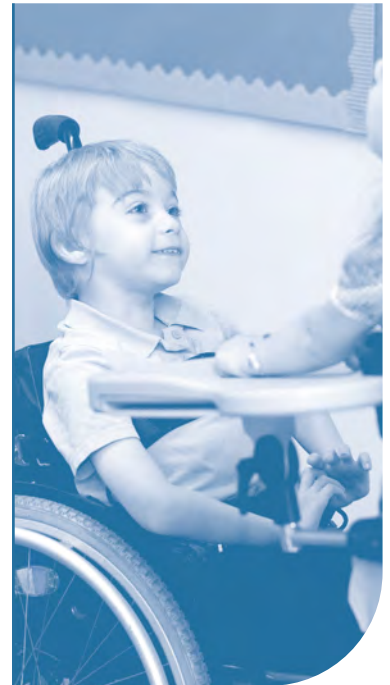
During their time at school, many pupils develop a secure understanding of healthy lifestyles, and learn how their choices will impact on their future lives. For example, many pupils take part regularly in physical exercise and explain the benefits of a healthy diet. Importantly, many develop their understanding of healthy relationships through well-planned therapeutic interventions and their personal and social education.

In four of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process during this period, there were shortcomings in the attendance and behaviour of a few pupils. These pupils make limited progress in managing their behaviour and do not engage well in learning. They do not respond well to staff support and leave lessons and activities early without completing tasks.

Teaching and learning experiences

In five of the seven schools inspected and in around half of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, teaching and learning experiences are at least good. In these schools, the school provides a broad and relevant curriculum that meets the needs of pupils well. Curriculum planning has a strong focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, as well as the wide range of skills that pupils will need in their future lives. For example, schools plan outdoor education, activities to develop independent living skills and opportunities for work experience.

In these schools, teachers use secure subject knowledge to plan challenging lessons that build suitably on pupils' prior learning. Teachers and learning support assistants work together constructively and know their pupils' strengths and areas for development extremely well. They share high expectations of pupils' behaviour and progress and provide highly effective support and challenge for pupils. They tailor the curriculum skilfully to individual pupils' needs and provide a stimulating variety of well-planned activities that extend pupils' problem-solving skills.



Sector summaries:

Independent special schools

In two of the schools inspected and in around half of the schools monitored, aspects of teaching and learning experiences require improvement. Generally, this is because teachers set learning activities that lack challenge and are not tailored well enough to pupils' abilities and needs. Teachers rely too much on a limited range of approaches to teaching such as the use of worksheets, and do not include enough opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning. In these schools, there is a lack of continuity and coherence in curriculum planning, and teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills progressively across the curriculum.

Care, support and guidance

Provision for the care, support and guidance of pupils is good or excellent in six of the schools inspected, and is a strong feature in around seven-in-ten of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process. In these schools, teachers and leaders gather a wide range of evidence to monitor and track pupils' progress in learning. They consider this information carefully together with data on attendance, behaviour and other aspects of pupils' wellbeing to provide a robust record of the progress that pupils make over time. They use this information skilfully to put in place a range of interventions that support pupils' needs very well.

A particularly effective feature of this work is the partnership between teaching, residential and therapeutic staff. This well-co-ordinated joint working promotes a highly consistent approach to helping pupils manage their complex needs and improve their attitudes to learning. Over time, this approach helps significantly to equip pupils with the skills and knowledge they need to make healthy lifestyle choices in adult life.

Where aspects of the provision for care, support and guidance require improvement, this is because baseline assessments of pupils' skills are not robust enough, and arrangements for staff to track and monitor pupils' progress across the curriculum are underdeveloped. In addition, teachers do not plan well enough for pupils' personal and social education. As a result, pupils are not prepared well enough for the responsibilities and challenges of life in the community when they leave school.

Leadership

Leadership and management are at least good in five of the seven schools inspected and are a strong feature in around half of the schools visited as part of the monitoring this year. In these schools, leaders provide strong and purposeful leadership, which focuses well on improving provision and on outcomes for pupils. They communicate a clear vision for the school that promotes effective teamwork between education, residential and specialist staff teams. As a result, they create a positive and nurturing ethos that supports pupils' needs effectively. In these schools, leaders have a clear understanding of the school's overall strengths and areas for development and have suitable processes to track and monitor individual pupils' progress and wellbeing.

Headlands School

Headlands School created a new approach to how they support pupils who have experienced early trauma and adverse childhood experiences. They wanted to provide trusting relationships and a trauma-sensitive service for their pupils and families.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Sector summaries:

Independent special schools

Where aspects of leadership and management require improvement, this is generally because self-evaluation and improvement planning activities are not rigorous enough. In particular, the information that leaders collect on pupils' progress does not focus clearly on the standards of pupils' skills and is not used well enough to identify whole school areas for development. Priorities for improvement do not specify clearly enough precise actions to be taken, or identify clearly the resources or time needed to make successful changes.

In three of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, instability in the senior leadership of the school creates uncertainty about the future direction of the school and does not help the school to plan confidently for improvement.

Woodlands School

Woodlands School wanted to improve their teaching and learning and establish a culture where pupils could achieve their academic potential. Daily assemblies and a new school council were used to share information with pupils and engage them in decisions.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Section 2

Sector summaries: Independent mainstream schools

2

Context

In January 2019, there were 38 independent mainstream schools in Wales, three more than in January 2018. These schools educate about 8,500 pupils. This is around 2% of pupils in Wales. This year, we inspected six independent mainstream schools. One of these schools is an all-age school, two educate pupils aged 3 to 16 years, one educates pupils aged 3 to 14 years, one educates pupils aged 9 to 18 years, and one provides education for pupils aged 10 to 20 years. This sample reflects the diversity of schools within the sector, with some catering for pre-statutory school age children and others extending into post-16 provision. The findings from all inspections have informed this report.

Sector summaries:

Independent mainstream schools

Compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

In independent schools, we inspect the extent to which the school complies with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). This year, five of the six schools inspected met all of the regulations. In one school, we identified shortcomings in compliance with a few regulations relating to the quality of education provided and the welfare, health and safety of pupils. We will monitor this school to ensure that it makes the required improvements to maintain registration. We carried out follow-up monitoring activities with the two schools that had not met all of these regulations in 2017-2018. Both of these schools have taken appropriate actions and now comply fully with the regulations.

Standards

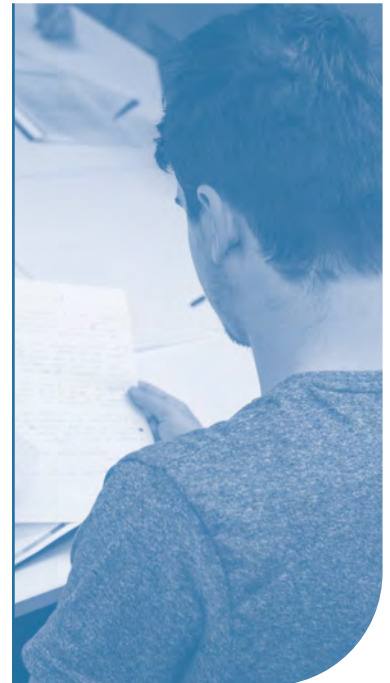
In half of the six independent schools inspected this year, standards are good or better. While this appears weaker than last year's position, the sample size of schools inspected is too small to draw conclusions from this about the sector as a whole.

There are excellent features in pupils' standards in two of the schools. In these schools, pupils develop a particularly secure understanding of subject knowledge and make strong progress in improving their skills and applying their understanding of key principles and concepts to new contexts. Pupils ask thoughtful and pertinent questions to extend their understanding or to challenge others' views. Older pupils read and respond confidently to an increasingly complex range of texts. Many are able to analyse the use and impact of language particularly well, for example when drawing inferences from 'Pride and Prejudice' to explore gender stereotypes. As they progress through the school, pupils become extremely secure in their mathematical skills. They apply these skills effectively to support their learning in subjects across the curriculum, for example when employing their measuring skills in science or making calculations in astronomy.

Where standards are unsatisfactory, pupils do not make enough progress in developing their knowledge and skills. Pupils do not read with expression or always understand what they have read and, in their writing, pupils make frequent spelling and punctuation errors. This includes repeated mistakes in spelling commonly used words and subject specific terminology. In addition, pupils do not apply their mathematical skills accurately in numeracy tasks across the curriculum.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In five of the six schools inspected this year, wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good or better. There are excellent features in two of the schools. In these schools, pupils are exceptionally eager to succeed and develop key attitudes and behaviours that will help them to learn throughout their lives. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of learning opportunities and develop increasing confidence as ambitious, independent learners. They demonstrate a curiosity in their learning and a tenacity in overcoming challenges, and they fully understand that errors are useful learning opportunities.



Sector summaries:

Independent mainstream schools

Pupils enjoy and value highly their participation in activities and extra-curricular clubs, including innovative learning opportunities through the outdoors programme in one school. Pupils develop strong resilience and beneficial personal and social skills through participating in this programme.

In the best practice, pupils develop valuable leadership skills through their involvement in a worthwhile range of roles and responsibilities. For example, pupils become sports ambassadors, establish a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) society or organise community events.

Where wellbeing and attitudes to learning are not a strength, pupils rely too heavily on adult support when they find tasks challenging, rather than thinking things through for themselves. In addition, they do not have positions of responsibility or leadership roles and therefore do not influence the work of the school.

Teaching and learning experiences

In two of the schools inspected, teaching and learning experiences are good or better. In these schools, the curriculum is tailored to the needs of pupils well and builds systematically on pupils' knowledge and skills as they move through the school so that they become confident, ambitious, aspirational and well-informed learners. Pupils have extensive opportunities to extend their learning additional activities, such as field trips, sports events, design challenges and foreign exchange visits. These opportunities develop pupils' personal and social skills as well as providing opportunities to demonstrate their imagination and creativity.

In five of the six schools inspected, one of the recommendations relates to improving teaching. Where teaching is strong, teachers convey their passion and enthusiasm for the topics taught, which in turn inspires their pupils. Teachers provide clear explanations and target questions precisely to assess pupils' learning. Extremely helpful verbal and written feedback ensures that pupils understand how to improve their work.

In the schools where teaching is less successful, this is often because learning activities do not meet the needs of all pupils and the teaching lacks pace and challenge. In these schools, the quality and impact of teacher feedback vary too much and do not contribute well enough to improving the quality of pupils' work.

Care, support and guidance

In five of the six schools, care, support and guidance are good or better, with excellent features in one school. Where practice is exceptional, committed staff provided extremely high levels of support within and beyond the classroom to help pupils to develop their self-confidence and important life skills, such as self-reliance. The extensive arrangements to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development foster values such as respect, tolerance, kindness and compassion. These values are evident in practice across the whole school community.

Myddelton College

To interest pupils in the outdoors and physical activity, Myddelton College created a 'Learning Through the Outdoors' programme. Activities include mountain walking, navigation, climbing and water sports, making use of their proximity to Snowdonia.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Sector summaries:

Independent mainstream schools

Although five of the schools gather information regularly to monitor pupils' progress, they do not use this information well enough to inform planning and to track pupils' progress robustly. As a result, these schools do not ensure that the needs of all learners are met.

Leadership and management

In half of the schools, leadership and management are good or better. In these schools, leaders are successful in establishing vibrant, engaging learning communities. Leaders are reflective and adapt to respond to the school's needs. Staff work well together as a cohesive team and benefit from relevant professional learning opportunities that focus on improving pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Where there are shortcomings in leadership, quality assurance processes are not sufficiently robust to ensure that leaders can accurately identify the school's strengths and areas for development. Therefore, leaders do not identify key priorities well enough or plan effectively to strengthen provision and improve outcomes for pupils. In addition, staff performance management and professional learning opportunities are underdeveloped. The processes to help leaders to determine specific objectives for members of staff and to identify relevant training to support their professional learning are also underdeveloped. As a result, there is not a strong culture of promoting best practice within the school or through working with other organisations.

Section 2

Sector summaries: Independent specialist colleges

2

Context

This year, there are seven registered independent specialist colleges in Wales. This is the same as in January 2018. These colleges educate around 205 learners aged 16 and over. The colleges provide for a diverse range of pupils' needs, including autistic spectrum disorder, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. In four of the colleges, many learners live in residential homes attached to the college.

In addition to full inspections, we carry out regular monitoring visits of independent specialist colleges. These visits consider the progress made by the colleges against specific recommendations from core inspections and previous monitoring visits. This year, we carried out monitoring visits to six specialist colleges and no full inspections.

Sector summaries:

Independent specialist colleges

Standards

In the six colleges monitored this year, most learners make at least suitable progress against the goals in their individual learning plans. Over time, they improve their literacy and numeracy skills in relation to their starting points. Where relevant, nearly all learners attain relevant units of accreditation or nationally recognised qualifications at a level appropriate to their ability.

In four of the colleges, they apply and consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills very successfully through activities that build their confidence and promote their independence. For example, they improve their independent living skills and acquire valuable work-related and vocational skills through purposeful work-experience placements on-site or in the local community.

In these colleges, many learners make particularly strong progress in developing their social and communication skills because of the well-planned learning experiences and specialist support provided by the colleges. For example, in one college, many learners use signs and symbols highly effectively to assist their understanding and communication. These skills support learners well in making the transition to a more independent life after college.

In two colleges, learners do not make the progress they are capable of in developing their independence and practical skills because of shortcomings in tutors' planning and the range of learning experiences provided.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In all of the colleges visited this year, learners enjoy attending college and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. In lessons, most learners participate enthusiastically and focus well on activities. They interact positively with each other and build positive relationships with staff, responding constructively to feedback and sustaining their engagement successfully. Many develop their resilience and problem-solving skills effectively through enterprise activities or programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

In four of the colleges, many learners make strong progress in addressing targets to do with their physical and emotional wellbeing. For example, in three colleges, learners make strong progress against physiotherapy and speech and language goals set by the college's multi-disciplinary team. Over time, learners with difficult behaviours learn to manage their emotions because of the consistent and sensitive support provided by teaching staff.

Teaching and learning experiences

In all of the colleges visited, teaching staff have a strong understanding of the needs of their learners and build productive working relationships with them. They use this knowledge appropriately to set individual learning goals that take suitable account of learners' different interests and aspirations.



Sector summaries:

Independent specialist colleges

In four of the colleges visited this year, teaching focuses particularly effectively on developing learners' independence. In these colleges, learning experiences provide learners with a broad range of stimulating activities that engage their interests and support learners' progress to their likely destinations well. Tutors' planning builds suitably on learners' prior achievements. Tutors set targets for learners that clearly identify short steps of learning that are measurable and meaningful.

Where there are shortcomings, tutors' planning does not consistently promote independent learning and the range of learning experiences provided by the college is too narrow. In particular, the deployment of learning support staff inhibits the development of learners' independence. In one college, learner targets are too broad. As a result, learners and staff are not always clear about the next steps needed for progress.

Care, support and guidance

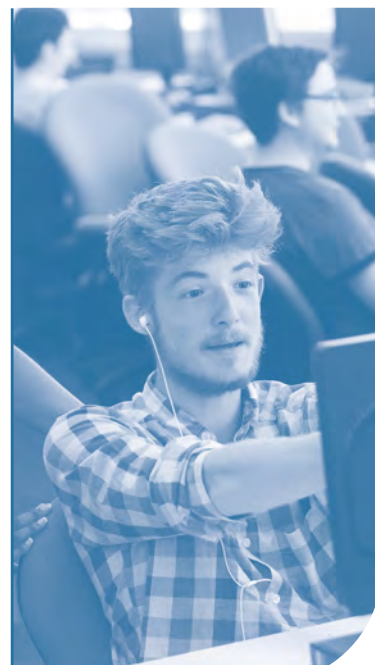
The quality of care, support and guidance is a particularly strong feature in four of the six colleges visited this year. In these colleges, robust processes to identify learners' starting points on entry to the college provide tutors and support staff with detailed information on the needs and abilities of learners. They monitor and review learners' progress regularly against a wide range of outcomes, including valuable targets to support their wellbeing and independence.

In three colleges, the education team works together very effectively with staff from the college's multi-disciplinary team. This approach ensures that there is a well co-ordinated approach to the support for learners' wider needs. Staff from both teams meet regularly to review learners' progress and plan suitable interventions to enable them to access education and to help teaching staff support learners successfully in sessions. In two colleges, staff use a wide range of communication strategies particularly effectively to enable learners of all abilities to participate fully in decision-making.

In two colleges, partnerships with learners' previous schools are under-developed. This means that the college does not have important information about learners' needs and prior learning before entry, and makes it difficult for these colleges in planning suitable learner pathways when they join the college.

Leadership and management

In four of the colleges visited this year, leaders and managers create a strong sense of vision and purpose that focuses clearly on ensuring that provision meets the needs of all learners. These colleges provide calm and inclusive learning environments that support learners effectively to make progress against their learning and personal goals.



Sector summaries: Independent specialist colleges

In these colleges, leaders have a strong understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development. They focus suitably on improvement and make good progress against the recommendations from previous monitoring visits. Staffing arrangements and programmes of professional learning support these priorities well. In two colleges, there are particularly effective arrangements to involve staff in self evaluation and improvement planning processes. This approach is very successful in building the capacity of staff to bring about important improvements to the provision in these colleges. However, overall, weaknesses in self-evaluation and improvement planning remain an important shortcoming in leadership in four of the colleges visited this year.

In one college, the progress made against recommendations from the previous monitoring visit has been too slow.

2

Context

In January 2019, there were 23 registered pupil referral units (PRUs) in Wales. This is the same number as in January 2018. There were approximately 820 pupils receiving their main education in PRUs in January 2019 (Welsh Government, 2019k, p.10).

This year we inspected four PRUs. Two of these are all-age PRUs providing for pupils across the primary and secondary phases, one provides solely for primary age pupils and the other only for secondary phase pupils to age 16. Three of these PRUs are multi-site and the other is on a single campus. All of the PRUs we inspected this year are for pupils experiencing social emotional and behavioural difficulties, with one PRU also providing support for pupils with mental health issues. The findings from all inspections have informed this report.

Sector summaries:

Pupil referral units

Standards

Standards in two of the four PRUs inspected this year are excellent. They are good in one and adequate in the other.

Where standards are excellent, over time and with skilled support, most pupils make exceptional progress in improving their learning and behaviour. They respond very well to the sensitive and supportive approach of staff. With this support, they come to understand the reasons for their challenging behaviour and how to manage it effectively so that they can concentrate on their learning. The positive response of almost all of these pupils enables them to improve their self-esteem, focus on learning and make remarkable progress in achieving the targets in their individual education plans.

In the three PRUs where standards are good or better, most pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills well and make assured use of them in their learning across the curriculum. For example, working in pairs during personal and social education, pupils combine improved vocabulary with attentive listening skills to provide instructions to a partner on how to tie a shoelace while blindfolded. In all four PRUs, older pupils gain a wide range of recognised skills and vocational qualifications with several attaining GCSEs, mostly in the core subjects. Most pupils continue their learning in further education or work-based learning when they leave the PRU.

In one PRU, a minority of pupils do not make enough progress in developing their numeracy skills, and the overall standards reached by a few pupils are not high enough. Across all of the PRUs inspected, pupils do not develop their Welsh language skills well enough.

Wellbeing

In the four PRUs inspected this year, wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good or better, and excellent in two PRUs. This outcome is notably stronger than for PRUs inspected during this inspection cycle so far.

Although most pupils have experienced considerable disruption in their education, over time they build strong and trusting working relationships with staff and develop important skills in tolerance, resilience and respect. They feel safe and benefit from opportunities to be themselves and develop successfully.

Many pupils improve their attendance significantly and develop positive attitudes to learning. They settle to structured activities quickly, sustain high levels of concentration and complete tasks successfully. Most pupils engage enthusiastically with a range of community, creative and sporting activities. For example, pupils maintain flowerbeds in the local area, make pinch pots to fundraise for charity, and participate in the daily mile challenge. These activities have an extremely positive impact on pupils' physical, social and emotional wellbeing and extend their life skills considerably.

In two PRUs, there is too much variation in attendance, especially that of older pupils.

Sector summaries:

Pupil referral units

Teaching and learning experiences

In three of the four PRUs, the overall teaching and learning experiences are good or better, and excellent in two. These PRUs provide pupils with high-quality learning experiences that meets pupils' needs particularly well and develop their interests and skills across an important range of learning areas.

All of the PRUs provide a broad, balanced and stimulating curriculum that is relevant to the needs and abilities of pupils. For example, most pupils who retain part-time mainstream placements follow their mainstream curriculum closely to ensure continuity in their learning. The PRUs have taken early steps in preparing for the new Curriculum for Wales.

The four PRUs provide a valuable range of opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and apply them assuredly in different contexts across the curriculum, particularly their literacy skills. However, the provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills, especially for those transferring from Welsh medium schools, is limited.

In all PRUs inspected, where teaching is consistently good or better, staff use their knowledge of their pupils skilfully to plan and provide engaging activities that challenge pupils. They have high expectations of pupils and use their individual targets to help inform lesson objectives and provide appropriate challenge. The pace of lessons is well balanced, with skilful use of timing and resources such as visual prompts to hold the attention of pupils. Support staff reinforce and extend pupils' learning particularly well.

Where there are shortcomings in teaching, this is largely because planning and activities do not meet the needs of all pupils well enough. As a result, in one PRU, a few pupils do not always make suitable progress.

Care, support and guidance

In all four PRUs inspected, care, support and guidance are good or better, and in two they are excellent.

Across PRUs and sites, tracking systems for recording pupils' attendance, academic progress and behaviour are mostly robust and effective. Staff use this information well to identify pupils who require support and to plan interventions such as one-to-one support. Each PRU has also developed partnerships with a range of multi-agency professionals to meet the needs of pupils in a joined-up way. Effective links with educational psychologists and agencies such as the NSPCC, Barnardo's, Action for Children and other organisations support provision for pupils particularly well.

Where provision is excellent, this includes exceptional flexible working and communication with parents. For example, in addition to daily diaries and regular phone calls, staff work with other agencies to provide highly effective parenting programmes to help them understand and manage their children's needs. In one PRU, these partnerships, together with successful strategies for working with mainstream schools, have been key to supporting pupils' reintegration back into mainstream education.

Tai Educational Centre

A pupil-led curriculum is embedded at the Tai Education Centre to help pupils re-engage with education successfully. Pupil voice is a driving force to build a curriculum that is exciting and relevant, whilst parents are involved with invitations to courses and events.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Sector summaries:

Pupil referral units

All PRUs inspected have comprehensive programmes of personal and social education to encourage pupils effectively to develop healthy lifestyles and behaviours. Staff frequently support pupils in learning how to stay safe and take responsibility for themselves and their actions. This approach builds pupils' confidence and helps them to develop secure values.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in two of the four PRUs inspected, good in one and adequate in the other.

Where leadership is excellent, the PRU's senior leader works successfully with staff to establish a powerful vision for their work. This vision places the needs of pupils at the core of all of the PRU's work and fosters a distinctive nurturing and supportive environment in which pupils flourish. In one PRU, the promotion of this vision and extremely strong partnership working with parents and mainstream schools support almost all pupils in returning to their mainstream schools and to maintain their placement there over time.

In the two PRUs where leadership and management are excellent, senior leaders set high expectations and model and promote professional values and behaviours such as mutual respect, openness and a willingness to learn. This approach contributes significantly to strong team working, trust and collaboration among staff. The passionate commitment of these leaders for promoting professional learning opportunities for all staff has contributed significantly to the progress and wellbeing of pupils. For example, staff are highly motivated to try out new approaches to improve outcomes for pupils. Staff also share aspects of their PRU's practice with other schools, including mainstream, special and PRUs, at local, regional and national events.

Three PRUs have developed comprehensive arrangements to evaluate the quality of their work and to plan for improvements. Information from processes such as lesson observations, work scrutiny, and gathering pupils' and parents' views is effective in providing a clear picture of the quality of provision at each PRU and priorities for improvement.

Where leadership and management require improvement, self-evaluation processes are not sharp enough or information is not evaluated thoroughly enough to identify suitable targets as part of improvement planning.

Follow-up activity

This year, we identified one PRU as requiring Estyn review. During the year, we removed two PRUs inspected in the previous academic years from Estyn review. Another PRU made enough improvement and no longer requires significant improvement. These PRUs have benefited from working collaboratively with other PRUs and schools, and with local authority officers and their regional consortium. For example, the helpful support that one PRU had from a special school enabled it to improve the way it monitors pupils' progress over time. At the end of this year, one PRU remains in special measures and two remain under Estyn review.

Denbighshire PRU

Denbighshire PRU's outreach team is integral to forming strong and effective links with mainstream schools. The PRU also has an open door policy, which encourages school-based staff to visit and observe best practice.

For more information, please read our **case study**



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Section 2

Sector summaries: Local government education services

2

Context

Local government education services include those provided or commissioned by a single local authority as well as those provided in partnership with other local authorities. School improvement services are provided largely through four regional consortia on behalf of local authorities.

Following two pilot inspections in 2017-2018, we reviewed our processes for inspecting local government education services. As a result of the review, we changed our inspection processes. We removed the judgements for individual inspection areas and replaced these with one overarching judgement on whether the local government education service is causing significant concern or not. We also changed our approach to the inspection areas. Inspectors continue to evaluate and report on all aspects of inspection areas 1 (outcomes) and 3 (leadership and management), but under inspection area 2 (education services) we set local inspection questions that are tailored to each local authority. Local inspection questions focus on education services that relate to the local authority's strategic priorities or result from information that we have about education services in the local authority. We agree the local inspection questions with the local authority prior to the inspection.

Sector summaries:

Local government education services

When we judge that a local government education service is causing significant concern, we hold a post-inspection improvement conference around three months after the core inspection. Senior leaders from the local authority and other stakeholders attend the conference, which focuses on the authority's plans to address shortcomings. Following the conference, we will continue to work closely with the local authority to support improvement until we are satisfied with progress against the recommendations in the inspection report.

Between September 2018 and July 2019, we carried out four inspections, in Newport, Bridgend, Flintshire and Powys. We judged that three of the local authorities do not require follow-up activity and that one causes significant concern.

We also visit all local authorities and regional consortia as part of our link inspector arrangements. These visits review progress against the recommendations of previous inspections and thematic reviews, as well as following up on key priorities in the sector. We undertook a more substantial link inspector visit to the ERW region (south-west and mid Wales) during this year due to concerns about the lack of progress since the previous monitoring visit. ERW planned significant changes to their workforce and approach from September 2019, and we continue to monitor ERW's progress. The findings from all these inspections and visits have informed this report.

Outcomes

Across the local authorities, many pupils make sound progress between the statutory school ages 5 to 16. Performance is generally stronger in primary schools than in secondary schools. Three of the four local authorities inspected this year have a recommendation about improving pupil performance in secondary schools. In Bridgend, pupils' standards at the end of key stage 4 are good. However, the proportion of primary schools that have at least good standards when inspected is below the average for Wales and inspectors have often noted weaknesses in pupils' literacy skills in these schools. In two of the local authorities inspected, pupils eligible for free school meals perform at least as well as the same group of pupils across Wales. However, in Newport, the performance of these pupils is weaker. Pupils in Newport who receive continuous support from the Gwent Education Minority-ethnic Service (GEMS) over a period of years perform well at the end of their statutory education. We asked officers from Newport to produce a case study about this work.

Pupils' attendance in primary schools is good in three of the four local authorities. Attendance of pupils in secondary schools is good in Bridgend but is weaker in the other three authorities. In Flintshire, the attendance of pupils in both primary and secondary schools does not compare well with levels in similar local authorities. In two of the local authorities inspected, the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent from school has been above the Wales average for the past three years (Welsh Government, 2019a).

The rate of permanent and fixed-term exclusions is too high in all the local authorities inspected this year.

Newport GEMS

Pupils who receive support from GEMS perform well at key stage 4 in the key indicators that include English/Welsh and mathematics. They achieve to a standard comparable with that of other pupils. The service helps pupils to develop their language skills rapidly through, for example, support from bilingual teaching assistants.

For more information, please read our [report](#)



Bridgend County Borough Council

Across the local authority, children and young people make a very positive contribution to influencing decisions that affect them made by their schools and the local authorities. Young people know that their contribution is valued and makes a difference.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Sector summaries:

Local government education services

In two of the four local authorities inspected, children and young people have good opportunities to influence decisions that affect them. For example, in Flintshire, young people worked with research officers from Cardiff University to analyse information from the Schools Health Research Network survey. They identified common issues about the health and wellbeing of pupils in secondary schools. This work has resulted in the development of a comprehensive local authority action plan to improve the health and wellbeing of young people in Flintshire. There is more information about this survey and the wellbeing of pupils in Wales in our thematic survey [Healthy and Happy](#), published in June 2019 (Estyn, 2019b). In Bridgend, the youth council has taken the lead in addressing 'period poverty' in schools. As a result of this work, free sanitary products were made available to all schools.

In Newport and Powys, opportunities for pupils to contribute to the strategic direction of the local authority or to help to evaluate the initiatives offered to them are underdeveloped.

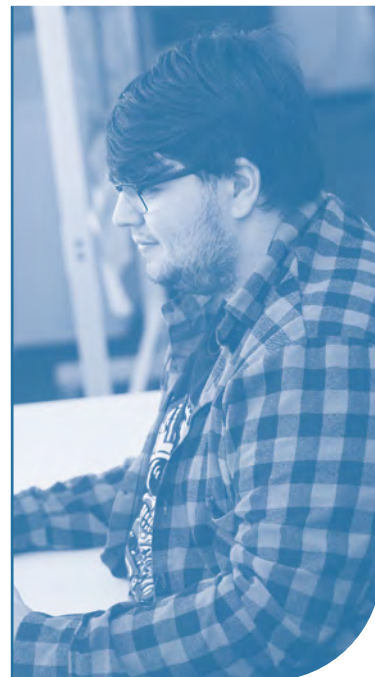
Education services

School improvement officers and challenge advisers generally know their schools well. The partnership between local authority school improvement officers and officers from the regional consortia are effective and officers work well together to provide support to schools. Officers develop good working relationships with schools. For example, the 'Team Bridgend' approach introduced in 2017 supports collaborative working between schools and the local authority well. This approach has helped to establish a collective responsibility for improving outcomes for all learners. Local authority officers in the local authorities inspected this year have improved the use they make of their statutory powers, for example by issuing warning notices to schools that need to improve.

In all four local authorities, challenge advisers have strengthened the support that they provide to schools. They carry out a good range of activities to gather first hand evidence about how well pupils perform, including lesson observations, learning walks and looking at pupils' books. However, the evaluations that officers and advisers make in order to judge progress often focus too heavily on performance data and provision rather than the standards that pupils achieve or the progress that they make.

The work that local authority officers and challenge advisers carry out does not always ensure that schools causing concern improve quickly enough. A few schools in all local authorities inspected this year either remain in statutory categories following inspection for too long or do not sustain improvements following a period of intensive support. As a result, outcomes and provision for pupils in these schools remain weak over time.

Local authorities generally use the resources available to them well to increase the levels of support that they provide for pupils with special educational needs and other pupils who require extra support. For example, they use the skills and expertise of teachers from PRUs and special schools to work with teachers and pupils in mainstream schools.



Sector summaries:

Local government education services

Bridgend local authority focuses well on supporting young carers in its schools. The vulnerable groups' team has established good working relationships with the children's social care service to provide training and support to the schools that young carers attend. In May 2019, we published a survey on the provision for young carers in secondary schools, further education colleges and PRUs across Wales (Estyn, 2019d). For more information please read the [report](#).

In Flintshire, the local authority provides good quality provision for pupils with special educational needs. The service is well resourced and its staff have significant expertise and experience. They provide clear and helpful guidance to schools to help them identify pupils' needs and secure relevant support. A notable feature of Flintshire's work is its strong early identification and intervention to support children's speech, language and communication skills. We asked the local authority to provide a case study outlining their work in this area.

In Powys, there is inadequate co ordination, evaluation and planning for pupils with special educational needs or those who require extra support. Provision for groups of vulnerable learners is too variable and the local authority's vision for pupils needing support is not communicated effectively to schools. Officers do not have a comprehensive overview of the needs of pupils and this limits their ability to meet the needs of vulnerable learners effectively.

In Newport, provision to support the wellbeing of children and young people is a high priority. The local authority monitors well the provision that schools make to improve pupils' wellbeing through its school wellbeing tracker. This enables officers to identify and share strong practice in schools. Officers know their school communities well and provide bespoke support to vulnerable pupils through a range of initiatives. For example, the 'see the world through our eyes' project has helped to promote inclusion through introducing pupils to the features of different cultures including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. In April 2019, we produced a survey about the provision that schools and local authorities make for secondary school-aged Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils (Estyn, 2019c). For more information please read the [report](#).

Leadership and management

In all four local authorities, senior leaders have a clear vision for education. In three of the four authorities, this vision informs corporate planning well. However, in Powys local authority, significant change of senior officers, including at chief executive, director and head of service levels, has affected the impact of leadership on key areas of the local authority's work.

Local authorities have good working relationships with their regional consortium. Officers generally contribute well to the management, governance and scrutiny of their consortium. Local authority and consortia officers share information about schools frequently to ensure that there is a shared understanding of school performance and that relevant support is provided.

Flintshire County Council

The Language Development Project enables well-resourced and effective universal, targeted and specialist support for younger pupils. The authority's language development assistants attend schools and work collaboratively with teachers to support individuals and small groups of pupils. In addition, the English as an additional language (EAL) service and the Language and Communication service deliver valuable training to teachers about early language acquisition. .

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Sector summaries:

Local government education services

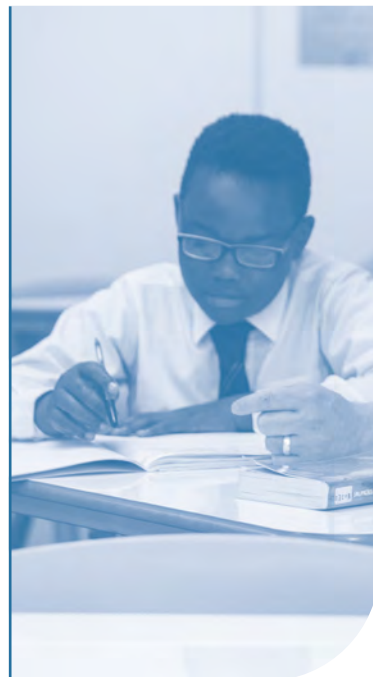
Improvement planning processes generally identify appropriately the most important aspects of education that need to improve. In most cases, these priorities provide a sound base for improving education at corporate and service level. Local authorities have, in the main, made appropriate progress in addressing their priorities and securing improvement. However, in Newport, although officers have been able to sustain good outcomes in primary schools and strong leadership of GEMS, they have not had enough impact on improving outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals or for pupils in the PRU. In Powys, leaders have not made strong, sustainable improvements to address many of the shortcomings identified during previous Estyn inspections or in Wales Audit Office reports.

Self-evaluation processes at corporate level are well established in three local authorities. In the best instances, officers take good account of contributions from stakeholders, including school leaders and pupils, to help them evaluate their services. This helps to ensure that officers and elected members have an accurate understanding of the education service's performance. However, there is variability in the quality of the evaluation of the work of specific education services in all of the local authorities inspected this year. These are not rigorous enough, do not always provide senior managers with the full impact of the services provided, or focus too much on headline data. In Powys, the local authority does not have a robust and ongoing self-evaluation process for its education service. Recently, senior leaders have developed a better understanding of the main issues facing the local authority, and elected members are beginning to challenge performance more effectively.

In three of the local authorities, scrutiny arrangements are well run and elected members are increasingly robust in monitoring and challenging progress and supporting decision-making in key areas. Powys local authority has been slow to develop its scrutiny arrangements and until very recently challenge has been weak.

Generally, the local authorities have suitable policies and procedures in relation to school re-organisation. Powys leaders, despite making modest progress in re organising primary schools through federation processes, have made very little progress in addressing the challenges of post-16 education. In July 2019, we published a report on the common features of effective federation (Estyn, 2019a). For further information please read the [report](#).

All local authorities show commitment to increasing Welsh-medium provision through their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. Progress in delivering the plans in three of the four local authorities has been slow or not strategic enough. Officers in Flintshire have responded well to an identified need to expand Welsh-medium education, and advisory and early years teams provide effective bespoke support to develop pupils' Welsh language skills from a very early age.



Sector summaries:

Local government education services

Staff in the education services of all local authorities take part in a range of useful professional learning opportunities to support and develop their work. In three of the four local authorities, these opportunities are planned as part of the corporate performance management framework and annual appraisal processes. Managers identify the individual strengths and learning needs of staff and link learning opportunities well to corporate priorities. In Powys local authority, very few education service staff have undertaken courses linked to a leadership pathway. As a result, there are limited opportunities for leadership succession planning within the service.

In three of the four local authorities, officers and elected members plan annual budgets carefully and in accordance with priorities. They respond appropriately to key pressures within the education budget and allocate resources to reflect the high priority placed on improving education outcomes. In Newport, officers take a proactive approach in seeking internal and external funding to deliver priorities, for example to improve school buildings and support minority ethnic pupils. However, in Powys and Flintshire authorities, financial management has not been robust enough to ensure that schools with deficit budgets reduce these within appropriate timescales.

Section 2

Sector summaries: Further education colleges

2

Context

In January 2019, there were 12 colleges providing further education courses in Wales.

Many of the further education colleges are large multi-sited institutions that cover a wide geographical area. A minority of colleges, such as Grwp Llandrillo Menai, NPTC Group and Coleg Cambria, operate under a group structure with multiple sites operating under separate college names under the overall control of one further education institution.

This year, we inspected two further education colleges. We continue to visit all colleges not inspected this year as part of routine further education link inspector visit arrangements. These visits review progress against the recommendations of previous inspections.

Sector summaries:

Further education colleges

Standards

Standards are excellent in one of the colleges inspected and good in the other. Where standards are excellent, learners demonstrate an exemplary ability to work independently and in groups, and to develop valuable skills and knowledge. Many exhibit particularly strong analytical and problem-solving skills, produce work of a consistently high standard, and demonstrate strong practical skills.

Where standards are judged as good, most learners make at least sound progress in lessons and produce work of a suitable standard. Many acquire new knowledge and skills. A few learners demonstrate strong analytical skills and in-depth understanding of important concepts. For example, AS chemistry learners use their knowledge of mass spectrometry to determine atomic structure. However, a few learners do not know what they need to do to improve their learning and standard of work.

A levels in sixth forms and further education colleges (Estyn, 2018a)

This reports on standards, provision and leadership of GCE Advanced Levels (A levels) in school sixth forms and further education colleges. It considers a range of factors, such as standards at A level and how these are measured, the quality of teaching and assessment, the nature of the A level curriculum offer and strategic leadership, including partnership working.



Across both colleges, many vocational learners develop valuable practical skills. For example, learners in hairdressing and theatrical make-up demonstrate strong creativity and produce a consistently high standard of practical work.

Many learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses make significant progress in their English literacy skills. A few Welsh-speaking learners actively develop their use of the language and are supported well by their teachers. For example, beauty learners give bilingual presentations, and healthcare learners undertake work experience on a Welsh-medium hospital ward. Overall however, only a very few learners use their Welsh language skills regularly in lessons.

Where standards are excellent, learners achieve outstanding grades at the end of their courses relative to their prior GCSE attainment. In one college, the proportion of A level learners achieving A*-A, A*-B and A*-C grades is high, as is the attainment of high grades for vocational qualifications.

In both colleges, most learners from deprived backgrounds, minority ethnic learners and learners with learning difficulties or disabilities make strong progress relative to their starting points and achieve consistently high success rates.



Sector summaries:

Further education colleges

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are excellent in one of the colleges and good in the other. Nearly all learners feel safe and free from harassment and bullying at college. Many have a clear understanding of making healthy lifestyle choices and the importance of good hygiene, diet and fitness.

Where wellbeing and attitudes to learning are excellent, many learners develop highly effective work skills and behaviours. For example, learners participating in external placements and skills competitions develop very strong problem-solving skills, determination and resilience that support their career aspirations and help progression into employment or further study.

During their time at college, most learners gain an understanding of ethical, global and moral issues. They particularly value the multicultural and inclusive ethos of the colleges. Learners respect diversity very well and are highly supportive of each other. They feel valued and respected regardless of their faith, ethnic, or socio-economic background.

Most learners enjoy college life. They are ambitious and demonstrate a positive and enthusiastic attitude to their learning. Most are confident and considerate when interacting with their peers and staff in sessions and around the college.

Many learners develop valuable leadership skills through participation in activities such as peer tutoring, mentoring, charity fundraising, enrichment programmes, enterprise events and community projects. For example, ESOL learners organise food collections for local food banks and hair and beauty learners provide treatments for patients at a local hospital. A few learners demonstrate excellent leadership skills when undertaking student ambassador and course representative roles. Through these activities, learners develop confidence, decision-making and wider employability skills.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching and learning experiences are good in both of the colleges inspected. In both colleges, leaders have a very clear and strategic approach to planning their provision and the extent to which it helps learners to progress successfully into employment or higher education. In particular, they draw on strong links with employers, higher education institutions and their local communities to plan and develop the curriculum well.

The outcome of this approach is a broad range of courses that provide learners with clear progression routes into further and higher education as well as supporting entry into an extensive range of employment and training opportunities. The range of options available to learners includes specialist subjects and vocational pathways that are not widely available elsewhere. One of the colleges is also working well with local partners to keep waiting times for enrolment onto ESOL programmes to a minimum.



Sector summaries:

Further education colleges

The colleges provide useful work experience and work-related education for learners on vocational courses, either with employers or through college facilities such as commercial salons, retail outlets and restaurant facilities. In addition, learners aspiring to progress to university to study subjects such as medicine and law benefit from valuable opportunities to engage with professionals and academics in these fields. Overall however, opportunities for A level learners to take part in work experience placements are limited.

Nearly all teachers have up-to-date subject knowledge and experience. Most use a range of approaches and resources well, including digital materials, to engage learners' interest and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. In practical vocational sessions, many teachers challenge learners to develop industry specific and wider employability skills. For example, public services teachers use realistic fitness training scenarios to develop learners' leadership skills and, in media and information technology, teachers give worthwhile live briefs to learners, such as recording live music for the radio.

Many teachers plan their lessons well and organise engaging activities to help learners develop their knowledge, understanding and skills progressively. A few teachers do not provide enough opportunities for learners to discuss and debate issues or consider alternative viewpoints. A minority of teachers do not use questioning sufficiently well to stretch and challenge learners, for example to challenge perceptions or encourage counter-arguments.

Many teachers provide learners with valuable verbal feedback in lessons and a majority set them useful targets. Many also provide useful and constructive written feedback, including an appropriate focus on learners' literacy skills. A few teachers do not give learners effective guidance to help them improve their work and few learners are aware of their short-term targets, especially in relation to improving their literacy or numeracy skills. As a result, these learners are unclear about what they need to do to improve their work.

Both colleges have appropriate pathways for learners needing to re-sit mathematics and English GCSE examinations. However, this provision is not consistently good enough, especially in mathematics. Overall, there is a need to improve the planning and evaluation of how learners develop literacy, numeracy and digital skills through their vocational programmes.

Both colleges offer useful 'Iaith ar Waith' courses for learners following vocational programmes. They also work well to implement useful initiatives such as providing Welsh-medium pastoral support or Welsh Baccalaureate sessions, and hosting bilingual subject conferences to support the very few learners who previously attended Welsh-medium secondary schools. In general, only a few teachers provide opportunities for learners to develop their Welsh language skills.

Cardiff and Vale College

Cardiff and Vale College embeds employer-linked work-related education into its vocational courses. All vocational learners have the opportunity to take part in 'real, not just realistic' work-related activities formally linked into their programmes of study. This helps learners develop valuable personal, employability and leadership skills.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Sector summaries:

Further education colleges

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are good in both of the colleges inspected. The colleges have effective arrangements to help potential learners understand the opportunities that they offer and how individual support needs will be met. They provide useful information and advice about provision to help potential learners make informed choices. Learners benefit from being able to attend open events, taster sessions and guidance interviews at various times throughout the year.

College staff have developed strong links with schools, and learners with prior statements of special educational needs are supported well. Staff make good use of the information they receive about learners to help put specialist arrangements in place and provide assistive technology where necessary. Examples of this support include the provision of a customised chair, specialist support workers and a sign language interpreter.

Staff track the progress of learners with other support needs regularly and there are effective links between specialist support teams, pastoral staff and teachers. This enables support to be responsive to changes in learner needs. The colleges have effective systems to monitor attendance, progress and behaviour of all learners. A minority of staff do not monitor and challenge punctuality well enough and the effectiveness of target setting is also variable, especially in relation to learners' personal development.

Wellbeing staff in specialist learning support centres and across the colleges provide a wide range of helpful and easily accessible services to support learners. For example, counselling services help to support learners with mental health and emotional wellbeing needs, although waiting lists for appointments are sometimes too long.

In one college, work with local community groups is particularly successful in engaging learners who are hard to reach. For example, provision within minority ethnic communities is extensive. Other initiatives to improve parents' numeracy skills, enable better identification and support of young carers and widen participation in college provision and regional networks for more able learners are also effective. In the other college, support for learners who are aiming to progress to higher education is particularly strong, and many learners take part in worthwhile community volunteering activities, such as sports coaching in local schools and youth groups.

Both colleges have established a strong multicultural ethos, and staff help learners to understand issues such as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. This encourages learners to work together in a respectful and mutually supportive manner.

Sector summaries:

Further education colleges

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in one of the colleges and good in the other. Where leadership and management are excellent, the principal and senior leaders apply the college's distinctive 'servant leadership' principles particularly well. This approach promotes a harmonious multi-faith and multi-cultural environment and secures sustained high standards.

Where leadership and management are good, senior leaders have a clear vision that is highly focused on meeting the education, training and business needs of the local community and city region. The college's partnership arrangements with employers, local authorities, schools and community groups are exceptionally strong and impact on economic growth and skills development within the region.

In both colleges, the chief executive or principal is well supported by the governing body. Governors take an active role in shaping their college's strategic direction and providing appropriate support, scrutiny and challenge. They monitor the performance of the college effectively.

College leaders are ambitious for the colleges and their learners. They have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and provide effective strategic leadership. Middle leaders benefit from targeted training and professional development opportunities to develop their leadership experience and help them undertake their roles effectively. This enables them to play a proactive role in monitoring and improving the quality of provision in their departments.

Colleges have a wide range of practices to support the professional development of their staff. These include valuable college-wide development activities and tailored programmes for individual staff. One college focuses its professional learning on six clear pedagogical principles of challenge, explanation, modelling, practice, feedback and questioning. It has also developed a useful online 'learning observatory' of teaching and development resources, including video of effective practice across the college. The other college has identified clear and widely-understood key priorities for professional learning as leadership, inspiring teachers and commercial business support. In both colleges, teaching observation processes and appraisal systems link effectively to college priorities and the identification of professional development needs.

St David's Sixth Form College

College leaders at St David's Sixth Form College use the servant leader methodology to develop highly effective, engaged teams of staff that work together to secure outstanding outcomes by learners. This supportive leadership approach models and promotes professional values and behaviours that secure college-wide improvements, including strong collaboration between staff members.

For more information, please read our **case study**



St David's Sixth Form College

St David's Sixth Form College's professional development work improves teaching through an emphasis on observation, deep self-reflection, coaching and collaboration. This approach fosters a culture whereby staff strive for excellence and engage positively in activities to improve the quality of their teaching and help learners reach their full potential.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Sector summaries:

Further education colleges

Where arrangements for quality improvement are excellent, the college's self-evaluation processes at all levels are comprehensive and robust. They use well designed criteria to arrive at secure judgements in a transparent and self-critical manner. These arrangements help to inform detailed and effective improvement plans. Overall, the college's cohesive leadership approach across all levels has helped it sustain strong outcomes over time.

College leaders demonstrate strong understanding of resource planning and manage resources well. They undertake significant capital investments to ensure that their estate is fit for purpose and forms a stimulating learning environment.

Follow-up activity

Neither of the colleges inspected this year requires follow-up activity. No specific follow-up visits to consider further education provision in colleges took place this year.



Section 2

Sector summaries: Work-based learning

2

Context

In January 2019, there were 19 contract holders commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver work based learning in Wales. By August 2019, this has reduced to 18 contract holders. The majority of these providers work in consortia or use sub-contracted training providers. Approximately 100 sub-contracted providers deliver work-based learning. This is similar to January 2018. The latest published information shows that, in 2017-2018, 63,120 learners undertook work based learning programmes (Welsh Government, 2019i, p.15). Of these, approximately 20,515 enrolled on level 2 foundation apprenticeships and almost 35,305 on level 3 apprenticeships or level 4 higher apprenticeships. Around 7,300 learners undertook other training, including level 1 traineeship and employability programmes (Welsh Government, 2019i).

Between September 2018 and July 2019, we inspected two work based learning providers. The findings from these inspections have informed this report.

Sector summaries:

Work-based learning

Standards

Standards are good in the two providers inspected this year. Most learners on apprenticeship programmes develop a wide range of vocational skills and theory knowledge that are closely matched to their work roles. They make useful and relevant connections between the theory they learn and their job roles. Most make sound progress and are confident in applying their vocational skills in their workplaces.

In traineeship engagement programmes, most learners develop a good range of relevant skills for employability. Many traineeship learners improve their confidence and self-esteem and overcome significant barriers to learning and employment.

Many apprenticeship learners are clear about their own progress and use relevant targets to focus their efforts and to improve their work. However, a few learners rely too much on support from their assessors when setting assessment targets or they complete their frameworks later than expected.

Many learners make positive progress in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills development through effective use of the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit. A few learners achieve essential skills qualifications at a higher level than their framework requirements. A few Welsh language speakers choose to undertake some assessments through the medium of Welsh, although many learners do not recognise the benefits of Welsh as a workplace skill.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in the two providers inspected this year. Most learners enjoy their learning, show a positive work ethic, and build a good rapport with their teachers, assessors and employers.

Many learners, including those who start from a low base, improve their confidence, self-awareness, resilience and social skills. They develop independent learning and thinking skills and use these well, such as when carrying out daily tasks in the workplace. Many collaborate with each other, manage their time effectively and work well under pressure. They respond willingly to questions and group discussion, although in one provider a few learners do not contribute enough.

Many traineeship learners who have significant barriers to learning, such as mental health issues, special educational needs or unsettled home lives, are attentive in classes and participate well. Most attend regularly, although in one provider a minority of learners do not attend regularly or do not sustain attendance throughout the day.

In traineeship classes and in progress reviews, learners discuss the benefits of healthy eating and positive lifestyle choices. For example, they discuss the benefits of physical activity, the dangers of drugs and over indulgence in alcohol. In one provider, a few learners do not develop an understanding of radicalisation and extremism.

Sector summaries:

Work-based learning

Most learners have a secure understanding of health and safety in the workplace and know whom to contact should problems, such as bullying or harassment, arise at work, in the training centre or at college. Most learners improve their understanding of equality and diversity. They understand how to stay safe online and in one provider use a range of innovative online resources to help improve their wellbeing. This provider developed a variety of useful 'apps' to access information and guidance on a variety of safety and safeguarding issues.

Many learners take part in worthwhile projects and charitable activities, often linked to their learning pathways. For example, hair and beauty learners provide treatments in care homes and construction learners build outdoor facilities in a local school. Other activities, such as volunteering in food banks, working with the homeless and tidying up outdoor spaces, help learners appreciate environmental sustainability and develop social awareness.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching and learning experiences are good in the two providers inspected this year. Most teachers and assessors deliver well-planned and structured sessions that develop learners' theory knowledge, technical competence and life skills. Most have relevant and up-to-date subject expertise and vocational experience, which they draw on well to help learners make good progress in both practical and theory work. For example, in hospitality, an assessor helps a trainee chef prepare complex dishes and, in electro-technical engineering, another draws on up-to-date knowledge of wiring regulations when discussing a learner's electrical plant maintenance plan.

Most teachers who deliver traineeship engagement programmes adapt their teaching to meet the needs of learners. For example, they plan a good balance of theory and practical outdoor activities for learners involved in a military preparation course. In off the job sessions, many teachers use high-quality resources to engage learners and create stimulating sessions. For example, in one provider, they use tablet computers and web-based tools to create interactive quizzes and tasks as well as using industry standard equipment, such as robotic arms and computer aided design technologies, to develop vocational skills.

Many teachers and assessors set high expectations for learners and use questioning to extend learners' understanding and challenge them to reflect on their learning. In a very few cases, assessors ask questions that are too leading or teachers allow one or two learners to dominate discussions, preventing other learners from contributing.

In on-the-job training, nearly all assessors maintain regular contact with learners. They use individual learning plans and contact logs in progress reviews to help learners plan their progress towards achieving their learning goals. In a few cases, one provider sets targets that are either too generic or overly focused on assessment outcomes. This results in learners being unclear as to what they need to do to improve their learning. In a very few cases, in one provider, assessors do not make sure that employers are kept fully apprised of their employees' progress.



Sector summaries:

Work-based learning

Providers have well-established and strong relationships with a wide range of employers and are particularly responsive to learners' aspirations, the needs of employers and the regional economy. They deliver a wide range of vocational pathways, such as advanced manufacturing, health and social care, digital marketing and professional cookery. On most training programmes, learners participate in realistic or simulated work related activities. Providers offer clear progression routes for traineeship learners and between apprenticeship programmes.

Most teachers and assessors encourage learners to use the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. In a few cases, assessors do not take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to develop these skills through learners' job roles or do not give learners enough feedback on what they need to do to improve their literacy or numeracy skills.

One provider offers useful Welsh language classes tailored to the learners' vocational needs, such as for business administration apprentices in a local council. However, only a few assessors encourage learners to develop or improve their use of Welsh as a workplace skill. Overall, although providers offer learners the option to be assessed through the medium of Welsh, too few Welsh speaking learners complete assessments or undertake aspects of their programme through the medium of Welsh.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are good in the two providers inspected this year. The providers' arrangements for identifying learners who require additional support for learning are suitable. Learning support teams offer learners a range of valuable services, including learning support, counselling, advice and guidance. Providers work well with appropriate external agencies to support learners who face personal, financial or health challenges. In a few cases, identification of learning support needs comes too late in the programme to allow learners to progress at the pace they are capable of.

Providers' support arrangements for learners on traineeship programmes are particularly effective. For example, providers use attendance and wellbeing officers and resilience coaches to provide timely and useful support to learners who are at risk of disengaging from learning. Providers also promote healthy lifestyles and support personal development well. Support arrangements in a few delivery partners are less effective because they do not engage well with the relatively few apprenticeship learners who require extra support.

Providers are successful in providing opportunities for learners to take part in a range of community and fundraising activities. For example, one group of learners built an outdoor learning environment for a local school using materials donated by their employers, and traineeship learners interviewed local business owners about how they interact with their communities.



Sector summaries:

Work-based learning

Many staff support learners well to develop their appreciation of key equality and diversity issues. For example, they routinely discuss equality, diversity, values of tolerance and respect as well as encouraging learners to develop empathy and challenge stereotypes.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in one provider inspected this year and good in the other. Senior leaders provide clear direction to staff and partners. In one provider, leadership is guided by a well-established set of behaviours and, in the other, leaders have established a supportive and positive culture that promotes the wellbeing of learners and staff well.

Leaders in both providers respond well to regional and national priorities, for example by delivering growth in higher and degree apprenticeships and in Welsh Government priority areas. Both providers develop customised, responsive provision that meets employer needs and benefits learners. In one provider, there are outstanding and highly effective links with a broad range of employers.

Governors play an important role in setting strategic priorities and are well informed on providers' strengths and areas for improvement. Providers make very good use of data and first-hand evidence as part of quality monitoring and improvement processes. Senior leaders, partners and governors are fully involved in self evaluation. Providers make effective use of learner and employer surveys, due diligence checks, teaching and learning observations, best practice sharing sessions, and face-to-face meetings with delivery partners to help inform quality improvement strategies. In one provider, self-evaluation and improvement planning is too heavily based on the performance of a few large delivery partners.

Both providers use staff performance appraisals well to plan useful professional development activities for staff. Partner organisations have appropriate access to training programmes. In one provider, nearly all assessors undertake highly beneficial annual vocational placements, ensuring that their expertise is current.

Providers monitor financial performance and compliance well. Leaders ensure investment in a useful range of capital developments that enable learners to access high quality, modern learning resources.

Follow-up activity

Neither of the providers inspected this year requires follow-up activity. This year, follow-up activities have been undertaken with three providers. One provider is judged to have made at least sufficient progress in respect of the key issues for action following previous Estyn visits and has been removed from the list of providers requiring Estyn monitoring. A further two providers are judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following their most recent Estyn inspection and have been removed from the list of providers requiring re-inspection.

Coleg Cambria

One of Coleg Cambria's strategic objectives is to provide employer-led learning. The provider develops many and varied opportunities to engage all types of employers, from micro-businesses to large multinational organisations. By cultivating long-lasting mutually beneficial partnerships it provides valuable opportunities for learners and contributes to economic growth for the region.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Section 2

Sector summaries: Adult community learning

2

Context

Adult learning is delivered by 15 partnerships across Wales and Addysg Oedolion Cymru / Adult Learning Wales. The partnerships receive funding from the Welsh Government through the local authority, except Adult Learning Wales, which receives funding for adult learning through the Welsh Government as a further education college. Membership of the partnerships differs from area to area, but most will include provision offered by the local authority, further education college and voluntary organisations.

In July 2019, the Minister for Education made a statement setting out the Welsh Government's formal response to the consultation on proposals for restructuring the delivery and funding of community-based adult learning in Wales and on the next steps for the sector.

This year, Estyn undertook a pilot inspection of Addysg Oedolion Cymru / Adult Learning Wales.

Sector summaries:

Adult community learning

Standards

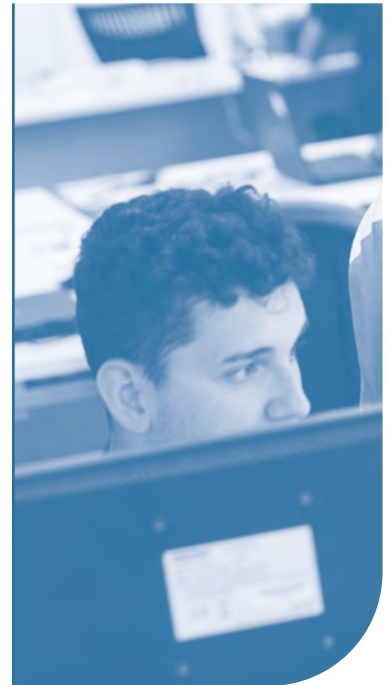
Overall, adult learners make sound progress in their studies both in the shorter and longer term and they successfully complete their courses and qualifications at good rates. Many adult learners gain accreditation through their studies.

On literacy courses, most adult learners make strong progress towards their personal goals. Learners on more advanced literacy courses research areas of interest and talk in detail about topics that are important to them in their daily lives and work. On numeracy courses, many learners show that they have a good understanding of basic numeracy, such as simple addition and household budgeting. In entry level classes for ESOL, learners speak simple English confidently and understand sentences written in simple English. More advanced learners speak English relatively fluently with accurate pronunciation and intonation. They can write complex sentences correctly and write well in different genres for different audiences. Less advanced learners in digital skills make sound progress in basic file management and developing their understanding of a range of operating systems. More advanced learners develop skills in word processing, in using spreadsheets and in creating simple databases. A few learners do not make quick enough progress in digital skills because the teaching approaches do not stretch higher ability learners appropriately. A few Welsh speakers use Welsh in class with their peers and exchange simple greetings and pleasantries with their tutors and peers. However, overall, adult learners do not develop, or extend, their existing Welsh language skills enough through their learning programmes.

Many adult learners come to their courses from disadvantaged areas and face challenging personal circumstances. Nearly all learners are proactive and enthusiastic about their learning. They attend regularly and they often travel long distances to take part in class. Many learners gain valuable life and employment skills. They increase their confidence and enjoyment of life through learning, with many learners progressing to further study, gaining promotion in work or going into employment. As a result of their engagement with learning, many others take on active roles in their communities, for example joining local groups and serving on committees.

Teaching and learning

Most tutors plan lessons effectively to take good account of the varied levels of learning and experience found in adult learning classes. They balance an appropriate amount of introduction to new aspects of the subject with a range of opportunities with which learners of differing abilities and interests can engage. Most support assistants work effectively with tutors and support learning well. In most cases, tutors use questioning techniques carefully to engage learners in discussion and problem solving. This helps learners to develop good employment and social skills, such as active listening, and it often helps less confident learners to voice their appropriately argued opinions in a supportive atmosphere. In most cases, tutors use teaching approaches that help learners to develop independent learning skills, such as research and



Sector summaries:

Adult community learning

review skills, which lead to well-argued assignments. Most tutors use an interesting range of materials to support learning, although very few materials are available bilingually.

In a very few cases, tutors' planning does not take good enough account of learners' individual learning needs. They spend too long presenting material. This slows the pace of the lesson and more able learners become distracted.

Many tutors embed literacy, numeracy and digital skills activities well into lessons. These activities are most useful when they reflect everyday problems that learners might encounter at work or in their family and social lives. For example, tutors encourage ESOL learners practising to pass the driving theory test to work with a partner to read the handbook aloud and decide upon an answer.

Leadership and management

Most senior leaders have worked effectively with stakeholders to produce a clear vision for the partnership with well-articulated strategies and appropriately high expectations. Most governors have a good understanding of the work of the partnership. They offer robust challenge and support. They take good account of national, regional and local priorities. Most middle leadership staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Senior leaders and middle leaders monitor and track learners' progress effectively and they hold regular meetings, which helps to ensure consistency across the partnership. The partnership offers staff regular opportunities to further their professional learning. However, it does not offer tutors enough opportunities to share practice and resources across the partnership to improve teaching and learning. The partnership's self-evaluation processes lack rigour and do not draw on a wide enough range of evidence, nor do the self-evaluation processes focus enough on the impact of actions. Quality development plans set out the areas for improvement clearly, but in many cases targets are too generic. Senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the budget. They take appropriate measures to ensure that the budget is well matched to the partnership's needs and to maintain a small surplus.

Adult Learning Wales

Learners at Adult Learning Wales were encouraged to enhance their awareness of cultural differences and the diversity of different areas of Wales. Learners took the opportunity to extend their vocabulary and understand other cultures through organised trips. These extra activities have helped to increase learners' self-esteem and confidence to integrate with communities other than their own.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Section 2

Sector summaries: Initial teacher education

2

Context

During 2018-2019, three regional centres of initial teacher education (ITE), the Graduate Teacher Programme and the Additional Graduate Training Programme (called 'Teach First') provided routes to become a qualified teacher in Wales. The latest public statistics show that, in 2018-2019, the three regional centres between them trained 605 primary school student teachers and 450 secondary school student teachers (Welsh Government, 2019f, p.5).

In 2019, our annual monitoring visits to the three centres focused on students' standards in planning and evaluating their teaching and the centre's assessment of their progress in meeting the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

Sector summaries:

Initial teacher education

Progress and standards

Generally, students make suitable progress towards achieving the standards for QTS, but there is too much variation in the quality of mentoring, support and school experiences. In many cases, this has an adverse effect on students' progress.

The assessment of student teachers' progress by tutors and mentors in their school experiences is too variable, across and within providers. Overall, the use of grade descriptors and the application of assessment criteria are too inconsistent to enable students to make the best progress.

Across the sector, providers are developing useful processes for capturing information and data on students' standards. Although this provides a broad understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in students' standards, this information is not analysed well enough to identify specific areas for improvement. This means that ITE staff do not have a detailed enough understanding of key improvement priorities in relation to students' standards and progress.

Lesson planning

In a majority of instances, students are conscientious in their planning. They respond positively to their tutors' and mentors' guidance.

Generally, students on primary programmes develop their lesson planning skills more effectively than those on secondary programmes.

Students' lesson planning is notably stronger in the South East Centre. These students' plans reflect effective practice to develop students' understanding of teaching on their programmes. Students also benefit from clear guidance provided by the centre to improve their skills.

In the best examples of students' lesson planning, there is a clear relationship between intended learning outcomes, lesson content, teaching approaches and the assessment of pupils' progress. However, too many students plan learning objectives for pupils that are too broad and focus too heavily on describing what pupils will do rather than what they might learn. They do not have a clear understanding of how to write precise success criteria. As a result, they are not able to evaluate the quality of learning well enough.

A majority of students demonstrate an understanding of the need to plan for the different needs of pupils in their classes. Students on primary programmes develop this skill more successfully than students on secondary programmes.

In a majority of cases, lesson planning forms do not help students to plan effectively. In particular, they do not encourage students to act on their assessment of pupils' progress, or assist students to integrate formative assessment strategies into their lesson plans. This also means that students planning over a series of lessons lack sufficient attention to pupils' progress.

Sector summaries:

Initial teacher education

Cardiff Metropolitan University

In Cardiff Metropolitan University (part of the South East Wales centre), PGCE students training to teach secondary Welsh and modern foreign languages visit a multi-lingual educational centre in the Basque Country to observe lessons taught in Basque, Spanish, English and French, and to study the teaching and promotion of Basque as a minority language. During the visit students develop their knowledge and understanding of effective approaches to language teaching, and consider cross-language curriculum planning that helps to prepare them for teaching the Curriculum for Wales. Through observing and reflecting on innovative multi-lingual teaching practices, the students develop their skills in teaching and learning for effective language acquisition. Their subsequent lesson planning shows the impact of creative approaches to language learning, and a good understanding of how to make imaginative connections between learning Welsh and other languages.

Students' knowledge and understanding

Overall, most students' subject knowledge is secure and they have a sound understanding of the current curriculum requirements and foundation phase principles.

Most students have a suitable understanding of the impact the current programme of education reform in Wales is likely to have on the curriculum. This understanding is stronger on primary programmes where students have greater opportunities in their school experiences to explore thematic approaches to teaching.

Where the centre's provision emphasises creative subject and phase pedagogies, students use this knowledge to plan imaginative and interesting lessons for their pupils. In the most effective examples, students' planning demonstrates imaginative approaches to subject teaching, which include appropriate consideration of developments such as the new curriculum and the digital competency framework. However, in too many instances, students do not develop their subject pedagogies well enough.

Sector summaries:

Initial teacher education

Students' skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT and their planning to develop pupils' skills

Many students have secure skills in literacy numeracy and in ICT. In general, students on primary programmes plan useful opportunities for pupils to develop their skills. Secondary students planning for pupils' development in literacy, numeracy, ICT and Welsh in English-medium schools is less secure. Overall, students who are training to teach through the medium of Welsh improve their skills successfully throughout the duration of their programme.

Students' evaluation of their teaching and pupils' learning

The quality of students' reflections in their classroom experiences is too variable. Too many students' evaluations are descriptive and do not analyse well enough the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning. Overall, students do not develop their critical skills well enough over the duration of their programmes.

Target setting for students' progress

In the best examples, mentor and tutor feedback to students focuses clearly on the precise areas that they need to improve. However, overall, there is too much variation in the quality of written feedback to students. As a result, in too many cases, the targets set by tutors and mentors do not enable students to develop their understanding, or hone their skills to improve their teaching. In general, target-setting processes are overly complex and are not aligned well enough to help students to make the necessary improvements in their teaching.

2

Context

In 2016, the Welsh Government transferred responsibility for the Welsh for Adults sector to the National Centre for Learning Welsh (National Centre). The National Centre allocates funding and provides strategic direction and quality assurance in the sector. It funds 11 providers to deliver Welsh for Adults courses in their designated geographical areas. These providers are branded as Learn Welsh providers. In 2017-2018, 12,680 individual adult learners registered on mainstream Welsh for Adults courses with these providers (Welsh Government, 2019c).

Following the implementation of the National Centre's Data Management Plan, this is the first full year of data available to share and is a national baseline for the sector. It will be possible to make year-on-year comparisons from the baseline established under this new structure. Learning opportunities are offered at five levels. In 2017-2018, 51% of learners were at Entry (beginners) level, 18% at Foundation level with 31% at Intermediate or Advanced levels, (including Proficiency level courses). In 2017-2018, 42% of all learning opportunities were delivered on courses of between 50 and 79 hours duration (Welsh Government, 2019c). The National Centre has a strategic objective to offer more intensive courses, in order to accelerate learners' progress towards fluency. In 2017-2018 12% of learning opportunities delivered more than 110 hours of learning.

Sector summaries:

Welsh for Adults

The National Centre receives extra funding from the Welsh Government for the 'Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh' programme that aims to strengthen bilingual skills in the workplace. Nearly 13,000 learners have taken part in the programme since it commenced in April 2017. As well as being a valuable addition to the Welsh for Adults sector, the scheme has extended into other areas such as further and higher education. Under the scheme, staff and lecturers access Welsh language lessons to develop their Welsh language skills and use them in their work and teaching. The scheme has also extended its work to courses for the early years' education and childcare workforce, the health and care sectors, apprenticeships providers and the private sector. During the present inspection cycle (2018-2024), we aim to inspect the National Centre twice.

Between September 2018 and July 2019, we inspected one Welsh for Adults provider.

Inspection findings

In May 2019, we carried out an inspection in Learn Welsh Swansea Bay Area, Swansea University. All inspection areas were judged to be good.

Learn Welsh Swansea Bay Area is a close-knit and inclusive community that offers suitable care and support to learners. Most learners develop a range of linguistic skills with the main emphasis on speaking Welsh within useful and meaningful contexts. Over time, most learners become increasingly confident Welsh speakers. Nearly all learners have very clear reasons for learning Welsh. Most are enthusiastic and ambitious learners who enjoy their learning.

Most tutors plan lessons effectively to meet learners' needs. They vary the activities during lessons skilfully and maintain a lively atmosphere whilst introducing and practising the language. Most tutors provide useful and encouraging oral feedback, which helps learners improve important aspects of their work. The quality of written feedback to learners about how to improve their written work varies too much.

Learn Welsh Swansea Bay Area's provision includes a wide range of formal and informal activities to practise the language. These include opportunities to use Welsh socially and take part in visits that extend learners' knowledge of the Welsh language and culture, for example visits to the Urdd Eisteddfod and the Christmas Festival in St Fagans National Museum of History.

Leaders and managers have established a clear vision and purposeful strategic aims that are consistent with the plans of the National Centre for Learning Welsh. Senior leaders have successfully maintained a high standard of provision during a period of re-organisation.

2

Context

During the year, there were no inspections of Career Choices Dewis Gyrfa Ltd (CCDG), which trades as Gyrfa Cymru Careers Wales. The company was formed in 2013, and is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Career Choices Dewis Gyrfa delivers a blended service that integrates the use of digital technologies alongside more traditional, face-to-face channels of delivery. It provides an all age, independent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance service for Wales.

The requirements for Careers Wales services are set out in an annual remit letter from the Welsh Government. This is underpinned by the articles of association for Career Choices Dewis Gyrfa and a framework document, which is used as a basis for the Careers Wales annual business plan. Careers Wales aims to help people make effective decisions in managing their careers and progressing within training, further learning or employment. In this way it aims to contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of Wales. In the period since 2010, changes in its remit and reductions in its operating budget have led to many changes to the structure, staffing and role of the company, including its withdrawal from supporting young people to access work experience.

Sector summaries:

Careers

In April 2017, Careers Wales launched their three year vision, 'Changing Lives' (2017). The vision refocused resources on young people, with a particular emphasis on key stage 4 and support at other transition points up to the age of 19.

The reduced resources available to the company have increased the importance of the role that schools should have in helping young people to plan their career progression.

During this year, we published a thematic report on [A levels in sixth forms and further education colleges](#) (Estyn, 2018a). This report identified that, while many learners and their parents are happy with the quality of advice and guidance they have received from staff in schools and colleges, in reality they do not have access to clear information about which are the best A level providers in their locality. Advice and guidance for a few learners, mainly those with low attainment at GCSE, are unsuitable. These learners are more likely not to complete Year 12 or not to progress to Year 13 than other learners. In general, advice and guidance from teachers are too focused on academic routes such as A levels and university, at the expense of other career paths. In schools with sixth forms, advice and guidance from staff are often focused on keeping learners in their sixth form.

Section 2

Sector summaries: Learning in the justice sector

2

Context

In Wales, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Probation leads inspections of youth offending teams. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons leads on inspections of prisons, including the young offenders' institution, and the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) leads on inspections of secure children's homes. Estyn joins these teams to inspect the quality of education and training.

Sector summaries:

Learning in the justice sector

Prisons

This year, Estyn worked with partners to inspect HMP Berwyn, HMP Cardiff and the young offenders' institution in HMP Parc. These reports can be found here:

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons

Provision for adults

In the adult prisons that Estyn inspected, most prisoners make effective progress towards their learning goals and most improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Many improve their awareness of how they can break cycles of offending behaviour.

In both prisons, many tutors plan sessions well, maintaining prisoners' focus for extended periods of time. Most engage and inspire prisoners to participate in activities. Trained peer mentors provide valuable, individualised support to learners. Both prisons assess prisoners' needs well, helping them to choose the opportunities that best suit their long term aims. In Cardiff, good outreach support to prisoners encourages prisoners to participate in education, training and employment.

Both prisons have effective partnerships that help prisoners to gain skills and improve their experience and employability. Both have sufficient places to engage nearly all prisoners in purposeful activity. However, since HMP Berwyn opened in 2017, the range of education, training and work has not met the needs of the population.

Leaders in both prisons make effective use of labour market information and employer partnerships to inform the planning of provision that improved prisoners' opportunities for employment. For example, barista training in Cardiff and an on-site distribution warehouse in Berwyn has enabled a few prisoners to gain real work experience.

Provision for young people

Estyn worked with its partners to inspect the education and training provision for young people in HMP Parc.

Nearly all learners attain appropriately. Many respond well to being set challenging activities that extend their learning and skills. Most learners make very strong progress in their learning from their starting points.

Sector summaries:

Learning in the justice sector

The broad range of activities enables all learners to select options that match their interests and needs. The very well-equipped workshops enable all learners on vocational courses to gain a realistic understanding of the world of work. However, learners have poor access to online learning resources. Teaching is tailored effectively to learners' individual needs. The prison gives helpful support to learners who refuse to attend education sessions or who have been withdrawn from classes, encouraging them to re-engage.

The prison's senior management team demonstrate a strong commitment to education. A strengthened management structure has further improved strategic oversight and operational management of learners' education.

Probation services

HMI Probation undertook one inspection in Wales last year. It inspected the Western Bay Youth Offending Service (YOS), which worked across the local authority areas of Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend. The inspection team included representatives from Estyn, Health Inspectorate Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. Estyn focused on the education and training that young people who were engaged with this service received. This report can be found at [HM Inspectorate of Probation \(2019\)](#). Overall, Western Bay YOS was rated as inadequate.

Information-sharing protocols are not effective in ensuring that all schools give YOS staff the information they need to provide support tailored to children's and young people's individual needs. Few schools provide helpful information about young people's literacy and numeracy levels. Too many young people of school age do not receive their full entitlement to education.

The service does not have an effective strategy to ensure that young people who most need it receive appropriate support for literacy and numeracy skills to enable them to make progress into or within education, training or employment and to reduce reoffending.

The service does not have an effective strategy to ensure that those young people who can speak Welsh receive a service in Welsh, can develop their language, or that they are encouraged to develop an awareness of the value of the language as an employment skill. There are not enough bilingual resources for workers to use to encourage young people's use of Welsh.

The findings echo several of the main findings from Estyn's report on [The quality of education and training for young people engaged with youth offending teams](#) (2018h).

Annex 1

Overview



Annex 1

Overview

Estyn is the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. We are independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales. The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education in Wales.

Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

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

Our inspection work is aimed at raising standards and quality in education and training across Wales.

In a number of sectors, we work with other regulators and inspectorates to inspect provision. We work in partnership with Ofsted to inspect work-based learning provision that operates both in Wales and England. Our inspectors liaise with CIW to inspect residential schools and local authority secure children's homes. We also take part in inspections of youth offending teams (YOTs), led by HMI Probation, and of prisons led by HMI Prisons. On occasions, we join Ofsted to inspect independent specialist colleges in England that have 10 or more Welsh learners. We may also join inspections of prisons in England where there are significant numbers of Welsh prisoners. In addition, we include inspectors from the Wales Audit Office when we inspect local government education services, and work jointly with CIW inspectors in the inspection of non-maintained nursery settings.

We also provide advice on specific matters to the Welsh Government in response to an annual remit from the Cabinet Secretary for Education. Our advice provides evidence of the effect of the Welsh Government's strategies, policies and initiatives on the education and training of learners.

We make public effective practice based on inspection evidence. We have a unique and independent view of standards and quality across all aspects of education and training in Wales, and this contributes to the policies for education and training introduced across Wales.

If you want to find out more about what we do and how we work, please follow this link:

www.estyn.gov.wales

The Common Inspection Framework and judgement descriptors for the cycle of inspection from September 2017

The framework will apply for the inspection of further education institutions from 2018.

This framework covers five inspection areas and 15 reporting requirements.

1 – Standards

- 1.1 Standards and progress overall
- 1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups
- 1.3 Standards and progress in skills

2 – Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

- 2.1 Wellbeing
- 2.2 Attitudes to learning

3 – Teaching and learning experiences

- 3.1 Quality of teaching
- 3.2 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum
- 3.3 Provision for skills

4 – Care, support and guidance

- 4.1 Tracking, monitoring and the provision of learning support
- 4.2 Personal development
- 4.3 Safeguarding

5 – Leadership and management

- 5.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
- 5.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning
- 5.3 Professional learning
- 5.4 Use of resources

The Local Government Education Services Inspection Framework

1 – Outcomes

- 1.1 Standards and progress overall
- 1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups
- 1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

2 – Quality of Education Services

- 2.1 Support for school improvement
- 2.2 Support for vulnerable learners
- 2.3 Other education support services

3 – Leadership and management

- 3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
- 3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning
- 3.3 Professional learning
- 3.4 Safeguarding arrangements
- 3.5 Use of resources

We use the following four-point scale to show our inspection judgements:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The Framework for the inspection of regulated non-school settings eligible for funding for part-time education

1 – Wellbeing

- 1.1 To what extent do children have a voice?
- 1.2 To what extent do children feel safe, happy and valued?
- 1.3 How well do children interact?
- 1.4 To what extent do children enjoy their play and learning?
- 1.5 How well do children develop, learn and become independent?

2 – Learning

- 2.1 How well do children acquire skills and make appropriate progress in their learning?

3 – Care and development

- 3.1 How well do practitioners safeguard children whilst keeping them and healthy?
- 3.2 How well do practitioners manage interactions?
- 3.3 How well do practitioners promote children’s development and meet their individual needs?

4 – Teaching and assessment

- 4.1 How well do practitioners plan learning experiences that meet the needs of children?
- 4.2 How well do practitioners teach and assess children?

5 – Environment

- 5.1 How well do leaders ensure the safety of the premises?
- 5.2 How well do leaders ensure the suitability of the premises?
- 5.3 How well do leaders ensure the quality of resources and equipment?

6 – Leadership and management

- 6.1 How effective is leadership?
- 6.2 How effective is self-evaluation and planning for improvement?
- 6.3 How effective is the management of staff and resources?
- 6.4 How effective are partnerships?

For these inspections, we use the following four point scale to show our inspection judgements:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh weaknesses but improvements are required
Poor	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths and significant improvements are required

Follow-up

During an inspection, we consider whether the provider needs any follow-up activity.

This can range from identifying excellent practice to recommending special measures. The table below illustrates the different types of follow-up and to which sectors they apply.

	Maintained schools	Pupil referral units (PRUs)	Local authorities	Non-maintained settings	Post-16	Initial teacher training
Excellent practice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Estyn review	✓	✓			✓	✓
Estyn monitoring				✓		
Focused improvement				✓		
Significant improvement	✓	✓				
Special measures	✓	✓				
Re-inspection					✓	✓
Causing significant concern			✓			
Local authority monitoring				✓		

Category	Explanation
Excellent practice	If a provider gains any excellent judgements, they will be invited to write a case study to share with other providers. The case study may be published on the Estyn website.
Estyn monitoring	Normally, this level of activity will be required when at least one of the overall judgements for a provider is adequate, but it is not causing concern to the extent of requiring significant improvement or special measures. If a monitoring visit is required, a small team of Estyn inspectors will visit the provider to judge progress around a year to 18 months after the publication of the report. From September 2017, this category has only been applied for inspections of non-maintained settings for children under five.
Estyn review	Normally, this level of activity will be required when at least one of the overall judgements for a provider is adequate, but it is not causing concern to the extent of requiring significant improvement or special measures. All schools in this category will receive a team desk-based review. The review will take place in October/November, after provisional KS4 data has been published. As a result of the desk-based review, schools who demonstrate clear evidence of progress will be removed from this category. Schools who have not demonstrated clear evidence of progress will either remain under Estyn Review for a further 12 months or they will receive a monitoring visit at some point during that academic year.
Focused improvement	If a non-maintained setting is identified as requiring focused improvement, Estyn will inform the Welsh Government of its concerns. The setting's management committee / proprietor must send their action plans to Estyn for approval. An Estyn inspector will visit the setting every term for up to three terms following the publication of the inspection report. If the setting does not make enough progress, Estyn will contact the local authority to suggest that funding is withdrawn from the setting as it is failing to provide an acceptable standard education.
In need of significant improvement	Estyn will inform the Welsh Government that the provider has been placed in a statutory category. The provider must send its action plan to Estyn for approval. A small team of Estyn inspectors will usually visit the provider to judge progress around a year to 18 months after the publication of the inspection report. If progress is insufficient, the team will consider whether the provider requires special measures.
Special measures	If a provider is identified as requiring special measures, Estyn will inform the Welsh Government that it has been placed in a statutory category. The provider must send its action plan to Estyn for approval. A small team of Estyn inspectors will usually visit the provider every term following the publication of the inspection report. Inspectors will focus on the progress the provider has made towards addressing the recommendations highlighted in the report. Estyn will continue to carry out monitoring visits until the Chief Inspector decides that the provider has improved enough to remove it from special measures.

Category	Explanation
Estyn review: post-16	If a post-16 or initial teacher training provider is identified as needing Estyn review or monitoring, a small team of Estyn inspectors will visit the provider to judge progress around a year later. If inspectors judge that insufficient progress has been made, this may result in a full re-inspection. Following Estyn monitoring, if inspectors judge that sufficient progress has been made, a letter will be published on the Estyn website.
Re-inspection	If a post-16 or initial teacher training provider is identified as needing a full re-inspection, the inspectorate will write a letter to the provider, copied to DfES, and, in the case of initial teacher training, to the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCW) identifying the areas that require improvement, and will carry out a full re inspection of the provider within a year to 18 months. After the re-inspection, Estyn will publish a full report evaluating the progress made by the provider. If the team judges that insufficient progress has been made at the end of a re-inspection, this will be reported to DfES, and to HEFCW in the case of initial teacher training, as part of their contract management procedures.
Causing significant concern	This level of activity will be required where inspectors judge that local government education services require follow-up activity. Around three months after the inspection, we will chair an improvement conference with senior leaders and other key stakeholders. Around a year after the post-inspection improvement conference, Estyn will facilitate a progress conference. We will consider how likely it is that the authority could be removed from follow-up in a year's time. If we think it is likely that the authority will be able to demonstrate enough progress to be removed from follow-up, then we will plan a monitoring visit. However, if Estyn thinks that the authority will require more time, then we will facilitate a second progress conference in a year's time.

Explanation of words and phrases used to describe our evaluations

The words and phrases used in the left hand column below are those that we use to describe our evaluations. The phrases in the right hand column are the more precise explanations.

nearly all	with very few exceptions
most	90% or more
many	70% or more
a majority	over 60%
half or around a half	close to 50%
a minority	below 40%
few	below 20%
very few	less than 10%

Notes about the data used in this report

The data we show in charts or discuss within the text of this report is mostly from Estyn's database of inspection outcomes. Where appropriate, data from other sources is referenced in the report, and this is mainly derived from data published by the Welsh Government. Figures in all charts are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. Totals may therefore not be equal to 100%.

When analysing inspection outcomes, it is important to note that there can be difficulties in comparing trends in outcomes between years. Each year, we inspect a proportion of providers in each sector. For example, during 2018-2019 we inspected 188 (15%) primary schools and 29 (16%) secondary schools.

It is also important to note that considerable care needs to be taken when comparing inspection outcomes, and other data, between and within sectors when the number of providers is small.

4

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the world's largest international education study. Every three years, a representative sample of 15-year-old pupils from schools in participating countries are tested in reading, mathematics and science (one of these has a main focus each time). Pupils are also asked questions about their school experience and wider life. Wales has been part of the study since 2006.

In 2018, for the first time, there is no statistically significant difference between Wales and the average for OECD countries in reading, mathematics and science.

Reading

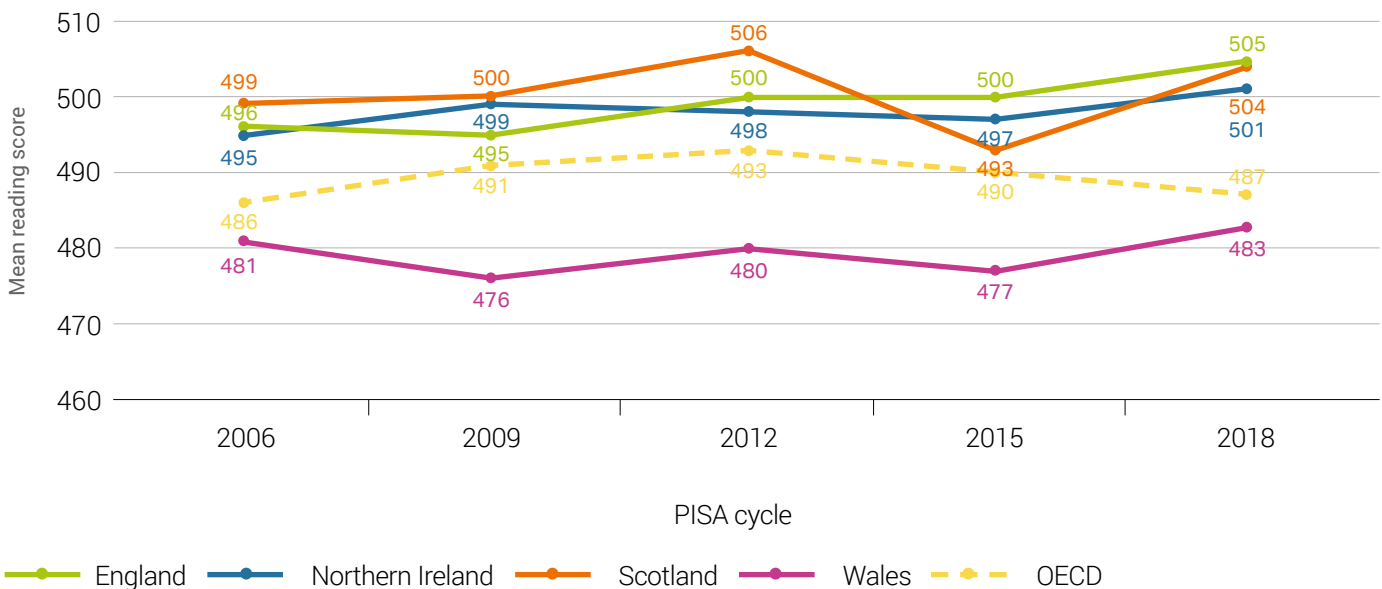
Reading was the main focus of PISA in 2018.

Pupils' overall reading score improved in 2018 and for the first time was close to the OECD average, which fell for the second cycle running. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland continue to perform significantly better than Wales. Over the period 2006-2018, there has been no significant change in the reading score for Wales.

Of the 75 other reported countries, 22 outperformed Wales significantly in 2018, compared to 30 in 2015.

In 2018, girls outperform boys significantly in Wales, as is the case in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. This gender gap has closed and is not significantly different from the OECD average, but remains greater than in England and Scotland.

Trends in reading scores across the UK



¹The figures and charts in this section are taken from Sizmur et al. (2019) or the OECD website..

PISA 2018 findings

The performance of the top 10% of pupils in Wales improved in 2018 and is now above the OECD average, but remains lower than in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. That of the weakest 10% fell in 2018. Again, it is above the OECD average but also lower than in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In 2018, the effect of socio-economic status was less in Wales than across the OECD countries. The most disadvantaged pupils in Wales scored higher than their counterparts across the OECD countries although the least disadvantaged pupils, on average, scored lower.

For pupils to read successfully, it is necessary for them to complete a range of cognitive processes which PISA identifies through four processes: 'locating information'; 'understanding'; 'evaluating and reflecting' and 'reading fluency'. Reading fluency underpins the other three processes and was included for the first time in PISA in 2018. Reading fluency contributed to pupils' overall scores.

Locating information

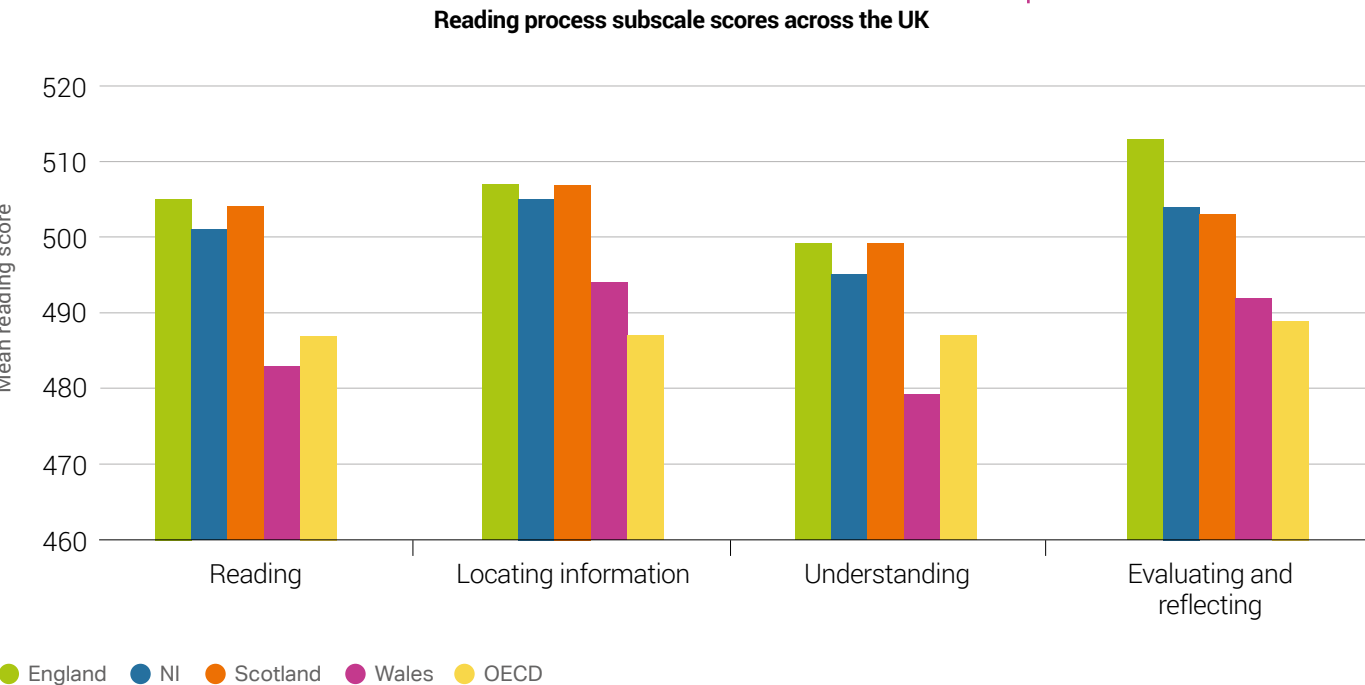
This category required pupils to scan a single text for information or to search several texts to find information relevant to the task. Pupils in Wales performed strongest in this area where they were required to employ familiar and widely-used skills. Whilst these skills are essential, in a minority of inspection reports, we identify pupils being overly-reliant upon these skills and not using a wide enough range of reading strategies to support their learning effectively.

Understanding

This category identified how well pupils could comprehend the literal meaning of text and move beyond including using inference and deduction, and to integrate information to create a main idea, or to produce a summary, or a title for a passage. Pupils were also assessed on how well they can integrate pieces of information that are located within two or more texts. This was the area that pupils performed least well in. Inspection reports usually identify how well pupils use these higher level skills, although this is often based upon their understanding of texts that pupils already know well, such as English or Welsh literature set texts. The PISA tests require pupils to look at a wide range of texts. This raises concerns about how well pupils can use these skills when reading unfamiliar texts. A key factor in pupils' understanding of text is vocabulary. Vocabulary development and knowledge are critical to supporting academic success. Pupils with a limited vocabulary cannot read and understand more advanced texts, and this creates a ceiling to their attainment.

Evaluating and reflecting

This category determined how well pupils were able to assess the credibility of a text through considering the source of the information and how the author presented it. They needed to consider authorial intent and, when required, to reflect on their own experience and knowledge to compare, contrast or hypothesise different perspectives or viewpoints. In addition, pupils had to compare and contrast the views of authors and explain why they may accept the views of the more reliable source.



Two of the main reading skills integral to this area are synthesis and comparison involving multiple source texts. In 2018, pupils performed well in this area as was the case in 2009. From 2017 onwards, there was a renewed focus in schools on summary, comparison and synthesis for GCSE English language examinations. In addition, the ability to synthesise information from various sources is a key component of other examination courses such as GCSE history.

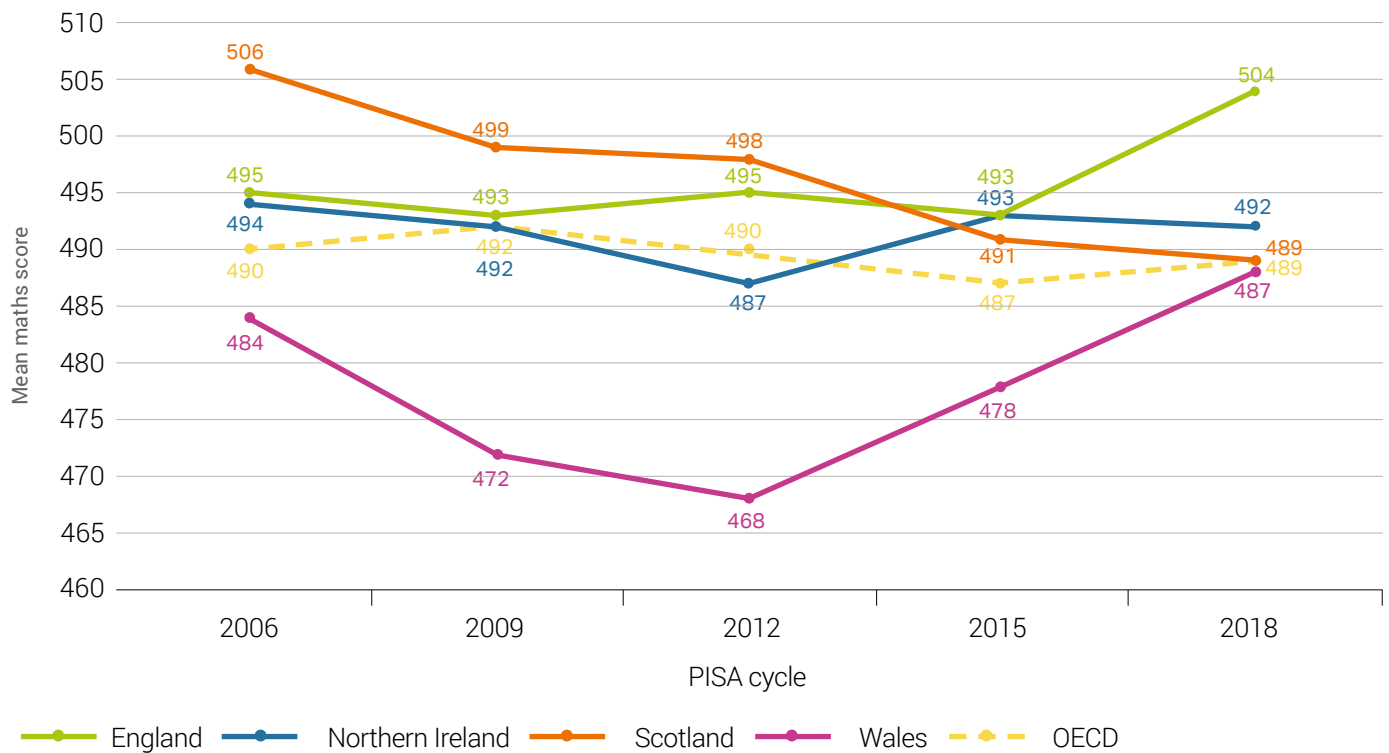
In 2018, pupils performed better in tasks that required them to consider more than one text. They are more confident in their reading ability than the average pupil across the OECD but less likely to read a book. Pupils in Wales displayed more negative attitudes to learning than across other OECD countries, with the majority claiming that they read only for information as was the case in 2009.

PISA 2018 findings

Mathematics

In 2018 the overall mean score achieved in mathematics of 487 is similar to the OECD mean average of 489. This is Wales' highest performance in PISA and, for the first time, the mean score for mathematics is not significantly lower than the OECD average. Since PISA 2012, there has been a sustained improvement in the performance in mathematics.

Trends in mathematics scores across the UK



Performance in mathematics in Wales is still lower than that in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and significantly lower than in England.

In 2018, boys in Wales achieved a mean average marginally better than the mean average score for girls. Girls performed significantly better in 2018 than in 2015 and, as a result, this is the first time the performance of boys is not significantly higher than that of girls.

The top 10% of pupils achieved a significantly higher score in 2018 compared to 2015 in Wales. However, the performance of this group of pupils is still lower than the OECD average and the corresponding groups of pupils in the rest of the UK. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest levels in mathematics (proficiency levels 5 and 6) increased from 5% in 2015 to 7% in 2019. However, this proportion remains lower than the OECD average of 11%.

The overall performance in mathematics improved between 2012 and 2015 and this was due to the improved performance of weaker and middle ability pupils. During this period, there was a fall in the percentage of pupils who were achieving the higher proficiency levels in mathematics. Between 2015 and 2018, overall performance improved again. This was due to a further improvement in the performance of middle ability pupils, an improvement in the performance of more able pupils and weaker pupils sustaining the performance seen in 2015.

The performance of the weakest 10% of pupils improved in 2018 and is now above the OECD average. It is also above the score of the corresponding group of pupils in Scotland and Northern Ireland, although it remains slightly below that of England.

The improvement in mathematics scores over the last two cycles coincides with the introduction by the Welsh Government of three strategies which were specifically aimed at raising pupils' standards in mathematics:

- the introduction of the literacy and numeracy framework in 2013
- the introduction of numerical reasoning tests in May 2014
- the introduction of the new GCSEs in mathematics and mathematics-numeracy for first teaching in September of 2015

The new GCSE numeracy and mathematics qualification requires pupils to be able to have a deep understanding of mathematical concepts, to be able to reason mathematically and to solve problems that are set in context. These skills are also at the core of the mathematics domain of the PISA framework. Our thematic report in 2018 found that these strategies were beginning to raise pupils' standards in these areas. The report states that:

In mathematics departments, the major changes [in the curriculum] are to provide increased opportunities for pupils to develop problem-solving skills for the new numeracy GCSE and for pupils to have a deeper understanding of mathematics concepts.....

.....Many mathematics departments are placing a greater emphasis on developing pupils' problem-solving skills. For example, teachers adapt the structure of lesson plans to teach the skills first and then giving pupils valuable opportunities to practise these skills in context during each lesson. Teachers in these departments use strategies such as problem-solving grids to help pupils recall the steps they need to take to solve problems. Overall, these strategies are successful, especially in improving pupils' ability to extract key information from problems (Estyn, 2018d, pp.21, 26).

PISA 2018 findings

The greater focus on problem solving and developing numerical reasoning in the teaching of mathematics is likely to be one of the key reasons for the significant improvement in Wales' mathematics scores since 2012.

However, in the thematic review on new qualifications we also stated that:

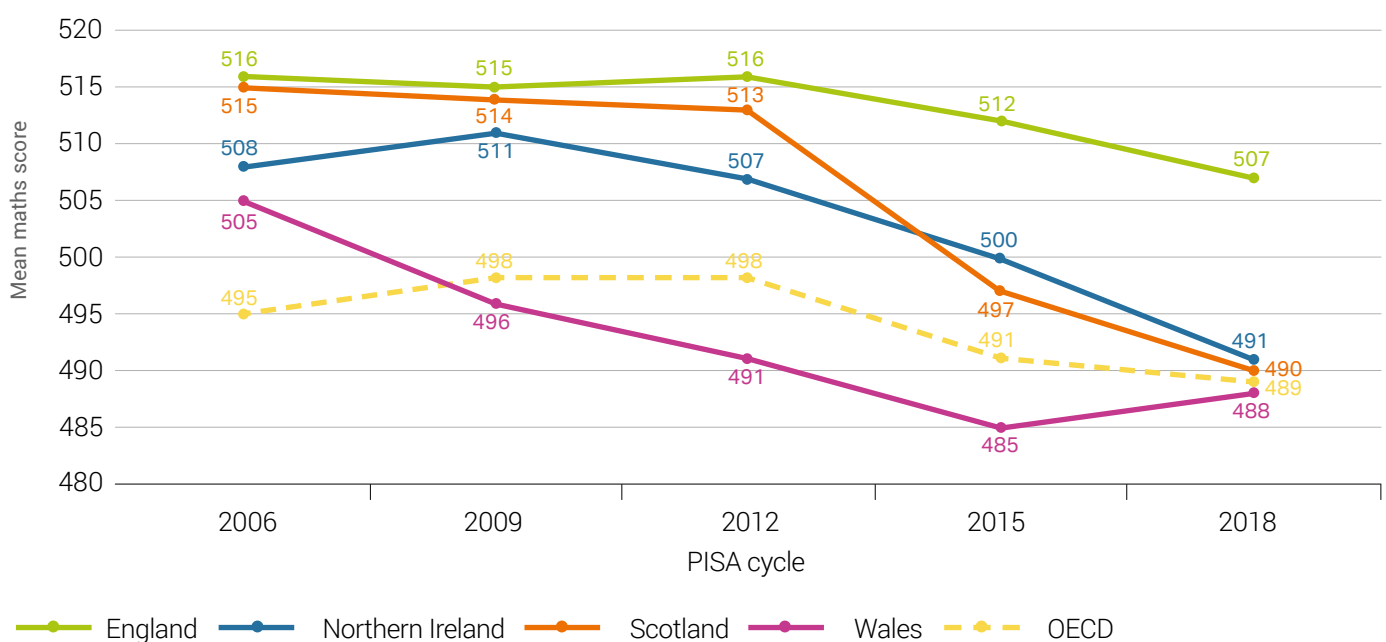
In a minority of schools, arrangements for developing pupils' problem-solving skills and strategies in mathematics and numeracy are not strong enough (Estyn, 2018d, p.27).

This highlights the fact that there is still work to do in improving the teaching of mathematics in Wales, and therefore raising the mathematics and numeracy standards of Welsh pupils.

Science

In 2018, the average score in science achieved by pupils in Wales was in line with the OECD average. Wales' score has improved since 2015, the first time Wales has seen an improvement in its science score, while the OECD average score has weakened during the same period. Wales' science score had fallen for each of the four PISA rounds from 2006 to 2015 and, despite improvements in 2018, the score for 2018 is significantly lower than in 2006. Wales' performance in science remained slightly lower than that of Scotland and Northern Ireland, and significantly lower than that of England.

Trends in science scores across the UK



For the first time in science, girls slightly outperformed boys in Wales. The margin by which girls outperformed boys in Wales in 2018 was in line with the overall margin across the OECD countries.

The proportion of pupils who achieved basic proficiency of level 2 or higher for science was slightly better in Wales, at 81%, than the OECD average of 78%. This reflects a slight improvement for these pupils since 2015, and is in line with performance from earlier PISA tests. The lowest performing 10% of pupils in Wales scored slightly higher on average than the corresponding pupils in Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as higher than those across the OECD. However, the top 10% of pupils in Wales scored below the OECD, below the scores of Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

A similar proportion of pupils attained the highest levels in science (proficiency levels 5 and 6) in 2018 compared to 2015, and Wales remains below the OECD average.

It is too early to tell whether the slight improvement in the performance of pupils in science is the beginning of an improving trend. The improvement is too small to be attributed directly to changes in secondary school science education in Wales, particularly the increase in the proportion of key stage 4 pupils undertaking GCSE science qualifications rather than vocational science courses over the last four years.

Annex 3

Inspection outcomes 2018-2019



Annex 3 – Inspection outcomes 2018-2019

This appendix summarises inspection outcomes for 2018-2019 in each sector. We published our inspection outcomes for 2018-2019 as official statistics. The statistics were pre-announced and published on the Estyn website and prepared according to the principles and protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

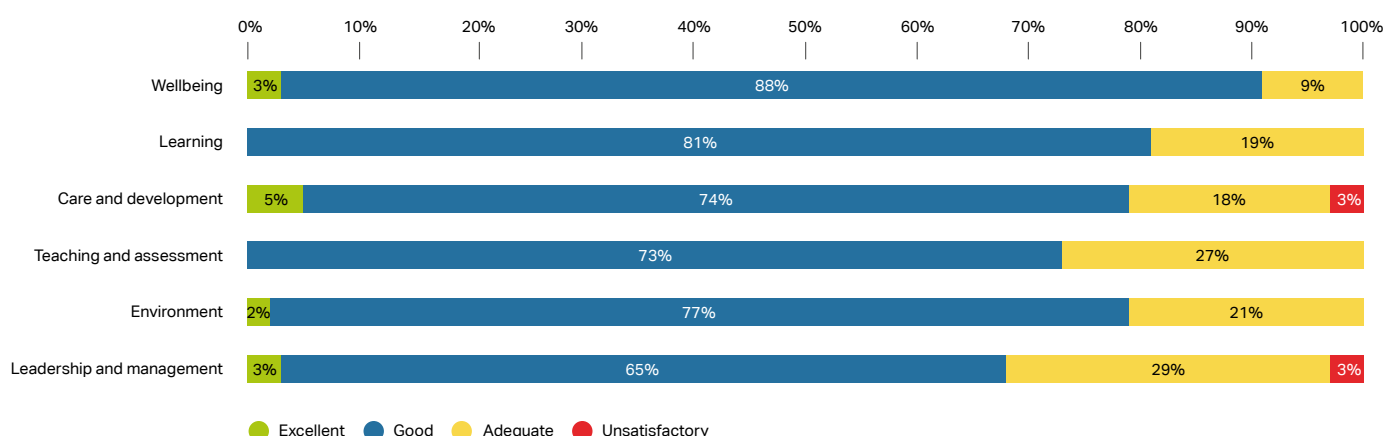
Our interactive data website provides summaries of our inspection outcomes and questionnaire responses from pupils and parents. Users can apply filters to customise their data views and download the results. The website includes data for inspections carried out between 1 September 2010 and 31 August 2019. To access our data website, please visit: data.estyn.gov.wales

For more information about the inspection reports for individual providers, please visit: estyn.gov.wales/inspection/search

Non-school settings for children under 5

The outcomes below reflect the inspection of non-maintained nursery settings undertaken jointly between Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales from January 2019.

Number of inspections = 66

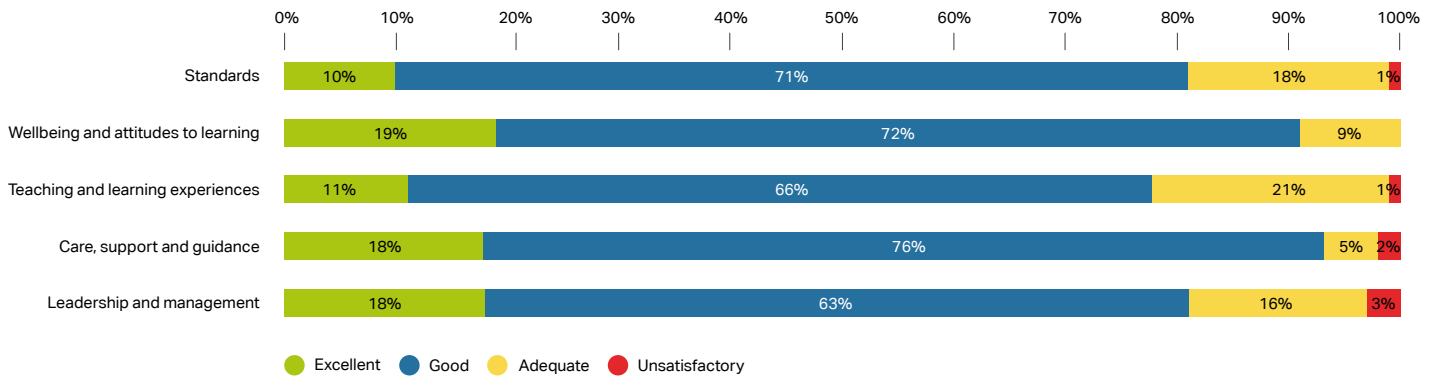


Follow-up

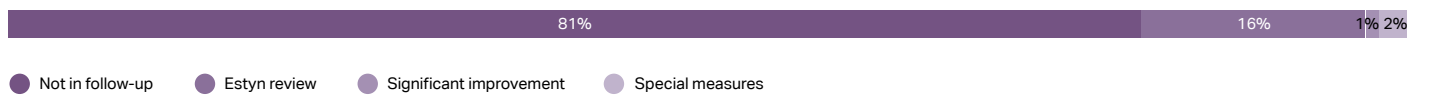


Primary

Number of inspections = 188

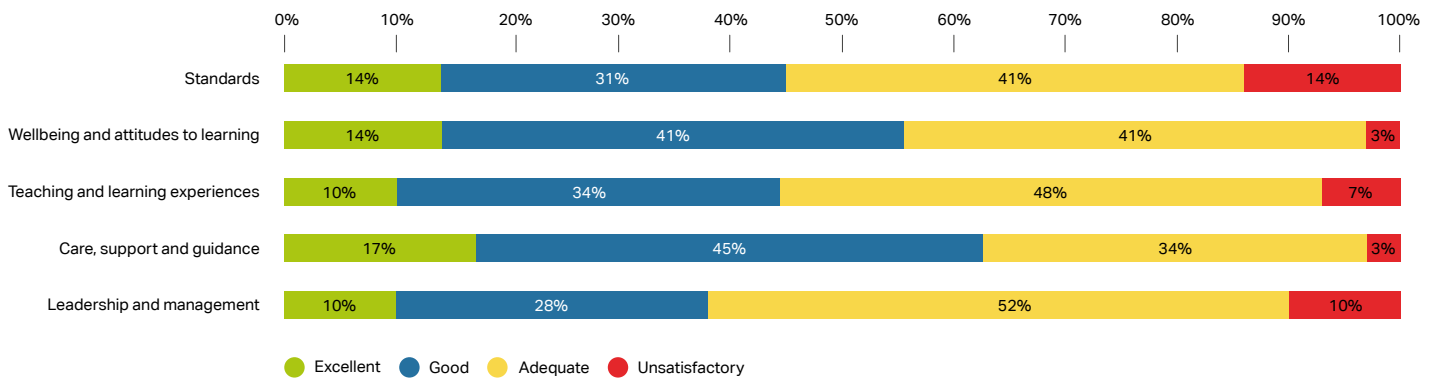


Follow-up

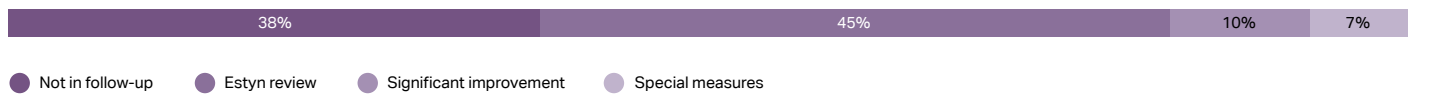


Secondary

Number of inspections = 29

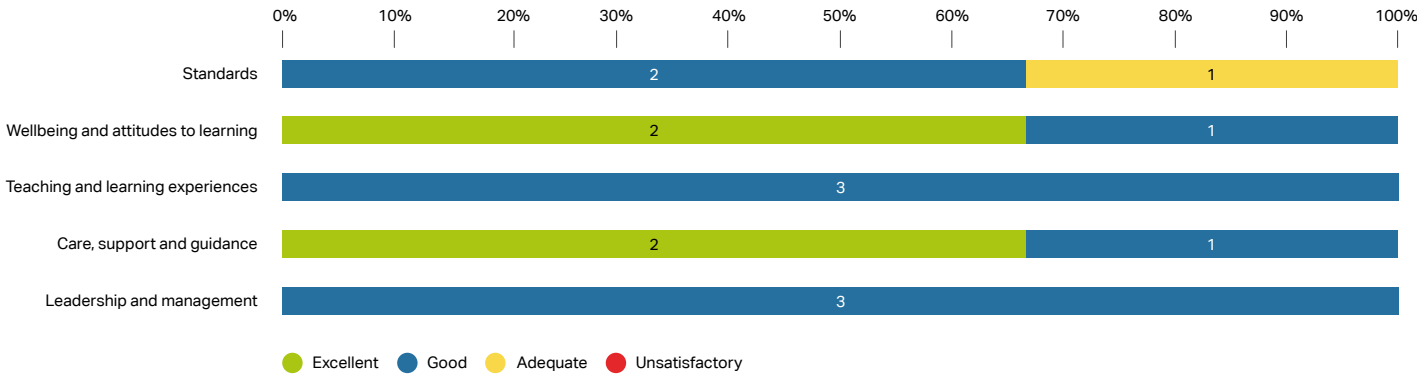


Follow-up



Maintained all-age schools

Number of inspections = 3

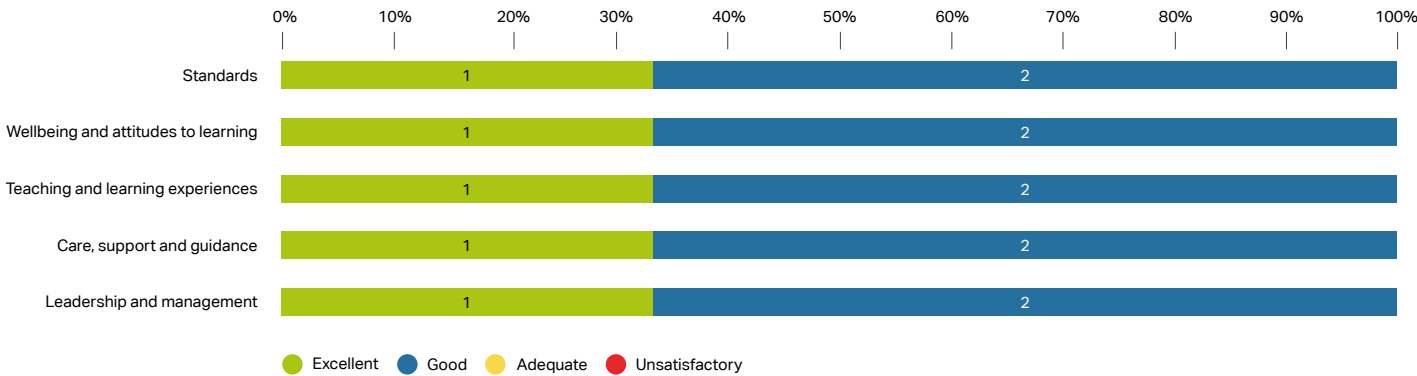


Follow-up



Maintained special schools

Number of inspections = 3

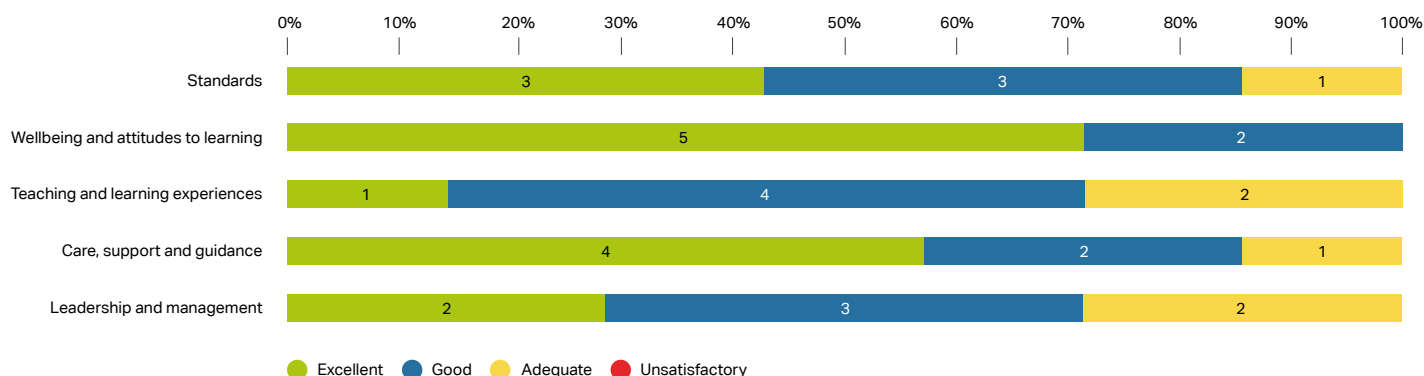


Follow-up



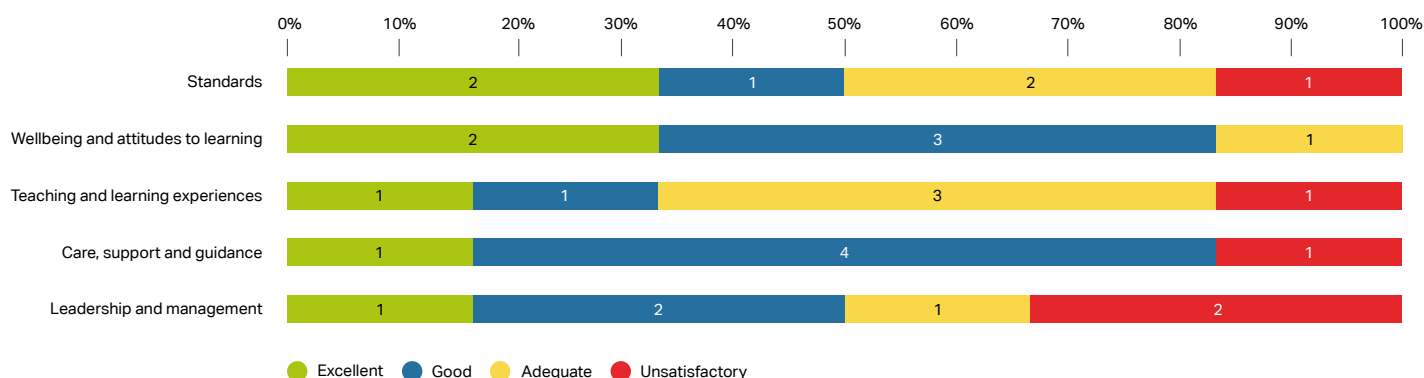
Independent special schools

Number of inspections = 7



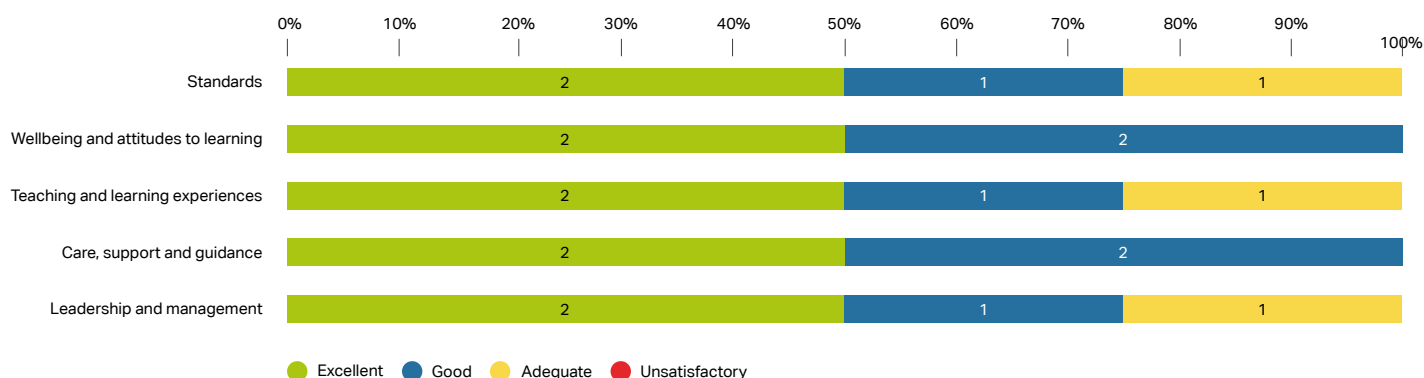
Independent mainstream schools

Number of inspections = 6



Pupil referral units

Number of inspections = 4

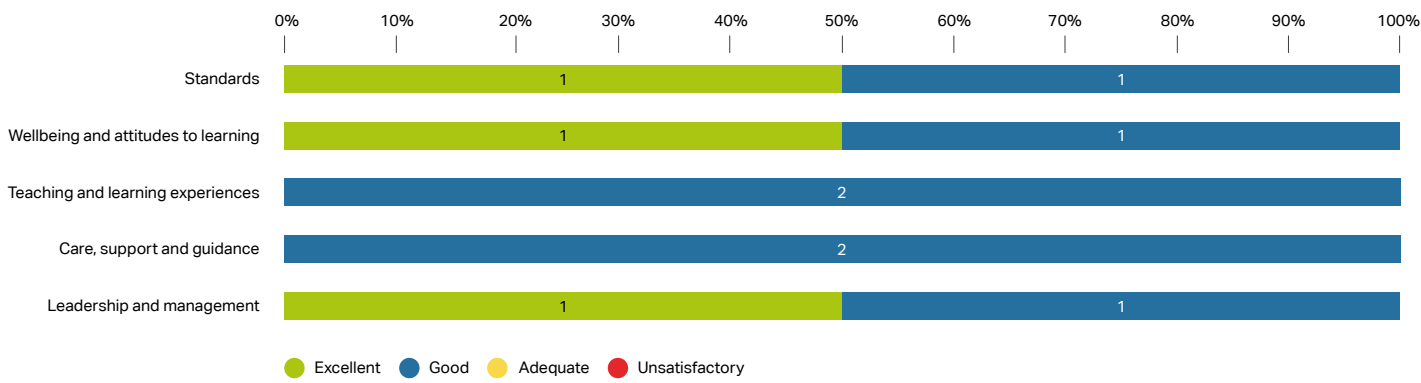


Follow-up



Further education

Number of inspections = 2

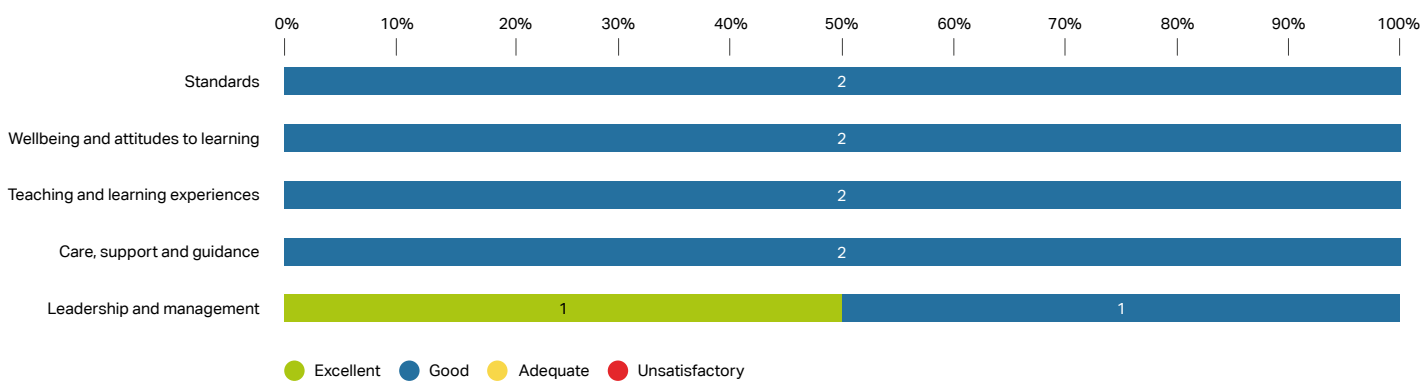


Follow-up



Work-based learning

Number of inspections = 2



Follow-up



Other sectors

We inspected 26 non-school settings for children under 5 under the 2010 Common Inspection Framework between August and December 2019. Furthermore, in 2018-2019, we also undertook an inspection of one Welsh for Adults provider, a pilot inspection of Addysg Oedolion Cymru / Adult Learning Wales and inspections of four local authorities. Their inspections can be found on our website.

Annex 4

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